

SYLLABUS

English 325 LITERATURE OF THE NORTHWEST (CRN# 22187)
Winter/2016 T&Th 4:00-5:20 214 McKenzie Hall
John Witte (rhymes with city) 346-5935 jwitte@uoregon.edu Office: 206 PLC
Office Hours: T&Th 2:00-3:00, W 3:30-4:30, & 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. A one-half page paper will be composed for each class, responding to the questions posed on the following page.

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 March 10.

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.

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. If you are uncertain how to properly document or quote from 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 nineteen daily papers reflecting on the texts (70%), and by your final paper (20%).

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is crucial. If you need to miss a class, an explanation will be required. **You will be allowed one unexcused absence.** Each additional 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.

Jan.5: Introduction, review of syllabus, and overview of class.

NATIVE AMERICAN TEXTS (packet)

Jan. 7: "The Indian Literature of Oregon," (p.2-10). Written assignment: *Describe an encounter you have had with Indian culture that has influenced your life.*

Jan. 12: Selections from "Coyote Was Going There," (pp.11-28). *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)

Jan. 14: Lewis & Clark Journals (p.41-48) and Pioneer Letters (p.49-59). Written assignment: In what ways were Lewis and Clark, as well as the writers of these letters, explorers?

NORTHWEST FICTION

Jan. 19: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, parts 1 and 2. *What is the role of laughter in the novel?*

Jan. 21: *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, parts 3 and 4. *Who is the hero of this novel, McMurphy or Bromden?*

Jan. 26: *Brokeback Mountain*. *Could this story have taken place in any other region than the American West?*

Jan. 28: *A River Runs Through It*. *How is fly-fishing like a religion in this story?*

Feb. 2: *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, pp. xi-110. *How are Indians shown to be survivors in this book?*

Feb. 4: *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, pp. 111-242. *What is the role of stories and storytelling in this novel?*

Feb. 9: *Fight Club*, pp. 11-106. *What compels these young men to join fight clubs?*

Feb. 11: *Fight Club*, pp.107-208. *Clearly the narrator is insane. Are Tyler's objectives for Project Mahem likewise insane?*

NORTHWEST POETS (packet)

- Feb. 16: Hazel Hall, Introduction and poems. *A short summary of a poem from the day's reading.*
- Feb. 18: Gary Snyder, poems and essay, "The Etiquette of Freedom." **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.*
- Feb. 23: David Wagoner and Lucia Perillo, poems. *A short summary....*
- Feb. 25: Theodore Roethke, poems. *A short summary of a poem from the day's reading.*

ESSAYS & PROSE (packet)

- March 1: Kermit Vanderbilt, "Theodore Roethke as a Northwest Poet." *Is the "regional impulse" in Roethke's poems sufficient to make him a Northwest poet?*
- March 3: H.L. Davis, "The Kettle of Fire." *Is "The Kettle of Fire" a critique, or a celebration, of the American West?*
- March 8: George M. Armstrong, "An Unworn and Edged Tool: H.L. Davis's Last Word On the West, 'The Kettle of Fire.'" *In what ways did Davis attempt to universalize his Northwest materials in "Kettle of Fire"? How successful was he?*
- March 10: George Venn, "Continuity in Northwest Literature." *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.

