

Where I Was From: Joan Didion & Your Hometown

***Course Syllabus
Lifelong Learning Collaborative
Fall 2023***

***Coordinators
Kip Brott, Celene Healy, & Laura Tucker***

***Where I Was From: Joan Didion & Your Hometown
Thursdays, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM
September 21 – November 16
9 Weeks***

Course Description

Where did you grow up? Boston or Berlin? Minneapolis or Mumbai? Or have you lived all over the globe in a string of towns? Whatever your answer, please join us to share your impressions of that special place you call “home.”

This course will provide a rich opportunity for cross-cultural learning within our LLC community as we study our diverse backgrounds together. History, geography, local culture, personal experiences, cherished memories, and family photos can all play a part.

To accompany our studies, we’ll be reading an insightful memoir by acclaimed author Joan Didion entitled *Where I Was From*. This book, as Didion writes, is “an exploration into my own confusions about the place and the way in which I grew up.” It’s a riveting piece of reportage that’s sure to inspire us.

Format

Each class member will give a presentation on the town they consider home. The course will also include a screening of the 1985 film *The Trip to Bountiful*, adapted from the award-winning play by Horton Foote, about an elderly woman’s longing to return to her small hometown one last time.

Resources/Expenses

The textbook for the class is available from numerous online outlets and local bookstores at a nominal charge.

Coordinators

Kip Brott earned his BA and MA degrees in art history from UCLA and he’s taught a number of popular fashion courses at LLC previously. In 2021-2022 he led a reading group at the Athenaeum Library here in Providence that included works by Joan Didion.

Email: johnbrott17@gmail.com Phone: (626) 354-1620

Celene Healy is a retired English teacher who has been a member of LLC for over 10 years. She’s coordinated many LLC courses, including short stories, museums of the world, and places to see and visit in Rhode Island.

Email: celenehealy@aol.com Phone: (978) 846-2819

Laura Tucker is a retired high tech corporate librarian and business continuity manager. She’s been an LLC member for 6 years, taking mostly theatre and film courses. She’s the Performing Arts liaison on the LLC Curriculum Committee and a member of the LLC Tech Committee.

Email: laura.tucker29@gmail.com Phone: (585) 329-0451

Weekly Schedule

Where I Was From: Joan Didion & Your Hometown Fall 2023 -- 9 Week Course

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Session A</i>	<i>Session B</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>September 21</i>	<i><u>Introduction to the Course --</u></i> <i><u>Coordinators</u></i> <i>The Concept of “Hometown” in Popular Culture</i> <i>Joan Didion’s Book</i> <i>Our Course Syllabus</i> <i>Technical Assistance</i> <i>Upcoming Presentations: Our Hometowns</i>	<i>Los Angeles:</i> <i>The Many Facets of La-La Land</i> <i>Kip Brott</i>

2	September 28	<i>Life As A Diplomat's Daughter</i> Maggie Miles	<i>Philadelphia, Here I Come!</i> Mel Shelly
3	October 5	<i>My Life in Iran & India Before Coming to the US</i> Sam Shamoon	<i>Manhattan Beach Brooklyn</i> Memoirs Roz Kurzer
4	October 12	<i>Southie is My Hometown!</i> George Washington, Whitey Bulger, & Busing in Boston Bob Martin	<i>Lowell, Massachusetts:</i> <i>From the Industrial</i> <i>Revolution to</i> <i>the First Urban National Park</i> Celene Healy & Mary Ellen O'Sullivan
5	October 19	<i>Orbisonia</i> Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania Walter Stitt	<u>Special Session -- Film Day</u> <i>The Trip to Bountiful, 1985</i> We'll watch this film at home in advance! Class Discussion to follow in this slot
6	October 26	<i>Pittsburgh: America's Renaissance City</i> Deborah Chorney	<i>Jane, G. I., & the P. of the O.</i> Helen Hawkins
7	November 2	<i>Born and Raised on Staten Island:</i> NYC's "Forgotten Borough" Bobbi & Joe Fisler	<i>My Formative Years</i> <i>in Shanghai, China</i> Ada Winsten
8	November 9	<i>Life in Southwest Michigan</i> Edie Weinstein	<i>I Come From Federal Hill</i> Sue Remington
9	November 16	<i>My Town: Kenosha, Wisconsin</i> Mary Welch	<u>Wrap-Up</u> Joan Didion & Our Hometowns: Roundtable Discussion of Our Textbook & What We've Learned in Class

Where I Was From: Joan Didion & Your Hometown
Fall 2023
Suggested Weekly Reading Assignments

*The textbook for our course will be an insightful memoir by acclaimed author Joan Didion entitled **Where I Was From**. This book, as Didion writes, is "an exploration into my own confusions about the place and the way in which I grew up." It's a riveting piece of reportage that's sure to inspire us.*

The following table suggests weekly reading assignments that will ensure you'll finish the book by our last class meeting, where we'll devote time to a roundtable discussion of this book's content & consider how our own look back at where we're from -- & our fellow classmates' presentations -- have in some way given us a fresh look at these places.

This timetable is only a suggestion -- read this book in any way you like as long as you've finished it by November 16, the date of our final class meeting.

<i>Read by Week/Date</i>	<i>Part</i>	<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Approximate Number of Pages</i>
<i>Week 1 September 21</i>	<i>Part One</i>	<i>Chapters 1-5</i>	<i>3-51 (48 pages)</i>
<i>Week 2 September 28</i>	<i>Part One</i>	<i>Chapter 6</i>	<i>52-71 (19 pages)</i>
<i>Week 3 October 5</i>	<i>Part One</i>	<i>Chapters 7-8</i>	<i>72-90 (18 pages)</i>
<i>Week 4 October 12</i>	<i>Part Two</i>	<i>Chapters 1-2</i>	<i>93-114 (21 pages)</i>
<i>Week 5 October 19</i>	<i>Part Two</i>	<i>Chapters 3-5</i>	<i>115-141 (26 pages)</i>
<i>Week 6 October 26</i>	<i>Part Two</i>	<i>Chapters 6-7</i>	<i>142-152 (10 pages)</i>
<i>Week 7 November 2</i>	<i>Part Three</i>	<i>Chapters 1-2</i>	<i>155-181 (26 pages)</i>
<i>Week 8 November 9</i>	<i>Part Three</i>	<i>Chapters 3-4</i>	<i>182-199 (17 pages)</i>
<i>Week 9 November 16</i>	<i>Part Four</i>	<i>Chapters 1-4</i>	<i>203-226 (23 pages)</i>

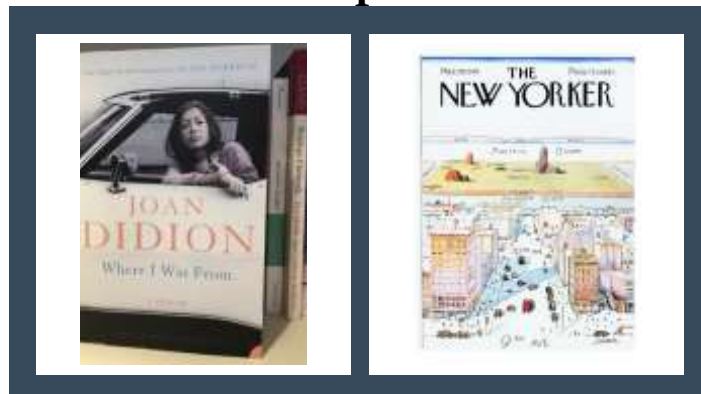
Suggested Weekly Reading & Video Assignments for Presentations

Where I Was From: Joan Didion & Your Hometown

"You can never go home again, but the truth is you can never leave home, so it's all right."

--Maya Angelou, American author, poet, & civil rights activist

Week 1- September 21



Session A

Introduction to the Course

The Concept of “Hometown” in Popular Culture

Joan Didion’s Book

Our Course Syllabus

Technical Assistance

Upcoming Presentations: Your Hometowns

Presentation: Kip Brott, Celene Healy, & Laura Tucker



Session B

Los Angeles: The Many Facets of La-La Land

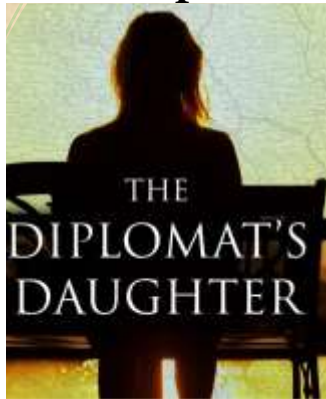
Kip Brott

Optional Suggested Reading

“Is New York Turning into Los Angeles?” New York Times, 1.5.23

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/05/style/los-angeles-new-york.html>

Week 2 – September 28



Session A

Life As a Diplomat’s Daughter

Maggie Miles

Suggested Reading/Videos

Foreign Service Examination Information



Session B
Philadelphia, Here I Come!
Mel Shelly

Week 3 – October 5



Session A
My Life in Iran & India Before Coming to the US
Sam Shamoon



Session B
Manhattan Beach Brooklyn Memoirs
Roz Kurzer

Week 4 – October 12



Session A
Southie is My Hometown!
George Washington, Whitey Bulger, & Busing in Boston
Bob Martin

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Session B

**Lowell, Massachusetts:
From the Industrial Revolution to the First Urban National Park
Celene Healy & Mary Ellen O'Sullivan**

Week 5 - October 19



Session A

**Orbisonia
Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania
Walter Stitt**



Session B

Film: The Trip to Bountiful, 1985

*“Come home, come home,
Ye who are weary, come home ...”*

Lyrics from Softly & Tenderly, opening hymn for The Trip to Bountiful

We’ll watch the film at home in advance! Class discussion to follow!
Free link to view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJg5jMN5qN4>

Film Review

Vincent Canby, New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/20/movies/film-geraldine-page-in-a-trip-to-bountiful.html>

Videos

Trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XczocuuAMV8>

Geraldine Page Wins Best Actress

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKw6su_e6ZQ

Week 6 – October 26



Session A

Pittsburgh: America’s Renaissance City
Deborah Chorney



Session B

**Jane, G. I., & the P. of the O.
Helen Hawkins**

Suggested Readings Governors Island

<https://www.govisland.com/history>
<https://gov-island-site.s3.amazonaws.com/pages/2022-Year-in-Review-web.pdf>

Videos

The P. of the O.

How to Eat a Balut Egg (6:03)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rm5_Zm6-6bA

How to Dance the Tinikling (1:47)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrSgRKhzjJ8>

Week 7 – November 2



Session A

**Born & Raised on Staten Island:
NYC's "Forgotten Borough"
Bobbi & Joe Fisler**



Session B
My Formative Years in Shanghai, Cinna
Ada Winsten

Week 8 – November 9

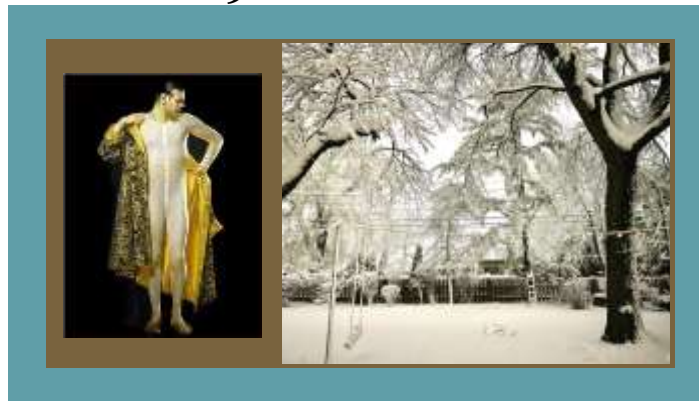


Session A
Life in Southwest Michigan
Edie Weinstein



Session B
I Come From Federal Hill
Sue Remington

Week 9 – November 16



Session A

**My Town: Kenosha, Wisconsin
Mary Welch**

Session B

Wrap Up

**Joan Didion & Our Hometowns:
Our Textbook & What We've Learned in Class**



**Roundtable Discussion
All Class Participants**



Guidelines for Presentations

Where I Was From: Joan Didion & Your Hometown Fall 2023

We're very fortunate to have our own Technology Coordinator, Laura Tucker, to help class members with their presentations as needed. Please see info below & ask Laura for help on any aspect!

FORMAT

Each week two participants will give a presentation and lead a discussion for the group, one participant in Session A and the other in Session B. One of our sessions will be devoted to a movie (which we'll watch in advance) entitled *The Trip to Bountiful*, based on the play by Horton Foote and discuss it in one of our sessions. Our final session will be a Roundtable Discussion of our textbook & what we've learned in the class.

A. Participants will select the topic of their presentations in advance in response to an email the Coordinators will send out after you're enrolled in the class. We'll need about 12 presenters given our schedule for the semester. Since we have more participants enrolled than that, presentations will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis when it's time to sign up. If you wish, you may double up with a partner on the same hometown.

B. There are many different formats you may use for your presentation, including Power Point, Google Slides, videos, film clips, flip charts, and handouts. But no matter what format you use, **be sure to include plenty of pictures and visual aids to enhance the appreciation and understanding of your hometown.** If you have garments, accessories, or other items that are relevant to your topic, bring them along to show to the class! Want to dress up in an outfit representative of the area? Do it!

C. Each week the coordinators will assign several chapters of our textbook, *Where I Was From*, by Joan Didion, for you to read. This reading will complement our course topics and the presentations you'll be giving. When you present, you may also wish to suggest an article or video ahead of time. Please try to get this information to us as early as possible after you select your topic so we can incorporate it into the syllabus. If that's not possible, then at least a week ahead of time so we can share with the class by email.

D. Ideally your presentation should be approximately 30 minutes long with an additional 15 minutes for a discussion led by you with assistance from the coordinators.

CONTENT

Class members will give presentations on the town (or towns) they consider home. History, geography, local culture, personal experiences, cherished memories, and family photos can all play a part. It's your choice – but remember, **make sure there are stimulating visual elements for maximum effect.**

RESEARCH

A. **The Internet has a wealth of information** on your topic. Just enter a search request for your hometown and you may be surprised and delighted at what comes up for your review (e.g., articles, videos, film clips, etc.)!

B. **Books and magazines are another great source of information** (from the local library -- or try Amazon, Abe, E-Bay, etc. if you care to purchase at nominal cost).

C. **Prior discussion of presentation with coordinators:** The coordinators welcome the opportunity to meet with you before your presentation to discuss your topic and strategize on how to present it. Meetings can be scheduled in person or by phone or email.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

A. **We will be studying your hometowns -- very special places!** Your fellow classmates will be excited to hear what you have to say because your presentation will provide a rich opportunity for cross-cultural learning within our LLC community. By studying our diverse backgrounds together, we'll get to know one another better and expand our horizons at the same time! **So relax & enjoy putting your presentation together -- you'll have an eager audience!**

B. **Get organized!** Your fellow classmates will get the most from your presentation if it is presented systematically. Make an outline – what do you want to say and when do you want to say it? For example, you could start with an introduction that grabs their attention, continue with an illustrated discussion of relevant aspects of your hometown and your experiences there, and end your remarks with a pithy conclusion that stimulates them to learn even more.

C. **Please do not read your entire presentation.** It is fine to work from notes but be sufficiently familiar with your material that you can speak to your classmates naturally. Eye contact is important too!

D. **Rehearse your presentation in advance.** Make sure you can move through your content easily within the allotted time. You might want to get feedback by presenting to a fellow classmate, friend, or family member. Listen to their suggestions and revise your remarks to improve your impact on the listener.

E. **Check and recheck the technology you are using as part of your presentation.** Verify the compatibility in the week before your presentation – e.g., if you're using Power Point or Google Slides, bring your USB key/jump drive to the coordinators and test it with the equipment in the course room (this will just take a few minutes).

F. **For additional excellent suggestions** please consult LLC's Collaborative Learning Guidelines, especially pages 16-24. The link on LLC's website is: <https://www.lifelonglearningcollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines.pdf>



Suggestions for Further Reading
A small selection of personal favorites...

Brideshead Revisited, Evelyn Waugh
A Christmas Memory, Truman Capote
Hiroshima, John Hersey
Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet, Jamie Ford
Look Homeward, Angel, Thomas Wolfe
Manchild in the Promised Land, Claude Brown
One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Paris France, Gertrude Stein
South and West, Joan Didion
The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan
The Makioka Sisters, Junichiro Tanizaki
The Thanksgiving Visitor, Truman Capote
Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe
You Can't Go Home Again, Thomas Wolfe