

SYLLABUS

English 325 LITERATURE OF THE NORTHWEST (CRN# 47939)
Summer 2014 MFW&Th 2:00-3:50 185 Lillis Hall
John Witte 346-5935 jwitte@uoregon.edu Office: 206 PLC
Office Hours: MT&W 4:00-5:00, & by appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS (at UO Bookstore):

Xerox Packet: *Literature of the Northwest*.
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Ken Kesey
Brokeback Mountain, Annie Proulx
A River Runs Through It, Norman Maclean
The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Sherman Alexie
Fight Club, Chuck Palahniuk

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will survey the rich contribution of the Northwest to our nation's literature. The objective of the class will be to identify and explore principles of literary regionalism. Throughout the term we will revisit the following questions. *Is there a distinct Northwest regional literature? If not, why not? If so, how might we describe it?*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Daily Assignment:

The class will be organized around, and propelled by, your reflections on the daily reading assignments. Each day you should be prepared to share with the class your written response to the assigned texts, and to help guide the discussion.

All papers must be typed and double-spaced.

The prose assignments will require a one-half to one page response to the question posed.

The poetry assignments will require a short summary of a poem of your choice from the day's reading, addressing the following questions. *What is the poet's intent? What is the form of the poem and why was this form chosen? What is the tone of the poem and why is this tone appropriate? How do the poem's form and tone converge to amplify its intent?* A sample summary is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Final Paper (4 pages), due July 17.

Based on your readings this term, how would you define a "literature of the Northwest"? You may choose to argue that a distinct literature of the region does not exist.

Suggestions for writing essays: Think about your topic and reread the relevant material several times, taking notes and exploring possibilities. Question yourself, and the texts. Decide on a title and a main argument or thesis; then write an introduction that presents it in one paragraph. The body of your paper should develop the thesis logically, with each paragraph enlarging on an important point with specific evidence and clear explanation. Pay as much attention to the end of the essay as to its beginning. You should leave your reader with a clear sense of what you have demonstrated and why it matters. Carefully proofread the paper, rewriting as necessary, and correcting all grammatical errors.

Papers must be typed and double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Words *or ideas* not your own must be clearly identified by quotation, and, where necessary, a citation. Plagiarism is a serious academic crime that will result in disciplinary action up to expulsion from the University. If you are uncertain how to properly acknowledge others' words and ideas, I'll be glad to discuss this with you.

GRADING:

Your grade will be determined by your attendance and by your preparedness for and participation in class discussions (10%), by your fifteen daily papers reflecting on the texts (70%), and by your final paper (20%).

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is crucial. If you miss a class, an explanation will be required. Each unexcused absence will lower your grade one step (B to B-, etc.).

ASSESSMENT:

The English Department's assessment procedure evaluates six learning outcomes:

1. The ability to read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension;
2. to draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. to perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
4. to write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. to employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. to employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation.

CLASS SCHEDULE, with the day's written assignment in italics (where two questions are posed, choose one):

June 23: Introduction, review of syllabus, and overview of class.

NATIVE AMERICAN TEXTS (packet)

June 24: "The Indian Literature of Oregon,"(pp.2-10) and selections from "Coyote Was Going There."(pp.11-28) Written assignment: *Either describe an encounter you have had with Indian culture that has influenced your life, or choose one text from the day's reading and describe it in terms of being of the Mythic, the Transformation, or the Historical Age.*

SETTLEMENT TEXTS (packet)

June 25: Lewis & Clark Journals (pp.41-48) and Pioneer Letters (pp.49-59). Written assignment: *In what ways were Lewis and Clark, as well as the authors of these letters, explorers?*

NORTHWEST FICTION

June 26: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, parts 1 and 2. **Either:** *What is the role of laughter in the novel? Or: Is McMurphy the patients' savior or their victim?*

June 30: *Cuckoo's Nest*, parts 3, and 4. *Who is the hero of the novel, McMurphy Or Bromden?*

July 1: *Brokeback Mountain*. *Could this story have taken place in any other region than the American West?*

July 2: *A River Runs Through It*. **Either:** *How is fly-fishing like a religion in this story? Or: What is the "It" that the river runs through?*

July 3: *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. **Either:** *How are Indians shown to be survivors in this book? Or: What is the role of stories and storytelling in this novel?*

July 7: *Fight Club*. **Either:** *What compels these young men to join fight clubs? Or: Clearly the narrator is insane. Are Tyler's objectives for Project Mahem likewise insane?*

NORTHWEST POETS, ESSAYS AND PROSE (packet)

July 8: Hazel Hall, Introduction and poems (pp. 61-85). *A short summary of a poem of your choice from the day's reading.*

July 9: Gary Snyder, poems (pp.99-105) *and* essay, "The Etiquette of Freedom" (pp.106-110). **Either:** *How does Snyder's concept of the "wild" relate to the life and literature of the Northwest? Or: a short summary of a poem from the day's reading.*

July 10: David Wagoner (pp. 119-128) *and* Lucia Perillo (pp. 137-145), poems. *A short summary*

July 14: Theodore Roethke, (pp. 147-157). A short summary... Note that there are six long poems in numerous parts. Your summary must address an entire poem.

July 15: Kermit Vanderbilt, "Theodore Roethke as a Northwest Poet" (pp. 147-174). *Is the "regional impulse" in Roethke's poems sufficient to make him a Northwest poet?*

July 16: H.L. Davis, "Kettle of Fire," *and* George M. Armstrong, "An Unworn and Edged Tool: H.L. Davis's Last Word on the West, 'The Kettle of Fire'" (pp. 175-197). **Either:** *In what ways did Davis attempt to "universalize" his Northwest materials in "Kettle of Fire"? How successful was he? Or: Is "Kettle of Fire" a critique, or a celebration, of the American West?*

July 17: George Venn, "Continuity in Northwest Literature" (pp. 199-209). *Is there a "spirit of place" particular to the Northwest? If so, might this contribute to an indigenous literature?*

FINAL PAPER DUE

Here is a sample summary of a poem by William Stafford.

WITH KIT, AGE SEVEN, AT THE BEACH

**We would climb the highest dune,
from there to gaze and come down:
the ocean was performing;
we continued our climb.**

**Waves leapfrogged and came
straight out of the storm.
What should our gaze mean?
Kit waited for me to decide.**

**Standing on such a hill,
what would you tell your child?
That was an absolute vista.
Those waves raced far, and cold.**

**“How far could you swim, Daddy,
in such a storm?”
“As far as needed,” I said,
and as I talked, I swam.**

Summary:

In this four-quatrain poem, spoken from the perspective of a father looking out on a stormy ocean with his young daughter, the poet achieves first the personification of the stormy ocean (“waves leapfrogged”), then the awareness of the sea as menacing and other (“far, and cold”), and finally the speaker’s dawning awareness of responsibility for his daughter’s welfare in a dangerous world. Compelling with its colloquial tone, its concision, and its repetition of crucial words (*climb*, *gaze*, and *swim/swam*), the poem achieves its closure with the identification of speech, or writing, with swimming to save oneself or a loved one.

