

English 2308E Sec 001 – 2014-15
American Literature Survey

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Course Description

This course is a survey of American literature, from Columbus to the contemporary. We will read a wide variety of poetry and fiction, as well as some philosophy, political theory, and personal narratives.

Course Objectives

Successful students who complete the course will be able to:

- Offer an understanding of the importance of historical/national perspectives, and how social norms and customs and the construction and consumption of literature are products of time, events, and context;
- Explain how the dominant concerns/thematics in an historical period may be used to signify social status, subjectivity, cultural identity, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, political power, and state nationalism;
- Develop further their ability to analyze texts critically, and formulate and produce essays which have an effective thesis with a clear, well-articulated intent, and a logical argument supported by adequate evidence from the text(s) under discussion

Grading

First Term Essay	10%	(4 pages – December 2)
Second Term Essay	20%	(8 pages – April 7)
Midterm	10%	
Final	35%	
Participation	15%	
Position Papers	10%	(two each semester – 2 pages each)

Note: All students must pass both the term work and the final exam to pass the course.

Term Essays: Topics will be handed out in class. Late essays are not accepted. We will use Owl.

Midterm and Final Exams: The format will include quote and character identifications, a few short answer questions, and (on the final exam) some short essays that will require you

to compare different authors on a given topic.

Position Papers: You can choose to respond to two of the four possible topics given for each semester. Position papers are short, tight arguments. Toss out the long introductions and conclusions. Get to the point as quick as possible – that is, make your argument quick and sharp, and use quotes to support your contention or interpretation. Never summarize the text.

Participation: Your participation is central to this class and is a key component of your growth as a student. Participation includes: being involved in class discussion, participating in group work, and putting real energy into all assignments and readings. Also there will be some in-class writing assignments. **Read the texts before the day they are discussed.**

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and obviously counts for your grade in participation. It is imperative to arrive to each class on time. No unexcused absences are permitted (I am not crazy and I do know that problems arise during the semester – but please supply a legitimate written excuse – see Western policy on this). If you miss a certain number of courses, I will warn you, but already you risk getting a zero in participation and/or dropped from the course.

Academic Accommodation: Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism constitutes an automatic failure of this course and goes on a student's permanent record of conduct. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me.

The following is a statement on plagiarism which has been mandated by the UWO Senate: "Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). Plagiarism checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit

their work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.”

MLA Documentation: Undergraduate research papers written in Arts and Humanities follow the formatting procedures outlined by the Modern Language Association. The complete guide to this format can be found in the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009). This guide can be found On Reserve in the D. B. Weldon Library, call no: LB2369.M57 2009. The Department of English also offers an overview of MLA documentation, at: <http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/guidelines.html>

Texts

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, shorter 8th edition, eds. Nina Baym et al.

Nathaniel Hawthorne *The Scarlet Letter* (Penguin)

Cormac McCarthy *Blood Meridian* (Vintage)

Zora Neale Hurston *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Harper)

Sylvia Plath *The Bell Jar* (Faber)

Jack Kerouac *On the Road* (Penguin)

Octavia Butler *Parable of the Sower* (Grand Central)

(x) = **handouts**

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| Sep | 9 | Introduction; Christopher Columbus, from <i>Letters</i> ; excerpt from Bartolomé de las Casas |
| | 16 | John Winthrop “A Model of Christian Charity”; Roger Williams “A Key Into the Language of America”; Mary Rowlandson “A Narrative of the Captivity” (include seventh, eighth, ninth removes [x]) |
| | 23 | Benjamin Franklin <i>The Autobiography</i> , part II; Phillis Wheatley “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “To the University of Cambridge, in New England,” “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, 1770,” “To S.M., a Young African Painter, on Seeing His Works” |
| | 30 | Thomas Jefferson <i>Declaration of Independence</i> ; excerpts from <i>The Federalist</i> (#1, #10); Nathaniel Hawthorne <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (ch. 1-7; skip “The Custom-House”)
due: position paper |
| Oct | 7 | Nathaniel Hawthorne <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , finish |
| | 14 | Edgar Allan Poe “The Fall of the House of Usher”; Herman Melville “Bartleby, the Scrivener”
due: position paper |
| | 21 | Henry Wadsworth Longfellow “A Psalm of Life”; Walt Whitman “Song of Myself”; Ralph Waldo Emerson, letter to Whitman (x) |

- 28 Emily Dickinson: 207 “I taste a liquor never brewed,” 260 “I’m Nobody! Who are you?,” 339 “I like a look of Agony,” 340 “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” 372 “After great pain, a formal feeling comes,” 409 “The Soul selects her own Society,” 598 “The Brain – is wider than the Sky,” 760 “Pain – has an Element of Blank,” 1263 “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant”
- Nov 4 Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life*
due: position paper
- 11 Mark Twain *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ch. I-XX
due: position paper
- 18 Mark Twain *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ch. XXI-finish
- 25 Cormac McCarthy *Blood Meridian*
- Dec 2 Cormac McCarthy *Blood Meridian*
due: first term essay
- Jan 6 T.S. Eliot “The Waste Land”; ****Mid-Term Exam****
- 13 Ezra Pound “In a Station of the Metro,” “The Encounter” (x), “Portrait d’une Femme,” excerpt from “A Retrospect”; William Carlos Williams “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “Portrait of a Lady,” “To Elsie,” “This is Just to Say”; Flossie William’s response (x); Robert Frost “Mending Wall,” “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”
- 20 Wallace Stevens “Anecdote of the Jar,” “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “The Snow Man”; Gertrude Stein “Objects,” from *Tender Buttons*, “If I Told Him” (x)
- 27 W.E.B. Du Bois, from *The Souls of Black Folk*, ch. I, III; Paul Lawrence Dunbar “Sympathy,” “We Wear the Mask,” “Frederick Douglass”; Claude McKay “If We Must Die,” “America”; Langston Hughes “I, Too,” “The Weary Blues”
due: position paper
- Feb 3 Zora Neale Hurston “How It Feels to Be Colored Me”; *Their Eyes Were*

- Watching God* (1-115)
due: position paper
- 10 finish *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Sigmund Freud “Mourning and Melancholia” (x); Charley Patton “High Water Everywhere” (x)
- 17 Reading Week
- 24 Sylvia Plath *The Bell Jar* (1-178)
- Mar 3 Sylvia Plath *The Bell Jar*, finish; Allen Ginsberg “Howl”
- 10 Jack Kerouac *On the Road* (1-212); Jack Kerouac “Belief & Technique for Modern Prose” (x)
due: position paper
- 17 Jack Kerouac *On the Road* (213-finish); Gil Scott-Heron “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” (x)
- 24 John Ashbery “The Instruction Manual” (x); John Cage, excerpt from “Writing through Howl,” “Lecture on Nothing” (x); Ron Silliman, excerpt from “Sunset Debris” (x); Jackson Mac Low, excerpt from “Antic Quatrains” (x); Kenneth Goldsmith *Traffic* (online);
due: position paper
- 31 Octavia Butler *Parable of the Sower*
- Apr 7 finish Octavia Butler *Parable of the Sower*; review
due: second term essay