ENG 216 syllabus: American Literature 1850-present

Winter 2016, McKenzie Hall 240B, 2-3:20pm

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Office hours T 10-1pm, PLC 207

This course presents a survey of American literature from 1850 to the present day, offering a mix of the most important fiction and poetry of period. We will cover texts that consider the explosive changes in American society during these years—from the Civil War and the end of slavery to the rapid growth of American cities; from the impact of new technologies to the struggles of Native American writers to memorialize the past and imagine a future. We’ll also consider how the nature of writing evolved alongside this changing society, which will include discussions on the development of literary realism, the radical innovations of literary modernism, and why the representation of speech is such a crucial feature of American literature. A discussion-based classroom and a range of assignments will facilitate our encounters with a wide-ranging and exciting set of texts.

Learning outcomes
The class will help you work toward the six learning outcomes informing the English Major. By the end of the class, you should have improved your ability to:

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.

In addition to developing your abilities in these core skills, this class has the following, more specific, desired learning outcomes. By the end of the class, you should:

1) understand some of the formal and thematic preoccupations and developments of American literature since 1850
2) know more about some of the major cultural and historical contexts informing this tradition
3) improve your ability to perform critical analysis, both orally and in writing, of novels, poetry, and short fiction

Course reading:
You must complete all the essential reading listed for each class, and come prepared to discuss it. This is a discussion-based classroom, and I expect everyone to have something to contribute in every session.

Attendance:
At the beginning of each class you should sign the attendance register. You are allowed two unexcused absences. Missing classes beyond this without adequate excuse and documentation (such as a doctor’s note) will result in your overall grade being lowered by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence. Five such absences results in a failing grade.

Classroom Electronic Communications Policy:
In this class, cell phone use and the use of tablet devices is prohibited. All such devices should be stored in your bags or left at home. Laptop computers are permitted but only for activities related to the content of the class.

Plagiarism:
All written work should be either your own or contain clear references to your sources; one of the hallmarks of good scholarship is being able to use the insights of others while keeping your ideas distinct from theirs. I expect you to abide by university regulations on the proper acknowledgement of source material, and to follow accepted conventions for how to reference scholarship. I advise you to check on the university’s student conduct code (http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/StudentConductCode/tabid/69/Default.aspx) for information about this; I recommend MLA style for the presentation of your research papers. Information about how to prepare bibliographies and citations in MLA style can be found at the Purdue Online Writing Lab (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/), and at the Knightcite MLA citation application (http://www.calvin.edu/library/knightcite/).

Late papers:
Papers should be submitted in class on the day of the deadline listed. I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade for each day a paper is late. I will not accept any paper that is more than a week late. Any request for extensions will be carefully considered, but should be made as far in advance of the due date as possible.

Inclusive Learning Environments:
The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.
GRADED WORK

Participation 10%
I will reward students who approach discussion in an enthusiastic, informed, and collegial way. Both I and your fellow students will appreciate informed opinions, critical insight, a willingness to take a few risks, and respect for others. I will occasionally set small in-class activities and presentations which will also count towards this grade.

Quizzes 10%
There will be five quizzes throughout the term. Your best four scores will count.

Group discussion forum posting 10%
Here, you will work in small groups with questions given ahead of time. Please work together to write 1 page in response to the day’s reading material, which you will post ahead of time to orient the beginning of our class discussion.

Parody exercise 15%, due 1/20
This will ask you to write 2-3 pages in the style of one of the authors we cover. You will also complete a page of reflective commentary, which discusses why you made the stylistic choices you did in your story or poem.

Midterm close reading exercise 15%, 2/3
This will give you several short sections of writing to analyze. You will choose one and write a short response which carefully considers the style of the piece and the ideas it presents.

Research paper, 6-7 pages 25%, due 2/22
This is your chance to work in more detail on a paper, using critical sources and pursuing a thesis of your own creation.

Final, 15%, due 3/14
This will give you a series of prompts, and 72 hours in which to write a 2-3 page answer.

More details about these assignments will be given in advance of the due dates.

ESSENTIAL READING: please purchase these texts or arrange access for them for the duration of the course. These texts are available at the Duckstore.


IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOU BRING THESE BOOKS—AND PRINTOUTS OF INDIVIDUAL STORIES, ESSAYS, OR POEMS FROM CANVAS—TO CLASS. You should also get into the habit of marking up your books as you go along: it will help you focus your reactions and ideas for class discussion, and will improve the detail and insight of your written papers.

WEEK ONE

1/4: Introductions


WEEK TWO: Twain’s Huckleberry Finn

1/11: Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, chapters 1-15 (to p.95)

1/13: Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, chapters 15-20 (to p.150)

WEEK THREE:

1/18: Martin Luther King Day: No class.

1/20: Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, chapters 21-43 to conclusion, p.296.

PARODY EXERCISE DUE

WEEK FOUR: Chopin and The Awakening

1/25: Kate Chopin, The Awakening, chapters 1-24 (to p.70)
1/27: Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, chapters 25-39 (pp.70-109)

**WEEK FIVE: Modernist stories**


**2/3: MIDTERM**

**WEEK SIX: Modern poetry**


All poems on Canvas

**WEEK SEVEN: Baldwin and Giovanni’s Room**

2/15: James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, to the end of Part Two, Chapter Two.

2/17: James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, to conclusion.

**WEEK EIGHT: Contemporary stories**


**RESEARCH PAPER DUE**


All stories on Canvas.
WEEK NINE:
2/29: Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*, chapters 1-4
3/2: Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*, chapter 5-6

WEEK TEN:
3/7: Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*, chapters 7-9
3/9: Conclusions

3/11 Final Prompts released

FINALS WEEK:

3/14, MONDAY: FINAL DUE, 1PM