1. Discussion Guidelines exercise

One of the very first class sessions. As a group decide what the guidelines, parameters, do’s and don’ts of discussion will be. Issues of respect, conversation vs. pontificating, and support for positions should be addressed. For example, I submit that it’s important to call each other by proper name and not by pronoun, and that we support our comments with evidence from the text: “I agree with Julia because on page 24 the author says.. and not “I agree with what she said because...blah, blah, blah. “ Other submissions: I make it quite clear that though personal experience can indeed be used to help explain a particular position or be used as one example of particular phenomena within the text, it can not be used to validate or verify a position nor make a generalization true. I explain that we can take positions or posit suggestions about the meaning of a passage or about the meaning and/or effect of an event only with the support of evidence from the text under consideration or other texts read.

It’s very important to curb the tendency to generalize. I would always remind students to support their statements: “Where does the author say that! On what page!” “Show us where in the text this suggestion is made!” It’s important to allow students to take the time to find the passage and then continue with the point. By the end of the Tutorial students needed very few reminders about evidence. Actually, at times I felt like I was the Mistress Drill Sergeant at Critical Reading Boot Camp and they were recruits- young, naive and easily intimidated.

2. Start with short reading: The House on Mango Street (110 pages)

Assignment

Select a passage you feel represents the key to Esperanza’s life. Write two paragraphs (double spaced) about the passage and your reasons for choosing it. Provide citations from other parts of the text as evidence to support your selection. You will read aloud your passage in class and present your reasons for its selection.

3. Longer Reading: How the Carda Girls Lost Their Accents (290 pages)

Assignment: Student Led Discussion Pairs

Together with your partner (pre-selected) submit a list of discussion thesis and questions. These questions should reflect a discussion strategy: What point(s) do you want made? What evidence in the text can you suggest to the class? Do your questions develop your discussion’s thesis? Is the development logical?

Write a one page (double spaced) summary of the discussion. Provide evidence from the text.

4. Oral Presentation

Assignment:

Write a three page (double spaced) summary of one of the oral histories in the book Las Mujeres. Address the following in these pages: How does this woman confront the issue which Is the subject of your research proposal?

(Note: Students have already chosen these topics and have begun preliminary library research) Give specific examples and support your claims with evidence from other oral histories or any other sources.