According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the “voice” is a “sound produced by the vocal organs, especially when speaking or singing, and regarded as characteristic of an individual person.” While the definition sounds clear, its cultural, social, and political implications are complex. Indeed, the spectrum of meanings (literal and metaphorical) across which the notion of voice moves is wide and raises many questions: To what extent is the voice truly peculiar to the individual? What is the voice an index of? How does one’s given voice differ from someone else’s? What does it mean for an individual or a community to “have a voice” and make it heard? How does the embodied experience of vocal expression relate to metaphorical uses of the voice? How does vocal expression relate to issues of gender and identity? Is there a “matter” voice is made of? Is it truly possible to capture a voice? Does the voice leave traces in a written text? In order to tackle these questions, we explore the notion of voice across time and space. From ancient texts to modern and contemporary narratives about the voice, through a variety of medieval and early modern sources, both literary and philosophical, we chase the elusive nature of the voice and reflect on its consequential role in the human experience. Readings include Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Vergil, Ovid, Dante, Rabelais, Tasso, Shakespeare, Balzac, Verne, Calvino, Rice, McNally, Powers, and a selection of case studies from the performing arts.

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2-3:15 TUESDAYS/THURSDAYS