

Department of English & Writing Studies
American Literature Survey
English 2401E (002)
Fall/Winter 2018-19

Instructor: Alyssa MacLean
alyssa.maclean@uwo.ca
(519) 661-2111 ext. 87416
University College 4429

Class Location: Arts & Humanities Building 1B08

Class Day/Time: Mondays 3:30-5:30pm,
Wednesdays 3:30-4:30pm

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-2:30 pm

Antirequisites: English 2341E, 2342F/G, 2343F/G, 2344E, 2345F/G, 2346F/G and 3664E, or the former English 2308E.

Prerequisites: At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or 1042E or both of English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department.

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

A survey of American literature from the period of imperial exploration and contact in North America to the postmodern era. In this class, we will read some of the most fascinating literary works of the United States in a variety of modes and genres—from novels to sentimental poetry to slave narratives to postmodern drama. We will consider the aesthetic and formal properties of each text and consider how writers were inspired by the social conditions, ideological conflicts, economic forces, and political developments of their times, such as Indian Removal and slavery. As we study the evolution of major artistic movements and periods, we will also trace the development of important assumptions, myths, and fundamental beliefs about the United States that still influence American discourse today.

In this survey, we will also pay close attention to the voices that are heard—and not heard—in different moments of US history. The pressure of attempting to read 400 years of literary history will force us to pose some difficult questions about the limits of the American literary canon. Why do we read what we read, and who benefits from that? How have ideas of what constitutes “literature” (or “America,” for that matter) changed over time? What could lesser-known writers contribute to our understanding of the US nation and its literature? And is it possible to read so-called canonical writers in a way that produces new kinds of knowledge?

Readings will include novels such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*, short fiction by Herman Melville, Henry James, and William Faulkner; personal narratives such as Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*; and poetry by Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, and Allan Ginsberg. We will also be going on a class trip to see August Wilson’s award-winning play *Fences* at the Grand Theatre.