

Syllabus

American Literature: Civil War to the Present

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E-mail:

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Office Hours

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

Expressions of the American experience in realism, regionalism and naturalism; varieties of modernist and contemporary writing; the rise of ethnic literatures and experimental literary forms; includes such writers as Dickinson, Twain, James, Crane, Frost, Eliot, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, O'Neill, Baldwin and Rich. Prerequisite: ENGL 104. Rhetoric and Composition

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to illustrate the variety of American literature published since 1865. As a survey course, we will examine several literary and artistic movements: realism, naturalism, modernism, and postmodernism; we will also examine the contextual and historical moments in which these movements – and the literary texts which emerged from or in reaction against these styles – have shaped American literature.

The readings for this course are arranged chronologically so we can appreciate the ways in which historical moments have influenced our literary tradition. Additionally, this progression gives us the chance to witness how writers and readers react to one another and to the global situation. An historical approach in this course allows us to ask questions about the lives of the writers; about the ethnic, gendered, literary, geographical, political, and social environments in which they wrote and lived; and about the beliefs of their readers. Reading these texts at the beginning of the twenty-first century allows us a certain amount of distance from many of the events portrayed, but we may be surprised with the resonance they continue to have.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Through close reading, class discussion, exams, and writing projects, this course will challenge students to ask, and answer, the following questions:

- What are some characteristics of American literature? What are some of the ways in which it is peculiarly “American”?
- The texts we will read in this course were chosen to represent a complex variety of American cultural positions, including gender, race, social class, ethnicity, and sexuality. How do their different representational strategies address, incorporate, negotiate, or resist these positions?
- In terms of style, structure, and imaginative possibilities, how do these works extend or resist the idea of an American literary tradition?
- How do these authors relate to the past? How is the past articulated or illustrated for the reader? Does the past matter?
- What are some of the reasons for which these texts, in particular, are a part of the tradition? Why are we reading these texts? What can they tell us about the time period in which they were written? About contemporary American culture?
- How do American minority writers convey in their texts an understanding that they are participating in a tradition, or resisting one? What are we to make of this ambivalence? Are there twinges of ambivalence in “canonical” writers?
- How does a specific literary work follow, resist, or reinvent standard forms and rules of the genre?
- How do we understand “The American Dream” in these texts?

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

In this course, through focused class discussions, writing assignments, student-led generation of ideas, and exams, you will learn to:

- understand and use technical and academic language in discussions about American literature and literary theory;
- lead class discussion and generate ideas;
- read and interpret literature critically and analytically;
- respond critically to a work of literature or scholarship, including situating a work of literature within a specific context;
- engage with themes and ideas found in literature through writing and class discussion;
- identify characters, themes, and important quotations;
- demonstrate competency in grammar, diction, and usage,
- practice writing as an activity for inquiry, reflection, and learning;
- demonstrate personal reliability by practicing scholastic honesty, academic integrity, and the ethics of communication.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Ed. Robert S. Levine. Shorter 9th edition, Volume 2
As I Lay Dying William Faulkner

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Reading quizzes & Discussion questions:

There will be a number of unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. As long as you keep up with the reading assignments you should do fine on the quizzes.

Throughout the semester I will ask you to write 2-3 discussion questions for the assigned reading, to be handed in the day we discuss the reading assignment. Discussion questions may address anything related to the author, story, poem, theme, particular literary and poetic techniques, etc. They should be thought-out, challenging, and open-ended. Don't limit your questions to one sentence. Present an idea, passage, technique, etc and delve into the topic. These questions will help stimulate classroom discussion.

Response Papers:

You will turn in a total of five (5) two-page response papers (double-spaced and in twelve point font). In addition to bringing a hardcopy of your essay to class, you will also need to upload the essay onto the turnitin.com website. The response papers will discuss a common theme you have identified in **two** of that week's readings. These brief essays are an opportunity to reflect upon and/or raise questions about individual readings and how they resonate with one another in relation to the broader American scene. Your essay should include one short direct quotation from each of the texts that you are engaging; an excellent strategy would be to select one image, passage, scene, etc., from each work, and analyze them in relation to one another.

These papers will be evaluated closely: grammar, mechanics, sentence structure, and the like will be considered along with content. Due to the brief amount of space in which to make a compelling argument or observation, try to avoid writing extended introductions and conclusions; simply make a point and support it with primary text. Simple plot summaries are not acceptable and will be graded accordingly. Do not consult the internet for ideas. I want to hear what is important to you, not the internet.

Exams:

There will be two exams: a mid-term and a final. The format will include short answer identifications as well as an essay.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

Reading quizzes & Discussion questions	25%
Response papers	25%
Midterm exam	25%
Final exam	25%

ASSIGNMENT & READING SCHEDULE:

All reading assignments are in *The Norton Anthology* unless otherwise noted

Tuesday:

Class Introduction

Thursday: **Transcendentalism & American Literature 1865-1914**

“Introduction”

Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” & “The Wound Dresser”

Tuesday: **Dickinson & Regionalism**

Emily Dickinson Poems

Mark Twain “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”

Thursday: **Realism & Naturalism**

Essays on “Realism & Naturalism”

Tuesday: **Realism**

Henry James, “The Real Thing”

Sarah Orne Jewett, “A White Heron”

Thursday: **Naturalism**

Response Paper 1 due

Stephen Crane “The Open Boat”

Tuesday: **The American Dream?**

Zitkala Ša “Impressions of an Indian Childhood”

Thursday: **“The Color Line”**

Booker T. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address”

W.E.B Du Bois, from *The Souls of Black Folk*, chapters I & III

Tuesday: **American Literature 1914-1945: Modernism**

“Introduction”

Gertrude Stein

Ezra Pound poems

H.D. poems

Marianne Moore poems

Thursday: **High Modernism**

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Tuesday: ***The Waste Land***

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Thursday: **Harlem Renaissance**

Response Paper 2 due

Zora Neale Hurston "How it Feels to be Colored Me"

Claude McKay poems

Langston Hughes poems

Tuesday: **Regional Modernism**

Robert Frost poems

Elizabeth Madox Roberts "On the Mountainside" (Handout)

Thursday: **Exam**

Midterm Exam

Tuesday: **Modernist Short Stories**

Ernest Hemingway "Big Two-Hearted River" (Handout)

F. Scott Fitzgerald "Babylon Revisited"

Thursday: **Modernist Novel**

William Faulkner *As I Lay Dying* "Introduction" & 1-38

Tuesday: **Novel**

Response Paper 3 due

William Faulkner *As I Lay Dying* 39-78

Thursday: **Novel**

William Faulkner *As I Lay Dying* 79-114

Tuesday: **Novel**

William Faulkner *As I Lay Dying* 114-149

Thursday: **American Literature since 1945**

"Introduction"

Robert Penn Warren poems (handout)

Alan Tate "Ode on the Confederate Dead" (Handout)

Robert Hayden poems

Tuesday: **Southern Gothic**

Flannery O'Connor "Good Country People"

Eudora Welty "Petrified Man"

Thursday: **The Beats**

Response Paper 4 due

Allan Ginsberg "Howl" & "A Supermarket in California"

Gary Snyder poems

Tuesday: **The Confessional Poets**

Robert Lowell poems

Anne Sexton poems

Sylvia Plath poems

Thursday:

Thanksgiving No Class

Tuesday: **Postmodernism**

Excerpt from Don DeLillo' *White Noise* (Handout)

Thursday : **Contemporary authors**

Alice Walker, "Everyday Use"

Yusef Komunyakaa poems

Leslie Marmon Silko "Lullaby"

Tuesday: **Wrap-up & Review**

Last Day of Class

Response paper 5 due

Monday:

Final Exam