

Bridgewater State University
English 234: Survey of American Literature
Professor Tierney
M-T-W-Th-F

Duration: 25 May-26 June, Summer 2020

Location: Online

Course Credits: 3

Course Description

This course investigates both the continuities and discontinuities of the American literary tradition from the colonial to the contemporary period. Reading diverse genres and periods gives us the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be an American and to consider the values that define our national consciousness. This course will also reveal how common American ideals—individualism, democracy, capitalism, progress, innovation, freedom, and multiculturalism—have evolved, sometimes radically, over time. By definition, a literature “survey” course is meant to be inclusive, so we will read multiple literary genres (essay, autobiography, short story, poem, play, letter, and sermon), with attention to the underrepresented voices of women and racial and ethnic minorities. Our readings will cover a wide swath of historical time, from the initial contact between Europeans and natives, to the 18th and 19th-century efforts to forge a distinct national identity, to the development of the U.S. as an industrialized, international power in the 20th century. Students will be introduced to literary styles, movements, and periods such as realism, transcendentalism, modernism, the Harlem Renaissance, and Asian-American literature. Since the course is intended to be a foundational course taken early on in the major, students will also build skills in close reading and interpreting literature within the context of history, cultural forces, and author biography.

Learning Outcomes

In this class, students will:

- Demonstrate knowledge of major authors, literary movements and genres of writing in American literary history

- Demonstrate close reading skills essential to all literary study

- Situate American literary texts within a variety of historical and cultural contexts

- Demonstrate oral communication skills through discussion and presentation

- Write fully developed critical essays using primary texts as evidence

Required Texts

The Bedford Anthology of American Literature: Beginnings to the Present, Shorter 2nd Edition
(Bedford/St. Martins, ISBN 978-0-312-59713-9)

Course Requirements and Grading 10%

Class participation

This course will be a combination of short lecture and discussion. You will be expected to post substantive responses to the readings on a daily basis, and I will evaluate the quality of your posting as well as the frequency. The highest grades will go to students who demonstrate that they have thought deeply about the material,

10%

Powerpoint Presentation

Your presentations will offer a close reading (textual analysis) of a prose passage or section of a poem. This presentation will serve as a rough draft or idea map for your first essay.

15%

Close Reading Essay (3-4 pp.)

Your textual analysis essay should be developed from your power point presentation incorporating my feedback (sent via email). You may also draw upon quotations from other parts of the text, in addition to the single passage chosen, to support your argument. The essay is due one week following receipt of an emailed grade and comments on your presentation.

15%

Contextual Analysis Essay (3 pages)

This essay will present an argument about how the text reflects or responds to some aspect of its context. Students can draw upon events in its historical moment, literary movements, author's biography, or cultural concerns of the time period to present a focused argument about how ONE specific context influences some aspect of the meaning and purpose of the literary work. Contextual information can be gleaned from the author introductions, from the introductory sections of the textbook, or from additional research (which must be cited properly).

25%

Final Exam

25%

Comparative Final Essay (5-7 pp.)

Course Schedule

NOTE: Always read the biographical introduction to each author

Week of May 25 -29

May 25 - Introduction

May 26 - "Literature to 1750" (2-27) and "Colonial Settlements" (91-103)
William Bradford, from "Of Plymouth Plantation" (116-135)

May 27 John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity" (136-149)
Reading questions: What remnants of Puritan influence and values can you find in contemporary American life? What now seems the most foreign about their worldview?

May 28 Anne Bradstreet (150-152), "The Prologue" (153-54), "The Author to Her Book" (156), and "Here Follows Some Verses upon the Burning..." (159-160)

May 29 Mary Rowlandson, "from *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*" (169-188)

Reading questions: How do Puritan theology and gender norms influence these early women writers?

May 30 "American Literature, 1750-1830" (260-283) and "Writing Colonial Lives" (285-290)

Benjamin Franklin, "from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*" (290-321)

Reading questions: What aspects of Enlightenment thinking can you see in Franklin's autobiography? How does your daily experience differ from colonial era lives? Are there any commonalities?

Week 2 June 1-5

June 1 "To Begin the World Over Again: The Emerging Idea of America" (372-74)

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, "Letters from an American Farmer" (374-78) Thomas Paine, "from *Common Sense*" (379-382)

June 2 Thomas Jefferson, "Draft of the Declaration of Independence" (387-393)

June 3 Phyllis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (427-430), "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth" (431-32), and "To His Excellency General Washington" (434-35)

Reading questions: How do these writers define American ideals? How does their class and status (plantation owners, immigrants, or slaves) inform their ideas of America?

June 4 American Gothic Fiction--Dark Romanticism

Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (779-781, 805-827)

June 5 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (827-42)

Reading questions: What do these stories reveal about human psychology and the imagination? How do their views of human nature, reason, and science differ from those of the Enlightenment?

Week 3 June 8-12

June 8 Reform and Resistance

Margaret Fuller, "from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*" (594-606)

Seneca Falls Woman's Convention, "Declaration of Sentiments" (527-530)

June 9 Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government" (648-65)

Reading question: How do these writers use the rhetoric of America's founding documents to resist government oppression?

June 10 Transcendentalism

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (539-41; 555-73)

Reading questions: How do these transcendentalist thinkers view nature, religion, society, government, and the individual?

June 11 Slave Narratives Frederick Douglass, Ch. I to IV of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

(700-21)

Reading questions: What are Douglass's most compelling arguments against slavery?

June 12 Slave Narratives and Gender

Harriet Jacobs, "Letter from a Fugitive Slave" (619-623)

Reading questions: How did gender affect the differing experiences of slaves? What is the role of masculinity in Douglass's sense of self? What influences of transcendentalism and romanticism can you see in Douglass's narrative?

June 12 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (968-1019; read only stanzas 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15, 21, 24, 32, 39, 43-46, 48, 49, 52); "Beat! Beat! Drums!" (1027); and "The Wound-Dresser" (1029-31)

Reading questions: What unusual stylistic elements do you notice about Whitman's poetry? What are his attitudes about the nation, gender, work, war, the body and the soul? What elements of his work draw from transcendentalism or romanticism?

Week 4 June 15-19

June 15 Realism and War

“American Literature 1865-1914” (1102-1129) and “Realism, Regionalism, and Naturalism” (1131-39)

Mark Twain, "The War Prayer" (1157-58, 1180-83)

Reading question: How does Twain use satire, irony, and gritty realism to provoke readers to question romantic notions of war?

June 16 Married Women's Realities

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1296-1311)

Edith Wharton, "The Quicksand" (1311-27)

Reading question: How do these stories reveal the ways in which women were entrapped by marriage, patriarchy, and the domestic sphere assigned to women?

June 17 Black and Native Realities

"Writing American Lives" (1393-99)

Zitkala-Sa, "The School Days of an Indian Girl" (1407-19)

Reading question: How do these pieces resist white power, challenge white American points of view, and unmask false conceptions of reality?

June 18 Naturalism: Indifferent Nature and Indifferent Cities

Stephen Crane, “Open Boat” (1340-59)

Reading question: How do these stories reveal a naturalist attitude about fate, nature, or the determining effects of the environment upon human possibility?

June 19 "Modernisms in American Poetry" (1511-19)

Wallace Stevens (1570-72), “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (1576-78) and “Of Modern Poetry” (1581)

William Carlos Williams (1586-89), “The Red Wheelbarrow” (1596) and “A Sort of Song” (1596-7)

Week 5 June 22-26

June 22 Harlem Renaissance: Black Modernism

Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1690-94); "I, Too" (1695-96);

Zora Neale Hurston, intro (1788-90); “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (handout)

Reading questions: To what degree do these writers respond to or question Hughes's call for a truly "Negro Art"? How does race enable or constrain their artistry?

June 23

“Feminist and Queer Literature: Breaking the Mold

“American Literature since 1945” (1934-63)

Allen Ginsberg, “Howl” (2115-2126)

Ursula K. Le Guin, "She Unnames Them" (2138-42)

Sylvia Plath, "Daddy" (2168-70; 2171-74)

Reading questions: How are these works counter-cultural, resisting norms of gender and sexuality or revising traditional literary forms or stories?

June 24 Asian American Literature

“We Should Never Meet” Aimee Pham (pdf)

“Seventeen Syllables” Hisaye Yamamoto (pdf)

June 25

‘The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker’, Eric Liu

June 26

Chinese-American Literature – student selected texts

Final essay due