Final Essay

Due: 1 pm, Thursday, December 4, 2008, in Humphrey House Lounge. No extensions are possible for this assignment except for reasons of emergency officially verified by the college. I will not accept papers after our last session on December 4.

Length: 5 pages minimum, no maximum. All usual format requirements apply.

The prompt:
“Santo Domingo might be fukú’s Kilometer Zero, its port of entry, but we are all of us its children, whether we know it or not” (1-2).

Thus does Junot Diaz’s narrator, Yunior, in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, identify the theme of the story to come: how the curse carried by “the Admiral” from Europe to the Americas came to damage all of us who live here.

At the end of the first chapter, Yunior informs us of the only defense against the power of fukú: zafa, a word usually accompanied by the crossing of index fingers. “Even now as I write these words,” Yunior says, “I wonder if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell” (7).

Your task is to write an essay in which you do two things:

• First, explain how “we are all of us [fukú’s] children.” To do this, use course materials and experiences (films, texts, discussions, visiting speakers, border-crossings) as well as personal experience as a “child” of fukú. Consider that “children” might mean that we “carry” the curse as both its perpetrators and its victims.

• Second, as a result of the learning you have done in our seminar/cluster, explain what kind of zafa might combat the power of fukú. Use examples of zafa that you have seen in our course materials and other experiences, and feel free to include examples from outside the realm of our seminar if you like. But be sure to include somewhere how you, in your own education and your own life, can embody the spirit of zafa.

The aim here is not a survey of course materials. The aim is a coherent, limited essay, drawing connections between Diaz’s terms and our work together this fall in VOA. You will need to make thoughtful selections. Imagination and individuality will be rewarded.

After you have done a great deal of brainstorming, planning, and organizing, be sure you revisit ALL papers written for this course and have a clear idea of what your recurring writing problems are. (I already do.) Your goal in the final essay should be to show me that you are overcoming those problems.

You may collaborate on this essay as much as you want, without actually borrowing other students’ words. I encourage you to share ideas and drafts, and to consult the Writing Center. I will be happy to offer feedback on brainstorming and outlining, though I won’t be reading drafts.