

# English 104: Introduction to Fiction

## “This American Story”

Instructor: Matthew Hannah Contact: [mhannah@uoregon.edu](mailto:mhannah@uoregon.edu) Phone: 541-346-0934 Office: 212 PLC Hours: MW 10-11:30 CRN: 12177 Location: Gerlinger 248 Meeting Times: MWF 12-12:50

Welcome to English 104, Introduction to Fiction! Whether you are a frequent or occasional reader, all of you will have encountered some version of what we call “fiction.” In this class, however, we will seek to complicate and further understand this category and will learn some of the dynamics of this type of writing. By the end of this term, it is my hope that you will have a better understanding for what “fiction” is, how it works, and where it fits into the broader category we call “English literature.”



For our theme this term, I have chosen “This American Story,” playing on the title of the popular public radio program “This American Life.” As

many of you may know, this radio program depicts different aspects of American life each week. As the website for “This American Life” states: “It’s mostly true stories of everyday people, though not always” (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/about>). This notion, of truth or fiction, captures some of the issues we will explore this term. Despite being fictions, many of these novels have elements of truth to them. Do we value “truth” more than fiction? Is fiction always “made up”? What is the line between fiction and truth? Can fiction help us relate to the world in a different way? These are some of the questions we will return to again and again over the term.



I’ve chosen novels I believe capture different aspects of this American life. While in no way representative of all the American novels or experiences out there, these selections do imagine different ways of being an American, of living in America, or of experiencing it. During this term, we will analyze these representations of American life, but I also hope we will talk about our own experiences of living in America. Throughout these novels and stories, we will gain a sense of how people all experience America in different ways and how these experiences shape the fictions they write. All of these stories come from different places and times, and they all explore our theme in unique ways.

### Required Texts:

Nella Larsen, *Passing*  
Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*  
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*  
Helena Maria Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus*  
Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*  
All of these novels are available from the UO Duck Store.



### Assignments and Grading:

**Passage Explication:** In this assignment, you will begin to practice the tools of literary analysis. I will give you a choice of passages from several of our readings. You will choose ONE and write a 2-page essay telling me why this passage is important for the larger narrative. You will also be asked to choose ONE word or concept in the passage that you will look up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In your explication, you will include some discussion of how the word's meanings help your explication. **Submit on Blackboard.**

**Creative Essay:** For this 3-page essay, I want you to consider your experiences of America. Be creative. Don't rely on clichés and commonplaces about the "American Dream." Instead, I want you to think about your experience and write about some specific aspect of your experience. Draw on your reading of these novels and stories to provide inspiration. Write down some notes about various aspects you might focus on and choose the most interesting. Focus on that specific aspect throughout your essay. These essays can be "real" or "fiction," they can be your experiences or someone's you know, but they should focus on some particular piece of that experience. **Submit on Blackboard.**

**Analysis Essay:** In your final paper, you will choose a passage from your favorite novel or story and write a 3-4 page essay "closely" reading that passage and applying the applicable terms and concepts that you have learned. Imagine you are a literary scholar analyzing a particular theme within the novel or short story which you think is important. Your goal is to show why your interpretation is legitimate by quoting from the text, from analyzing those quotations, and explaining why these interpretations "fit" the novel's larger narrative. Use the skills you have learned in the other two papers to guide you. **Submit on Blackboard.**

**Blog Posts:** I have started a class blog on Wordpress. I will send you an invitation to join the blog to your Webmail account. You will need to follow the instructions to join the blog and write weekly blog posts. Additionally, you will comment on one other post each week. Each Friday by 5pm, submit a 150-word blog post. For each post, I want you to search the Web for a news story or video related to the novel or story we read that week. Paste the link to the story or video and write a post about how our readings relate to the content. Also, comment briefly on one other post. **Submit on Wordpress.**

**Quizzes:** There will be five pop-quizzes related to class content. These may be definitions of literary terms, plot details from the readings, etc. **In class.**

**Midterm/Final:** We will have a midterm and final. These exams will include a mixture of short answer, multiple choice, and short writing assignments. They will include material from the texts we've read and definitions of literary terms we've learned over the term. I will provide review sessions before each exam. **In class.**

**Communication:** I will communicate with you via your webmail. You will need to check your uoregon email account regularly to get class updates such as cancelations or alterations.

**Participation:** By staying in my class, you agree to participate in classroom discussions and activities, and I expect you to abide by the rules of academic behavior. This means respecting other students' opinions, not interrupting others, paying attention during presentations or discussions, working in groups, and doing your best. Disrespectful behavior includes: texting, sleeping, refusing to participate, showing up late, and side talking. I take this class seriously, many of your classmates take it seriously, and I expect you to take it seriously too.

---



#### Grading Breakdown

Essay 1: 15%

Essay 2: 20%

Essay 3: 20%

Blog: 5%

Quizzes: 5%

Midterm: 15%

Final: 20%

Total: 100%

---

**Course Policies:** This course satisfies the university's Group Requirement in the Arts and Letters category. The information learned in this class will be applicable to any sort of future study of poetry or literature, or communication in general. Note, however, that these credits do not count toward the English Major.

**Academic Honesty:** All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course, which means you may not submit papers or portions of papers you have written for any other course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please refer to the Student Conduct Code on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website. In cases where academic misconduct has been clearly established, the award of an "F" for the final course grade is the standard practice of the English Department. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources.

**Attendance:** You are allowed three absences before your absence will be reflected in the final grade. Four absences will lower your final grade by 1/3 of a letter, five by a whole letter, and six equals an automatic fail.

**Late Work:** Work handed in late will be reduced by one third of a letter grade for each day late. For example, a B+ essay that has been turned in a day late will earn a "B" grade. If you are absent from class due to illness, an electronic submission sent by the time class regularly begins will be accepted. Otherwise, the assignment will be considered late unless you've made prior arrangements with me.

**Grading and Expectations:** "Introductory" and "100-level" does not mean "easy." You will be held to English department standards in terms of your in-class participation, your display of course mastery on exams and quizzes, and the structure, argument, grammar, and mechanics of your writing. The reading and written work for this course may be heavy at times. The English department's grading policy is on Blackboard.

**Access:** The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in week one if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoac@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoac@uoregon.edu).

---

#### Learning Outcomes for the English Department:

1. Read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. Draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. Perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
4. Write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. Employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

## Schedule of Assignments

### **Week 1**

Monday 09/29: Introduction to English 104

Wednesday 10/01: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (3-24)

Friday 10/03: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (24-67) Blog Post 1 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 2**

Monday 10/06: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (67-124)

Wednesday 10/08: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (124-168)

Friday 10/10: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (168-206), Blog Post 2 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 3**

Monday 10/13: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (206-249)

Wednesday 10/15: Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* (249-281)

Friday 10/17: Larsen, *Passing* part 1 (9-47), Blog Post 3 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 4**

Monday 10/20: Larsen, *Passing* part 2 (51-81), Essay 1 Due (BB)

Wednesday 10/22: Larsen, *Passing* part 3 (85-114)

Friday 10/24: Viramontes, *Feet of Jesus* (3-46), Blog Post 4 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 5**

Monday 10/27: Viramontes, *Feet of Jesus* (49-90)

Wednesday 10/29: Viramontes, *Feet of Jesus* (93-130)

Friday 10/31: Viramontes, *Feet of Jesus* (133-176), Blog Post 5 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 6**

Monday 11/03: **Midterm Exam IN CLASS 12:00 PM**

Wednesday 11/05: Silko, *Ceremony* (1-54)

Friday 11/07: Silko, *Ceremony* (55-87), Blog Post 6 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 7**

Monday 11/10: Silko, *Ceremony* (87-130), Essay 2 Due (BB)

Wednesday 11/12: Silko, *Ceremony* (131-176)

Friday 11/14: Silko, *Ceremony* (176-201), Blog Post 7 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 8**

Monday 11/17: Silko, *Ceremony* (201-230)

Wednesday 11/19: Silko, *Ceremony* (230-262)

Friday 11/21: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* (1-40), Blog Post 8 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 9**

Monday 11/24: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* (41-81)

Wednesday 11/26: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* (83-119), Blog Post 9 Due (Wordpress)

Friday 11/28: Thanksgiving NO CLASS

### **Week 10**

Monday 12/01: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* (121-149)

Wednesday 12/03: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* (151-185)

Friday 12/05: Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* (187-204), Essay 3 Due (BB), Blog Post 10 Due (Wordpress)

### **Week 11**

Monday 12/08 Final Review Session

Wednesday 12/10 **Final Exam IN CLASS 10:15 AM**

---