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21W.730-4 Writing on Contemporary Issues: Food for Thought:
Writing and Reading about the Cultures of Food
Fall 2008

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Homework #1

Due in class T 9/9

- 1) WRITE a letter to me introducing yourself to me as a writer: What's your relationship to writing? What are your hopes (and fears?) for this class? What happened with you and writing in high school, or elsewhere? Anything else about you & writing you want to tell me? —e.g., is English your second language, writing you've done on your own, what you like to read . . .

➤ *1-1½ pages, word processed, single-spaced with space between paragraphs(i.e., letter format)*

- 2) READ the short essays that I handed out in class:

- Joan Didion's "Why I Write," which was originally a talk. Didion is a highly-regarded novelist and essayist of the late 20th century with an especially distinctive voice. Although her topic here is fiction writing, much of what she says applies to non-fiction writing as well.
- Toni Morrison's "The Day, and Its Splendid Parts." Morrison is the Nobel-prize winner who writes of African-American life in novels such as *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*.
- Lara Vapnyar's "Pot Luck." Vapnyar is Russian-born; she moved to Brooklyn in the 1990s, and writes short stories, mostly about the lives of Russian émigrés in New York.

NOTE: Read these and all homework assignments actively—that is: Notice who wrote it, and her or his background. Mark passages you like, that puzzle you, and that you think contain the essay's core ideas. Ask questions in the margin, summarize points, and/or talk back to the writer. Leave time to read each assignment thoroughly—and ideally, more than once.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION: What do you think of Didion's ideas about writing—do they ring true? What do you notice about her voice in this piece, and the way she relates to her audience? We will also discuss your responses to the two brief essays that center on memories related to food.

- 3) LOOKING AHEAD: Make sure to buy the books for the class if you haven't already done so. If you want to read ahead, begin reading the group of essays for our next homework assignment; they are in the E-reserve section of our Class Web site.