

LIZ334: Japanese Literature and the City

Sophia University, Summer Session Online 2021(June 14-July1)
Period 3 (13:30-15:10 Japanese Standard Time)

Professor Alisa Freedman (alisaf@uoregon.edu)

Course Description

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this course will be taught online (on demand). If the class would like, we can schedule optional Zoom discussions to discuss course topics and texts. All materials will be available on Moodle.

In this survey course, we will read a variety of Japanese literary works about cities written by both canonized and so-called “popular” authors from the years right after World War II to the present. The class will examine different ways Japanese writers creatively depicted urban growth, conveyed aspects of human nature, and devised aesthetic forms through which to respond to social, cultural, and political issues. We will examine depictions of the many kinds of people who have lived in Tokyo and other Japanese cities and the values authors and poets have associated with urban and rural Japan. Students will become familiar with important writers who have come to represent key literary movements and who have helped to construct Japan’s global image. We will explore Japanese publishing industries and discuss the politics of literary translation and the impact of economics on cultural production. We will question what books will be like in the future. Importantly, we will consider how stories help us to understand more about the world and our own places in it. The class will practice analyzing literature and learn to better express ideas orally and in writing.

Tentative Assignments (Total of 150 points) – Information about assignments will be provided.

1. 2 tests (2 tests X 50 points = 100 points). Due dates will be posted.
2. 5 Moodle assignments (5 X 10 = 50 points). Due dates will be posted.

Each class topic includes literary works (e.g., short stories and poems), supplementary audio and video texts (e.g., clips of film adaptations of our class stories and authors’ song playlists), pre-recorded lectures, and assignments, all posted on Moodle. A complete syllabus with the list of assigned texts, unit dates, deadlines, and other course information will be provided to students registered for LIZ 334.

Example Class Topics

Topic 1: Course Introduction

Topic 2: Stories of Postwar Recovery

Topic 3: Novel Bad Youth and Postwar Politics

Topic 4: Yukio Mishima’s Stories of Ambition, Cruelty, and Modernization

Topic 5: Abe Kōbō’s Sticks and Ōe Kenzaburō’s Monsters: Surreal Stories of Private Trauma

Topic 6: Murakami Haruki: Representative Author of Twentieth-Century Tokyo

Topic 7: Imaging Families in the Bubble Economy Era

Topic 8: Urban Poetry

Topic 9: Digital Literature

Topic 10: Disasters, Precarity, and Pandemics

Topic 11: Future Directions and Wrap-Up