



Bridgewater State University

ENGL 234: Survey of American Literature

Duration: 31 May-25 June, Summer 2021

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 1, 31th May-4th June

✓ Introduction

Puritans in New England

"Literature to 1750" (2-27) and "Colonial Settlements" (91-103)

William Bradford, from "Of Plymouth Plantation" (116-135)

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?

✓

Women and Puritanism

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

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?

✓

The Enlightenment and 18th Century American Literature

"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?

✓

Ideals of the American Republic

"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)

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

- ✓ American Gothic Fiction--Dark Romanticism
"American Literature: 1830-1865" (484-501) and "American Facts and American Fiction" (771-773 only)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter" (779-781, 805-827)
Edgar Allen 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 2, 7th June-11th June

- ✓ Reform and Resistance
"The Era of Reform" (503-511) and "I Will Be Heard: The Rhetoric of Antebellum Reform" (512-513)
Margaret Fuller, "from *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*" (594-606)
Seneca Falls Woman's Convention, "Declaration of Sentiments" (527-530)
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?
- ✓ Transcendentalism
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (539-41; 555-73)
Henry David Thoreau, "from *Walden: Where I Lived, and What I Lived For*" (665; 671-81)
Reading questions: How do these transcendentalist thinkers view nature, religion, society, government, and the individual? How do their conceptions of the individual self differ from those of Franklin? What echoes of Emerson's ideas can you see in contemporary political rhetoric?
- ✓ Slave Narratives and Native Protest Writing
Frederick Douglass, Ch. I to IV of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (700-21)
William Apess, "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man" (533-539)
Reading questions: What are Douglass's most compelling arguments against slavery? What rhetorical strategies do both writers use to persuade or provoke white readers to question racist ideas?
- ✓ Slave Narratives and Gender
Frederick Douglass, Ch. V to end of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (721-767)
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?

✓

Capitalism and Labor

Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener" (876-905)

Orestes Brownson, "from *The Laboring Classes*" (524-27)

Reading questions: How do these pieces represent capitalism and its effects on workers? Why is Melville's story told from the boss's point of view?

Forging an American Poetic Voice

"New Poetic Voices (937-43)

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 3, 14th June-18th June

✓

Nonconformist Poetry

Emily Dickinson (1043-46), and poems 280 [Fr 340], 288 [Fr260], 303 [Fr409], 435 [Fr 620], 465 [Fr 591], 501 [Fr 373], 709 [Fr 788], 712 [Fr 479], 754 [Fr 764], and 1129 [Fr 1263]

Reading questions: How does Dickinson's style differ from Whitman's? In her poems about death, does she seem to accept or question Christian beliefs in the afterlife, or both? How does her work resist conformity?

✓

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)

Ambrose Bierce, "Chickamauga" (1199-1207)

Stephen Crane, "[Do Not Weep, Maiden, for War Is Kind]" (intro 1359-60, 1361-62)

Reading question: How do these writers use satire, irony, and gritty realism to provoke readers to question romantic notions of war?

✓

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?

- ✓ Black and Native Realities
 "Writing American Lives" (1393-99)
 Zitkala-Sa, "The School Days of an Indian Girl" (1407-19)
 Charles Chesnutt, "The Passing of Grandison" (1273-87)
Reading question: How do these pieces resist white power, challenge white American points of view, and unmask false conceptions of reality?

 - ✓ Naturalism: Indifferent Nature and Indifferent Cities
 Stephen Crane, "Open Boat" (1340-59)
 Anzia Yezierska, "The Lost Beautifulness" (available on the web; please print)
Reading question: How do these stories reveal a naturalist attitude about fate, nature, or the determining effects of the environment upon human possibility?

 - ✓ Modern Anxiety
 "American Literature 1914-1945" (1482-1509)
 T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Wasteland" (1623-50)
Reading question: How does the style of Eliot's poetry echo the mood of the speaker and/or of the historical moment (post WW1 for "Wasteland")?

 - ✓ Modernist Poetry
 "Modernisms in American Poetry" (1511-19)
 Amy Lowell, "The New Manner in Modern Poetry" (1526-30)
 Ezra Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1523-26)
 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)
 (more readings on next page)
 (continued from March 29)
 Edna St. Vincent Millay, "[I, being born a woman and distressed]" (1663-65, 66)
Reading questions: How do these poems demonstrate modernist poetic ideals as described in the intro section or by Lowell or Pound? Why does Millay's poem use the traditional sonnet form to offer a modern look at female sexuality?
- Week 4, 21th June- 25th June**
- ✓ Harlem Renaissance: Black Modernism
 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1690-94); "I, Too" (1695-96); "The Weary Blues" (1696-97); and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1536-40)
 Zora Neale Hurston, intro (1788-90); "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (handout)
 Countee Cullen, "Heritage" (1699-1701; 1702-05)
 Sterling Brown, "Strong Men" (1684-85; 1688-89)
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?

- ✓ Modernist Fiction
Sherwood Anderson, "Hands" (1767-74)
Ernest Hemingway, intro (1871-73) and "Mr. and Mrs. Eliot" (handout)
Reading questions: What attitude do Anderson's and Hemingway's stories take towards homosexuality or a reversal of gender stereotypes?
- The American Dream Deferred
Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (separate book, not in the anthology)
Reading questions: How does Miller characterize post-war American society and selfhood, and what is his attitude toward the concept of the "American dream"?
- ✓ 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?
- ✓ What Is Postmodernism?
"From Modernism to Postmodernism" (1965-77)
Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" (2151-67)
Don DeLillo, "Videotape" (2205-11)
Reading questions: How does DeLillo's story comment on the American technoculture of mass-mediated images? How and why does Morrison's story frustrate a reader's attempts to determine the race of the protagonists?
- ✓ Transnationalism and Unheralded Americans
Sherman Alexie, "What You Pawn I Will Redeem" (2296-2314)
Gloria Anzaldua, "El sonavabitch" (2224-31)
Martin Espada, "Alabanza: In Praise of Local 100" (2292-95)
Reading questions: How do these pieces challenge notions of who counts as an American? How does Alexie's story figuratively allude to the history of the treatment of natives by the U.S.?

Final Essay Due. Final Exam