– Current Issues of American Culture in the EFL-Classroom – Annual American Studies Committee Meeting 2018
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ABSTRACTS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Lecture: Documentary as a Teaching Tool: Paul Laurence Dunbar

Joseph W. Slade (Ohio University Athens)

If African-American culture had its renaissance in Harlem, then its nascence was in the Midwest. Born to former slaves in 1872 in Dayton, Ohio, Paul Laurence Dunbar became the first African-American national poet and one of the first "cross-over" artists; his oral performances in the United States and England enthralled readers of all races. If his short life (he died at 33) exemplified African-Americans' contributions to American culture and the barriers to their achievement, telling his story in full requires tracing legacies that endure—the subject of my 2017 documentary *Beyond the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar*. Elegant poems such as "Sympathy" (aka "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings") and "We Wear the Mask," which lack racial markers, have entered world literature canon, yet Dunbar remains beloved in African-American communities for the dialect lyrics that he himself thought of with ambivalence. Rap and slam poetry descend directly from Dunbar's experiments in dialect. Moreover, as the author of poems, novels, short stories, plays, and songs, Dunbar has influenced not only famous writers from Langston Hughes to Maya Angelou, but also numerous artists, sculptors, musicians, and choreographers. This presentation will discuss the challenges and rewards of documenting Dunbar's life and legacy in video for purposes of persuading easily bored students that literature has dramatic and long-term effects on the ways people live their lives.

Lecture: Brother Jonathan Runs for President: Vernacular Values and Spoof Campaigns

Judith Yaross Lee (Ohio University Athens)

Humor thrives by transgressing taboos. Challenges to America's most sacred myths fuel the traditions of vernacular humor, which asserts faith in ordinary Americans and mistrust of elites. For nearly two hundred years, spoof presidential campaigns by ostensibly ordinary citizens—heirs of Brother Jonathan, folklore's quintessential American—have mocked the ideological contradictions of presidential campaigns. Examples of spoof campaigns in cartoon, video, newspaper features, and other formats highlight the values and visions always at stake in the presidential race, especially the contest between vernacular values and elite control, through what we might call the Janus laugh.

Lecture: When Government Was Good

David Goldfield (University of North Carolina, Charlotte)

This talk is based on my new book, *The Gifted Generation: When Government Was Good* (2017). During the first two decades after World War II, opportunities for all Americans, especially for women, African Americans, and the sons and daughters of immigrants expanded significantly. The result was the most prosperous and egalitarian period in American history. This circumstance was owed to the expansion of federal policy under the presidencies of Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson. And then it ended. How and why an activist government working on behalf of the many became a government that worked on behalf of the few, and how it may again serve the people forms the core of this talk.

Workshop I: Mockumentary Sitcoms in the EFL-Classroom

Marie Schönherr (MLU Halle-Wittenberg)

As a blend of the words 'situation' and 'comedy', the term 'sitcom' describes a type of serial TV genre that is defined by its comic intent, a fixed set of stereotypical characters and the re-establishing of the status quo at the end of each episode. Even though there are many distinguishing features, the genre of the sitcom is also a flexible and hybrid one. The traditionally used laugh track, for instance, is being omitted in more recent productions. Furthermore, elements of other genres have been introduced, thus creating hybrid formats such as reality sitcoms, dramedies or mockumentaries.
A mockumentary is a type of sitcom, that presents fictional content in documentary style, thus mocking both documentaries and sitcoms alike. Many recent US productions, such as *The Office*, *Parks and Recreation* or *Modern Family* can be defined as mockumentaries.
In this workshop, we are going to take a closer look at the features of sitcoms and mockumentaries and explore their potential for the EFL classroom.

Workshop II: "The Importance of Being the First"—Analyzing Civil Rights, Black Womanhood and the Era Obama in the Feature Film Hidden Figures

Charlott Falkenhagen (University Jena)

Hidden Figures tells the story of three Afro-American female mathematicians who helped develop space programs in the early 1960s in the US. In terms of historiography, the rather 'unrecognized' heroines Katherine Johnson, Mary Winston Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughan worked as human computers at NASA. The film shows the struggle of the three women for acknowledgement, for political and gender equality and for equal career opportunities. At the same time, the film connects historical views of the Cold War, coined by the space race, and the Civil Rights Movement with the 'Obama-era', especially via subtle film-music elements in the soundtrack.
In the workshop you will encounter different possibilities of working with *Hidden Figures* in class. Various teaching strategies, tasks and, possible learning products touching on film-related topics like *Black Rights/Civil Rights, Black Womanhood* and *The Importance of Being the First*

will be introduced and discussed. Workshop participants will look at music, pictures, reviews and quotes in a multi-modal approach to collect ideas for designing tasks for their students. The *previewing* phase will sensitize students and workshop participants for the historical situation, create familiarity with the film characters, and provide knowledge of the storyline. The *while-viewing phase* is structured as a group work setting. Here workshop visitors have the chance to analyze selected film scenes and debate on the major issues of the film. Again, tasks for practical classroom usage are included. In the *post-phase*, we will discuss how students could transfer their findings onto today´s situation in the US.

Workshop III: Integrating Creative Writing in the EFL Classroom

Rebecca Rukeyser (Berlin Senate Fellow)

The creative writing classroom is a place of freedom, where right and wrong answers are set aside in favor of striving for individualized expression. Language is presented as infinitely malleable; grammar is a toy rather than a tool. Rules are presented as being made to be broken. Because of this, creative writing can amplify student engagement and enthusiasm inside EFL classrooms. When encouraged to take linguistic risks, students begin to personalize—and more fully inhabit—the English language.
But even though the discipline of creative writing prizes playfulness, it isn't lawless. Students learn to identify and distrust clichés, vague statements, and hyperbole and close read texts for intention, characterization, and layered meaning.
In this workshop, we'll look at ways to integrate creative writing pedagogy into the EFL classroom at all levels. Special attention will be given to examining and developing classroom materials and activities.

Workshop IV: Nanabozho! Representations of an Indigenous Trickster Figure

Therese Marie-Meyer (MLU Halle-Wittenberg)

German children will most likely know Nanabozho from the French *Yakari* comic book series and less from Longfellow's poem "The Song of Hiawatha" or indigenous Canadian publications. Though there are contemporary German picture book versions of Longfellow's poem available in translation, including a picture book of the Disney movie version *Little Hiawatha*, of 1937, Yakari is the most dominant publication, together with the Nanabozho-inspired figure of Bugs Bunny. We will consider how these various representations of Nanabozho might influence the discussion of this indigenous trickster figure in a German classroom. How do comics and picture books represent him? What are the views that Nanabozho stands for in these versions directed at children of various age groups? What other more complex representations are available that teachers might want to deploy, and how do these, in turn, instrumentalize the figure of Nanabozho? The workshop is directed towards developing classroom material that deals constructively with the manifold stereotypes employed in the representation of Nanabozho and helps pupils question their own potential preconceptions and stereotyping processes.