

History of American Literature

ENGL 3340.002 Fall 2009 Syllabus
MW 5:30-6:50 pm Preston 302
Prof. Neill Matheson
office: Carlisle 406
office hours: MW 12:30-2 pm, and by appointment
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Course Description:

In this course, we will explore a range of authors and works, both canonical and less well-known, illustrating the diversity of perspectives and kinds of writing produced in what is now the United States. Because a one-semester survey of at least four centuries of American writing must be selective, we will focus more closely on some representative literary problems and important historical contexts, while keeping in view the broader movements of American literary history. We will read the works of mainstream American writers alongside those who represent more marginalized perspectives, exploring shifting ideas of cultural identity and national belonging. One central framework will involve considering “America” as a contact zone, a geographical, social, and political space, and ultimately an idea, that has been continually renegotiated, as a result of the interrelations of its diverse inhabitants, and their cultures and languages. We will also discuss the evolution of different literary forms, as well as changing definitions of the literary itself. We will treat the category of “American Literature” as an open question: both a tenuous historical achievement and a lingering critical problem, its defining characteristics and boundaries remain contested.

Course text:

The Heath Anthology of American Literature Concise Edition

Course Requirements:

1. Two papers (4-6 and 6-10 pages).
2. Midterm.
3. Final exam.
4. Participation. In addition to participation in class discussion, the participation grade for the course will include reading quizzes throughout the semester, as well as informal writing assignments. Because these quizzes are one measure of your participation in the course on a daily basis, make-ups will not be offered if you miss class on the day a quiz is given.

Note: All major assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Course Grade:

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|---------------------------------------|-----|
| First paper | 20% |
| Second paper | 25% |
| Midterm | 20% |
| Final | 25% |
| Participation (incl. reading quizzes) | 10% |

Attendance, Participation, Preparation:

Student participation is an extremely important part of this course. This course will primarily be organized around discussion of the readings, rather than lectures; student interests will play a major role in shaping our discussions. I expect you to come to class having carefully read the texts for each day's meeting, prepared with questions, ideas, enthusiasms, or objections.

Because this course depends on your full involvement, regular attendance is also essential for its success. More than three absences will have a significant impact on your grade for the course. More than eight absences may result in failure for the course. Late arrivals (and early departures) are disruptive, and a pattern of tardiness will also affect your grade.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students should be able to demonstrate critical understanding of the specific authors and texts covered in the course.
2. Students should be able to identify connections synthetically between these texts, comparing and contrasting them, and locating them within larger narratives of American literary history.
3. Students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of major themes, issues, and movements in the history of American literature.
4. Students should be able to recognize and identify the characteristics of various literary genres important to American literary history.
5. Students should be able to demonstrate a complex understanding of the relationship between American literature and larger historical and cultural contexts, including analyzing the relevance of important historical events to specific literary works.
6. Students should be able to explain and make use of analytical and theoretical concepts and literary critical terminology covered in the course.
7. Students should be able to express ideas and perform analysis in clear, concise, logical, and persuasive writing.
8. Students should be able to express ideas clearly through relevant oral contributions to class discussion, and to respond substantially to the ideas of other students.

Academic Dishonesty Policy:

It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University. “Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts” (*Regents Rules and Regulations*).

The policy for this course is that any assignment found to involve plagiarism or other significant academic dishonesty will receive a zero.

Disability Policy:

Federal law requires that “reasonable accommodation” be provided to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty at the beginning of the semester and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability. Also, you may visit the Office for Students with Disabilities in room 102 of University Hall or call them at (817) 272-3364. Let me know if you have a disability, and we can work together to ensure that you are able to participate fully in the course.

Student Success:

The University of Texas at Arlington supports a variety of student success programs to help you connect with the University and achieve academic success. These programs include learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admission and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at 817-272-6107 for more information and appropriate referrals. Also keep in mind that the Writing Center provides free tutoring for UTA students. The Writing Center is located on the fourth floor of the Central Library.

Course Schedule:

Except for occasional handouts, all readings are in the *Heath Anthology Concise Edition*, with page numbers in parenthesis. This schedule is provisional: I may make substitutions in readings or changes in the dates of assignments if necessary.

Aug. 24 Introduction: What is “American Literature”?

American Indian Voices

Aug. 26 “Native American Oral Literatures” (12-16, 30-45); Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone” (handout)

Colonial North America as Contact Zone

Aug. 31 Cabeza de Vaca, “The Relation ...” (57-68); “History of the Miraculous Apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe” (72-80); Otermin, “Letter on the Pueblo Revolt of 1680” (86-95); Hopi narrative, “The Coming of the Spanish and the Pueblo Revolt” (95-99)

Sept. 2 Harriot, “A Briefe and True Report...” (118-25); Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (164-179)

Sept. 7 Labor Day; no class!

Sept. 9 Rowlandson, “A Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration...” (206-32); Franklin, “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America” (374-78); Handsome Lake, “How America Was Discovered” (363-65)

Eighteenth-Century: “The American, this new man” (and Other Stories)

Sept. 14 Franklin, Part One of *The Autobiography* (365-67, 381-424)

Sept. 16 Foster, selection from *The Coquette* (584-604)

Sept. 21 Crèvecoeur, from *Letters from an American Farmer* (435, 441-53); Jefferson, from *Autobiography* (479-84); Wheatley, headnote (569-70), “To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth” (572-73), “On Being Brought From Africa to America” (575), “To the University of Cambridge, in New England” (576), “Letter to Samson Occom” (578-79)

Sept. 23 Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle” (940-53); **paper #1 due**

Mid-Nineteenth-Century: Independence and Slavery

Sept. 28 Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (689-91, 707-23); Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government” (749-65)

Sept. 30 Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1055-83)

Oct. 5 Sarah Moore Grimke and Angelina Grimke, selections (814-25); Fern, “Independence” (840-41); Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments” (861-62, 864-66); Stowe, from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1033-55)

Oct. 7 Jacobs, from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (841-60)

Oct. 12 Poe, “Ligeia” (988-1001), “To Helen” (1028), “The Raven” (1028-32), “Annabel Lee” (1032-33); Hawthorne, “The Birth-Mark” (977-88)

Oct. 14 Midterm exam

Whitman and Dickinson

Oct. 19 Whitman, “Song of Myself” sections 1-24, 51-52 (1209-11, 1225-46, 1275-76)

Oct. 21 Dickinson, “There’s a certain Slant of light” (1299); “The Soul selects her own Society—” (1300); “After great pain, a formal feeling comes—” (1301); “What Soft—Cherubic Creatures—” (1302); “This is my letter to the World” (1303); “I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—” (1303); “The Brain—is wider than the Sky—” (1306); “Publication—is the Auction” (1309); “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—” (1313); “Title divine—is mine!” (1313); “Rearrange a ‘Wife’s’ affection!” (1316); “I cannot live with You—” (1307-8); “She rose to His Requirement—dropt” (1310-11); Sigourney, “The Sutte” (handout)

Late Nineteenth Century: Imagining America

Oct. 26 Alcott, “My Contraband” (1620-34); Chesnut, “The Goophered Grapevine,” “Po’ Sandy” (1405-22); Chopin, “Désirée’s Baby” (1519-23), “The Story of an Hour” (1523-25)

Oct. 28 Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1747-54); Eaton (Sui Sin Far), “In the Land of the Free” (1670-78); Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa), from “The School Days of an Indian Girl” (1686-96)

Oct. 30 Last Day to Drop Classes

Modernism

Nov. 2 Pound, “In a Station of the Metro,” “L’art, 1910” (1830-33); Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1900-1905); Moore, “Poetry” (1945-46); Williams, entire selection (1850-56)

Nov. 4 Stein, “Susie Asado” (1849-50); Cummings, entire selection (1896-1900); Stevens, entire selection (1954-60)

Nov. 9 Cather, “A Wagner Matinee” (1782-87); Wharton, “Roman Fever” (1773-81); Anderson, “Hands” (1805-10); Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants” (1949-54)

Nov. 11 Fitzgerald, “Babylon Revisited” (1920-36); Faulkner, “Barn Burning” (1960-74)

The Harlem Renaissance

Nov. 16 Toomer, selection from *Cane* (1997-2006); Hughes, entire selection (2006-20); Hurston, “Sweat” (2034-42)

Nov. 18 Cullen, entire selection (2020-25); McKay, entire selection (2043-45)

Post-War Writing

Nov. 23 Ginsberg, “America” (2375-77); Ellison, “King of the Bingo Game” (2207-15); O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (2240-52); Reed, “Flight to Canada” (2627-29)

Nov. 25 Chaplin, *Modern Times* (film); Hart Crane, “Chaplinesque” (handout)

Nov 30 Kingston, “No Name Woman” (2476-85); Mukherjee, “Happiness” (2485-91); Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” (2456-64); **paper #2 due**

Dec. 2 Silko, “Lullaby” (2512-20); Alexie, “Because My Father Always Said...” (2552-59)

Final exam: Monday Dec. 7 5:30 – 8:00 p.m. (in our usual classroom)