

WESTERN UNIVERSITY
Department of English and Writing Studies

ENGLISH 2308E -- AMERICAN LITERATURE – ONLINE
SUMMER 2015

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Rasmus R. Simonsen, rsimonse@uwo.ca

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 Poe, Dickinson, Twain, Hemingway, and Morrison, but also the innovative work of less familiar Indigenous and ethnic authors.

Antirequisite(s): English 2341E, 2342F/G, 2343F/G, 2344E, 2345F/G, 2346F/G, and 3664E.

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

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. Penguin Books.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Vintage International. Random House.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. Norton Critical Edition.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Plume.
- Baym et al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 8th ed. Vols. A to E.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Think critically about American literature and culture, and understand the historical and literary contexts of works.
- Be able to 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.

EVALUATION:

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|------------------------|----------------------------|
| -- Forum Participation | 10% (weekly) |
| -- Essay # 1 | 15% (6 pages / 1500 words) |
| -- Essay # 2 | 15% (6 pages / 1500 words) |
| -- Essay # 3 | 25% (8 pages / 2000 words) |
| -- Final Exam | 35% |

FORUM PARTICIPATION:

Students are required to engage with the study questions that appear on the forum every week. Responses should be about 150 and are due within one week.

ESSAY # 1: The first essay requires students to respond to the following topic: 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. Discuss this conflict between those who advance systems of thought and those who question totalizing views of the world.

ESSAY # 2: The essay questions and the due date will be posted on the course web site.

ESSAY # 3: The essay questions and the due date will be posted on the course web site.

READING SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: John Smith, "A Description of New England," John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," and Roger Williams, "The Bloody Tenet of Persecution."

WEEK 2: William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (read the selections from Book I and II) and Anne Bradstreet poetry selections ("To My Dear and Loving Husband," "Contemplations," and "The Flesh and the Spirit.").

WEEK 3: J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (read the selections from Letters III, IX, X, and XII) and Benjamin Franklin, "The Way to Wealth" and *The Autobiography* (Part I).

WEEK 4: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" and Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." **ESSAY 1 DUE**

WEEK 5: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (selections from chapter I, VII, X, XIV, XXI, and XLI) and Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," and "Self-Reliance."

WEEK 6: Melville, *Moby-Dick*.

WEEK 7: Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and *Song of Myself* and Emily Dickinson, poetry selections.

WEEK 8: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Henry James, *Daisy Miller: A Study*. **ESSAY 2 DUE**

WEEK 9: William Carlos Williams poetry ("The Red Wheelbarrow," "Portrait of a Lady," "Spring and All," "To Elsie," and "The Dance,") and Wallace Stevens poetry ("Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Anecdote of a Jar," "The Snow Man," "The Emperor of Ice Cream," "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman," and "Sunday Morning.")

WEEK 10: Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (selections).

WEEK 11: Morrison, *Beloved*.

WEEK 12: Don DeLillo *White Noise*. **ESSAY 3 DUE**

NOTE: EXCEPT FOR THE FOLLOWING NOVELS--MOBY DICK, INVISIBLE MAN, BELOVED, AND WHITE NOISE--ALL READINGS ARE IN THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.

Reading and working with these specific editions is preferred, especially for essays. If you already have some or all of the texts in different editions, then inform me what edition you will be using on your essays. The Western Bookstore will have these texts in stock, and you can order them on-line from the Bookstore. You may also find the books at a local bookseller. During the course, you are expected to read the online lectures in combination with the texts.

COURSE WORK AND EXAM:

STUDENTS MUST PASS THE COURSE WORK AND THE EXAM TO PASS THE COURSE.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS:

Submit your essays via OWL, or if you have difficulties email your paper to my UWO address.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

Essays submitted late will receive a penalty of 2% per day, including weekends.

PLAGIARISM:

There is **ZERO** tolerance for plagiarism in this course.

Plagiarism: The penalties regarding **PLAGIARISM** (the unacknowledged use of another person's work) are severe and will be enforced. You are responsible for being aware of the nature of plagiarism as it is detailed in the University calendar and in the Department of English's "Instructions for Students" sheet.

Plagiarism: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by quotation marks and in footnotes. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar or refer to Scholastic Discipline under the Senate Policy on Academic Rights and Responsibilities at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf.

Plagiarism checking: Western University uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking."

ACADEMIC ACCOMODATION:

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/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

MENTAL HEALTH:

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.

WEBSITES:

There are many **websites** dedicated to literature and 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

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. I recommend the following handbook that has sections devoted to MLA essay and citation format.

- * *The Little Brown College Handbook*: (most recent edition). Canadian Edition (Fowler et al. Pearson).

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. 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 or at least citing 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*.