

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 2401E (650)**American Literature**

Summer 2025

Instructor: Professor Joshua Schusterjschust@uwo.caCourse Description

This course offers a survey of important texts and authors from the Puritan and Revolutionary periods to the present. It addresses not only the major movements and styles of American literature associated with such authors as Hawthorne, Dickinson, Twain, Ellison, and Ginsberg, but also the innovative work of Indigenous and minoritized authors, situating their writings within the contexts of national identity, race, gender, and literary form.

Prerequisite(s): At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020-1999 or permission of the Department.

Course Materials**Required Texts:**

Eds. Robert S. Levine, Sandra M. Gustafson, et al., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, shorter 10th edition. (\$151 list, on Amazon for \$91), W. W. Norton. ISBN-10: 0393884449

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Penguin (\$10.50). ISBN- 0143107666

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, Vintage. (\$22) ISBN-10: 9780679732761

All other learning materials, lectures, and all assignments will be posted to **Brightspace**.

Learning Outcomes:

- Think critically about American literature and culture and understand the historical and literary contexts of works.
- Distinguish between periods, movements, and styles and discuss the differences between colonial, nineteenth century, modern, and contemporary American literature.
- Develop further the ability to analyze texts critically, and to formulate and produce essays which have a clear, well-articulated intent, and a logical argument supported by adequate evidence from the text(s) under discussion.
- Research critical commentary on literary texts and evaluate the relevance, reliability, and usefulness of research sources, especially those obtained through the internet.
- Write a research essay using secondary sources documented using the Modern Language Association (MLA) method.

Methods of Evaluation

Essay # 1 =	10% (1000 words) Due May 19.
Short Research Essay =	5% (750 words) Due June 2
Essay # 2 =	15% (1200 words) Due June 23.
Annotated Bibliography =	5% (500 words) Due July 7.
Essay # 3 =	25% (2000 words) Due July 21.
Final Exam (online) =	40% Date TBD

Submitting Assignments

Submit your essays on Brightspace via the associated ASSIGNMENT folder for the course, or if you have difficulties, email your paper to my address.

Late Assignments

Essays submitted late will receive a penalty of 1% per day, including weekends.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage 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 offence.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the unacknowledged use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT and Google Translate, to create content that is submitted as one's own. In this course, the use of AI (automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT...) is prohibited. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced gender-based or sexual violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support & Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

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.

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 Counseling 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/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>.

Western University Land Acknowledgment

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

ESSAY # 1: The first essay requires students to respond to one of the following topics:

- 1) It can be argued that it is possible to sort major writers from the Puritan period to the late nineteenth century into two groups: those who advance particular doctrines and systems of thought, and those who question or critique those doctrines or who suspect any systematic or totalizing view of the world. Using two examples from our readings, discuss this conflict between those who advance systems of thought and those who question totalizing views of the world.
- 2) In the writings of William Bradford, John Winthrop, or Mary Rowlandson, etc. (pick ONE of the authors from the colonial era) discuss how religious beliefs inform depictions of Indigenous peoples.
- 3) Crèvecoeur was one of the first writers to see America as a place where dogmatic disputes and sectarian violence could be permanently overcome, not by other idea

systems, but by the landscape and the agrarian life within it. Why would the practice of farming lead to profound political and personal freedoms in this view?

4) Phillis Wheatley's poems demonstrate her confidence and control of complex 18th century lyric expectations. Discuss how Wheatley uses two or three traditional lyric conventions (for example, rhyme, diction, classical references, the encomium, the elegy, etc.) to indicate how she connects lyric traditions that were assumed to be white (and European) with her life as a Black woman in America.

SHORT RESEARCH ESSAY: Instructions will be posted on the course website.

ESSAY # 2: The essay questions will be posted on the course website.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: You must submit a 500-word annotated bibliography (2-3 peer-reviewed academic articles) for your final research paper. Each annotation should be a couple of sentences summarizing the main points of the article and how it may be useful for your argument.

ESSAY # 3: The essay questions will be posted on the course website.

ESSAY FORMAT AND CITATION

Your essays must follow MLA (Modern Language Association) format, as detailed in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. I strongly suggest consulting a copy of the *MLA Handbook* while writing your essays, as it contains important information regarding essay format and the citation of sources (you can also consult a style guide like *The Little Brown Handbook* that includes the MLA model).

Regarding citations and avoiding plagiarism, the basic rule to follow is that you must indicate the source of any idea and any words that are not your own—whether you are quoting directly or paraphrasing. As well, your Works Cited list should include all sources that you cite in and consulted for your essay, including footnotes/endnotes, dictionaries, and internet material (for citing sources, you will need to look at the *MLA Handbook* or a style guide like *The Little Brown Handbook* that includes the MLA model).

ESSAY WRITING

As an Honor's English literature course, you will be evaluated based on your ability to write clear, well-argued essays. Elements such as grammar, organization, argumentation, citation, and editing are all important and will affect your grade.

While planning and writing your essays, as always, feel free to get in touch with me for any questions you might have.

Below are directions for writing effective essays.

* Your essay must have a clear **thesis**. A thesis is a statement of what you are trying to prove in the essay—your argument, your point, your stance or position. It should be something with which your reader can potentially agree or disagree; it should not be a statement of fact or general knowledge. Also remember you are making a literary argument – you are saying something about the form and content of literature (or the non-fictional genres on the syllabus) that is important to how you are interpreting the work. In general, your thesis is most effective near the end of your introductory paragraph.

* Your essay must have a clear **structure**. This means that you need definite introductory and concluding paragraphs. As well, your body paragraphs should follow a logical order of argument, covering specific points and/or ideas that support and work to support your thesis. Make sure that each paragraph has a topic and concluding statement, and that you establish smooth transitions between paragraphs. Attention to good structure helps your reader follow your argument, and helps you keep your thoughts and evidence organized.

* Always be **specific**. Do not assume that your reader will “get” what you are alluding to (think of a theoretical reader who may be familiar with the topic or the text in question, but needs specific information in order to engage fully with your argument). Quoting from the primary text—the novel or short story, for instance—is always a good idea to give your reader a definite context for what you are saying.

* Take time to **plan and outline**. Before writing the first words of your essay, spend time planning and outlining it. Gather your evidence and look for patterns, similarities, and differences. Remind yourself what it is that you want to discuss and prove, then think about the best way to organize your essay accordingly. What is your point? What is your argument or position? What evidence will you need to support your thesis? What is the most effective way to structure the essay—what argument should come first and what is your most important evidence? Essentially, when you sit down to write, you should have a firm idea of what you want to do in your essay and how the parts will fit together. Good planning and outlining will save you tension and frustration.

* Write about **what interests and excites you**. When considering a topic, think of what you liked most in the texts on the course—issues, ideas, themes, passages, and so forth. What would you like to explore further? What would you find interesting to write about for six or eight pages? If any of the suggested topics do not appeal to you, you can devise your own topic in consultation with me? If you enjoy what you are writing about, your essay will show it.

* Finally, **reread and edit**. Before submitting your paper, reread it and revise it as necessary, looking for everything from typos to potentially unclear sentences to improper essay format. Having someone else look at a draft is always a good idea, particularly if you trust that person to be honest and helpful. The value of a “clean” essay to a reader cannot be underestimated, for it shows that you care about your writing, which in turn encourages the reader to care about what you are writing.

If you are not familiar with the basic technical vocabulary of English literary studies, you may want to consult a handbook of literary terms when in question. M. H. Abrams *A Glossary of Literary Terms* offers an excellent source book for literary terms. For an overview of recent literary and critical theory consult *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*.

WEBSITES

There are many **websites** with notes, summaries, and free essays on American literature. Unfortunately, the majority of websites associated with American literature can be general, misleading, or inaccurate. Though the biographical information is generally accurate, most do not move beyond plot summary. Hence, you need to be careful when using a website. First, if you consult a website you need to document it correctly. Second, most criticism on websites tends to be naïve and lacking in analysis.

Course Readings Schedule

FIRST TERM

PART I – CONTACT AND COLONIAL PERIOD

WEEK 1: Iroquois creation story; John Smith, “A Description of New England”; John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”; William Bradford, Book I and II, “Of Plymouth Plantation”; Mary Rowlandson, *A Narrative of the Captivity* (First, Second, Third, Twelfth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Remove)

WEEK 2: J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (read the selections from Letters III and IX); Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography* (Part I); Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “On the Death of the Reverend George Whitefield”; Thomas Jefferson “The Declaration of Independence” (in *The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson*)

PART II – NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

WEEK 3: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (you can skip “The Custom-House” opening to *The Scarlet Letter*)

Herman Melville, “Bartleby, The Scrivener”

Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance,” “Nature”

WEEK 4: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (selections from chapter I, VII, X, XIV, XXI, and XLI); Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*; Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865”

WEEK 5: William Apess “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man”; Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” “Song of Myself”; Emily Dickinson, poetry selections (see lectures for assigned poems – note that some of the poems in the lectures are not in the Norton Anthology, but you can find these poems on the web)

WEEK 6: Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”

SECOND TERM

PART III – MODERN LITERATURE

WEEK 7: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-Paper”; Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour”; Sui Sin Far, “Mrs. Spring Fragrance”; Zitkala-Ša, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood.”

WEEK 8: T.S. Eliot, “The Waste Land”

Robert Frost, “Mending Wall,” “After Apple-Picking,” “The Road Not Taken,” “Birches,” “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” “Desert Places,” “Design.”

William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “Portrait of a Lady,” “Spring and All”

Wallace Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “Anecdote of a Jar,” “The Snow Man,” “The Emperor of Ice Cream,” “Sunday Morning.”

Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” “I, Too,” and “Let America Be America Again” (available here: <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/let-america-be-america-again>)

WEEK 9: W. E. B. Du Bois, from *The Souls of Black Folk*, ch. 1, 3

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

WEEK 10: finish Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

PART IV – CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

WEEK 11: Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till”; Sylvia Plath, “Daddy,” “Lady Lazarus”; Allen Ginsberg, “Howl”; Maxine Hong Kingston, “No Name Woman” (from *The Woman Warrior*); Gloria Anzaldua, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue.”

WEEK 12: Jhumpa Lahiri, “Sexy”; Junot Diaz, “Drown.”