COURSE DESCRIPTION
In 1968, Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for American literature. Momaday's award signaled for many the “arrival” of Native authors to the American literary scene, and ushered in an unprecedented era of Native literary production widely known as the Native American Renaissance. While the explosion of Native writing and the critical tradition that emerged from it carved out much needed cultural and institutional spaces for Native self-representation and Native Studies, it had the unintended effect of privileging contemporary Native novels over writing from other periods and across a variety of genres and forms. This introductory survey of Native American literature widens the net to include an array of native self-representation across genres, regions, periods, forms and tribal nations. We will read cultural critiques and policy debates alongside short stories, plays, and novels, as well as juxtapose short films and comics alongside YouTube videos, op-eds, and other media.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
- Situate conventional literary texts alongside other cultural forms in which Native peoples have exercised self-representation, always being careful to locate writers and texts within their appropriate historical and tribal/cultural contexts.
- Gain a more complicated understanding of and appreciation for the diversity and complexity of Native American intellectual and cultural productions.
- Develop a historically-nuanced grasp of some of the major issues, questions, and concerns that run throughout Indian Country today, specifically the relationship between cultural production, federal policies, and contemporary movements toward Native sovereignty and self-determination.
- Consistently work to hone close, critical reading skills applicable to a variety of mediums, forms, genres, and intellectual/professional contexts.
- Develop capacities to engage in thoughtful, critical debate around questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, citizenship, and belonging.

REQUIRED TEXTS
- Thomas King (Cherokee), *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (TTAS)
- N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), *Way to Rainy Mountain* (WTRM)
Leann Howe (Choctaw), *The Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story* (MK)
Elizabeth LaPensé (Anishinaabe/Métis) et al., *Deer Woman: An Anthology* (DW)
Leanne Simpson (Nishinaab), *This Accident of Being Lost* (TABL)

Other readings, videos, music, and media via Canvas

**PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE**
You are expected to attend class regularly, remain current with reading assignments, bring assigned texts and writing materials to class, and make substantive contributions to class discussions.

Though I don’t enforce an attendance policy—and therefore don’t need for you to inform me of an impending absence, illness, etc.—be aware that chronic absences will severely impact your grade due to missed in-class group work, free writing assignments, daily/weekly quizzes, and class discussions, all of which you’ll be responsible for on exams. If you miss class, it is your responsibility entirely to approach your fellow classmates to get notes for that day and catch up on any material you missed. Do not email me before you’ve made these initial inquiries and have developed specific questions/concerns about the material.

Students who observe religious holidays, who are involved in university sanctioned activities, or who have other commitments or circumstances that conflict with academic requirements must inform me and make compensatory arrangements in person in advance of the holiday.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT**
This course offers a variety of assignments by which your performance is assessed. These include group work, quizzes, and short writing assignments; a reading journal; online discussion forums; and two exams. Late assignments will be docked 1/2 grade point for every day they are late.

**Reading Journal**
You are required to keep an active reading journal (“Decomposition Books” @ DuckStore) for this course in which to take notes, ask questions, make observations, and sketch out preliminary and ongoing thoughts about the readings for the week. These journals will be evaluated twice per term on a credit/half-credit/no credit basis. To receive full credit, you must demonstrate legitimate engagement of at least 2-3 single-spaced pages for a given day’s reading assignments. How you choose to engage the texts or use the journal is entirely up to you. Examples of substantive journal entries are available via the assignment instructions on Canvas. I strongly suggest that you use the “Strategies for Close Reading” handout appended to this syllabus as a guide for your journaling.

**In-Class Exercises**
Plan on short, unannounced quizzes, freewriting assignments, and breakout group work at least once a week to evaluate your engagement with and recall of course materials. These activities will be administered at the beginning of class. Under no circumstances will you be allowed to make them up.

**Course Discussion Forum (Canvas)**
Each student is required to participate in the Discussion Forum on our course Canvas site.
These assignments ask you to engage critically with a primary text, essay, concept, idea, or problem and to respond thoughtfully to the thoughts, arguments, and analyses of your peers. **Discussants** will interrogate a specific problem, question, critical issue or formal element in the materials assigned for the week and mount well-organized, focused, critical analyses of 500 words (~2 double-spaced pages, 12 point font) driven by an explicitly articulated thesis and supported by textual evidence and explanation/interpretation of that evidence. **Respondents** will submit incisive, thoughtful responses of 250-300 words (~1-1.5 double-spaced pages) to **two discussion posts** which productively challenge your colleagues to nuance their interpretations, complicate and strengthen a given line of inquiry, expand on their presentation and analysis of textual evidence, and shore up any holes or blindspots that might be present in their arguments. Detailed instructions, sample discussion threads, and critical argument activities available on Canvas.

**Take Home Midterm and Final Exams**
Both exams will be essay in format, comprehensive in scope, and will ask you to synthesize information from across the term. They will incorporate both primary and secondary materials, information from class discussions and group work, as well as relevant topics from discussion threads.

**GRADING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Essay (RE)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Journal (RJ)</td>
<td>10% (cr/.5 cr/no cr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes/In-class assignments</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Discussion Forum (DP, DR)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam (ME)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam (FE)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GRADE POINT DISTRIBUTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grade Point Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>59.6-63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>69.6-73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>79.6-83.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>89.6-93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>63.6-67.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>73.6-77.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>83.6-87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>93.6-97.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Meeting the minimum requirements for the course (attending consistently, regular/active participation, meeting deadlines) will typically result in an average grade, or a C on the college scale. Higher grades are awarded based upon **exceeding minimum expectations** per the discretion of the professor.

**RESOURCES**
I strongly encourage you to take advantage of every resource available to you to improve your research, writing, and critical thinking skills. Two of those are English Writing Associates and Teaching and Learning Center Writing Tutors. Both services are free to all UO students.

English Writing Associates are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course. As peer tutors, Associates are advanced English majors who have been trained to tutor writing. They are thus well-equipped to work with you one-on-one on your writing assignments, helping you understand the process of writing about literature and media while...
also showing you how to make your written work for this class more clear and effective. Click [here](#) to make an appointment with a Writing Associate today.

Teaching and Learning Center Writing Tutors, located in the “Sky Studio” on the 4th floor of the Knight Library, offer “drop-in” sessions to discuss assignments and receive feedback on class writing before handing it in. They also periodically offer workshops in grammar, argument, and other popular forms/concerns. Stop by Sky Studio and work with a tutor beginning week two each term. Click [here](#) for more information.

**COURSE CONTENT AND INTELLECTUAL DISCUSSION**
Due to the ongoing histories/experiences of settler-colonial violence, racism, dispossession, and genocide that frame both the colonization of the Americas and Indigenous responses to it, this course will openly engage these and related issues without censorship. If content makes attendance and participation difficult, please see me to make alternative arrangements.

**CLASS COMMUNICATION**
Get in the habit of checking your UO email account regularly (i.e. daily) as this will be our primary means of communication outside of class. **Please be aware that I will not respond to emails sent after 5pm or on the weekend until the next weekday.**

**CONVENTIONS OF ADDRESS**
Speaking to a professor, instructor, administrator, staff member, employer, manager, or colleague is different (at least initially) from speaking/texting with a friend, family member, or other familiar relation. In a professional, intellectual context like the University, it is conventional to refer to faculty, administrators, staff, GTFs and others by their titles (Doctor, Professor, Instructor, Coach, preferred gender/gender neutral titles, etc.) unless explicitly instructed otherwise. You should also get into the habit of including greetings, salutations, and language appropriate to such contexts. I will always respectfully refer to you according to your stated preferences and the appropriate context; I expect that you’ll reciprocate in kind.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER**
In the case of inclement weather, please check the UO homepage, UO Alerts Blog, and local weather stations for information on travel, closures and cancellations. If inclement weather makes traveling to campus difficult, I will notify you by email about whether we are holding class. Whether or not I decide to hold class, you should use your own judgment about the safety of traveling to campus.

**INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATIONS**
If you have a documented need that necessitates accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with me as soon as possible and request that a counselor at the [Accessible Education Center](#) send a letter verifying your requests.

**TITLE IX POLICY AND REPORTING RESPONSIBILITIES**
The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment,
know that help and support are available. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially—i.e. those not required to report—you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO’s 24-hour hotline to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options, as confidential counselors are not required reporters. You can also visit the SAFE website at https://safe.uoregon.edu/services for more information. Each resource is clearly labeled as either “required reporter,” “confidential UO employee,” or “off-campus,” to allow you to select your desired level of confidentiality.

**ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT**
The [University Student Conduct Code](#) defines [academic misconduct](#). Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available [here](#).

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1**

**April 3**

**Introductions, Logistics, & the Stories We Tell**

**READ:** Syllabus and Course Schedule; Strategies for Close Reading

**LECTURE:** “Native American Literature and the Problem of “The Indian””

**April 5**

**READ:** King, *TT.AS*, Ch. 1

**ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS:** “What I (Think) I Know About American Indians” (Canvas)

**April 6**

**REFLECTION ESSAY (CANVAS, 5PM)**

**Week 2**

**April 10**

**Unit 1: Race, Representation, and Gender in Popular Culture**

**READ:** King, *TT.AS* ch. 2; Apess, “Eulogy On King Philip” (Canvas); 1491s & Ryan Red Corn, “Bad Indians” (YouTube)

**April 12**

**READ:** Johnson, “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction” and “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” (Canvas)

**April 13**

**DP1 (GROUP 1, 5PM)**

**Week 3**
April 16  **DR1 (GROUP 2, 5PM)**

April 17  **READ:** King, *TTAS* Ch. 3; Mojica, *PP&BS* (Introduction through Trans. 3) (Canvas)

April 19  **READ:** Mojica, *PP&BS* (Trans. 4-8)

April 20  **DP1 (GROUP 2, 5PM)**

**Week 4**
April 23  **DR1 (GROUP 1, 5PM)**

April 24  **READ:** Mojica, *PP&BS* (Trans. 11-13)

April 26  **Unit 2: Assimilation and the Assault on Native Nations, Lands and Families**

**READ:** King, *TTAS*, ch. 5; Posey, “Fus Ficico Letters” (Canvas)

**Week 5**
April 30  **ME (CANVAS, 5PM)**

May 1  **READ:** Zitkala-Sa, “School Days of an Indian Girl” (Canvas); Oskison, “The Problem of Old Harjo” (Canvas)

**RJ DUE**

May 3  **READ:** Oskison, “Harjo” (cont); Howe, *MK*, Prelude-ch. 4

May 4  **DP2 (GROUP 1, 5PM)**

**Week 6**
May 7  **DR2 (GROUP 2, 5PM)**

May 8  **READ:** Howe, *MK*, ch. 5-8

May 10  **READ:** Howe, *MK*, ch. 9-12

May 11  **DP2 (GROUP 2, 5PM)**

**Week 7**  **Unit 3: History, Resistance, & Resurgence in Contemporary Native American Literatures**

May 14  **DR2 (GROUP 1, 5PM)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 15</td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: King, <em>TTAS</em>, ch. 4; Momaday, <em>TWRM</em>, Preface-p. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 17</td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: Momaday, <em>TWRM</em>, 15-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: <em>TWRM</em>, 65-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 22</td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: Deer, from <em>The Beginning and End of Rape</em> (Canvas); Erdrich,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Rape on the Reservations”; Belmore, “Fringe”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24</td>
<td><strong>DP3</strong> (GROUP 1, 5PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 9</strong></td>
<td><strong>DR3</strong> (GROUP 2, 5PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1</td>
<td><strong>DP3</strong> (GROUP 2, 5PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 10</strong></td>
<td><strong>DR3</strong> (GROUP 1, 5PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4</td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: Simpson, <em>This Accident of Being Lost</em>, pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 5</td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: Simpson, <em>This Accident of Being Lost</em>, pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>RJ DUE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 7</td>
<td><strong>READ</strong>: Simpson, <em>This Accident of Being Lost</em>, pp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS: Final Exam (Canvas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 11</strong></td>
<td><strong>TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM (CANVAS, 5PM)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thoughts and Strategies for Performing Literary Analyses and Close Readings

To do a close reading of literature, you choose a specific passage and analyze it in fine detail, as if with a magnifying glass. You then comment on points of style and on your reactions as a reader, always using direct evidence from the text to support your claims. Close reading is important because it is the building block for larger analysis. Your thoughts evolve not from someone else's truth about the reading, but from your own observations. The more closely and actively you can observe, the more original and exact your ideas will be. The following are some thoughts, strategies, and potential questions you might consider as you think about how to respond closely, actively, and critically to a text.

Be Patient!
Close, critical, active reading—what David Mikics calls “Slow Reading”—demands patience and time, two things which many of us find ourselves possessing less and less of. It is different from other kinds of reading (and writing!) that we typically do today, much of which is designed to provide quick, easily-consumable snippets of information seemingly about everything but that often leave us with only a superficial understanding of anything that we’ve read. For this class, I’m going to ask you to commit to slowing down, allowing yourself as much time and attention as your schedules will allow to actively immerse yourself in the texts we’ll read this term. On some days you’ll have to make strategic decisions about where to invest your time, and you won’t be able to slowly, closely and actively engage each and every text. That’s okay! Just committing to making this a habitual practice will yield great rewards, a ton of pleasure, and a genuine sense of knowledge about and familiarity with the materials we cover.

Read Actively
Whether reading for pleasure or in preparation for an assignment, prepare yourself to read actively. Don’t read a text simply to get its information or skim it to get a sense of the main ideas and points (at least don’t confine your reading to these practices!). This method of reading is passive: you "receive" the text as you read, and you hold off making any intellectual response to it until after you've finished reading. This way of reading doesn't get you very far and doesn’t allow you to fully explore the pleasures gained by becoming “intimate” with a text.

Break the Linear Tradition
Maybe you believe that the most efficient way to write a paper is to read first, think later, and write last of all. To become an active reader, you have to throw that idea in the garbage can and strive to think and write—or think by writing—as you read. When you read, stop to ask questions, challenge the writer, search your soul for what you really believe about the topic at hand, etc. This is where the mutually-reinforcing practices of underlining, highlighting, annotating, and keeping a daily reading journal all come in handy (see “Enter the Conversation” below). And once you've begun writing, go back to the text not simply to find a piece of evidence that will support your claims, but also to continually reconsider the text and your own positions about it!

Trust Your Gut
Once you understand that you ought to be thinking actively as you read, you'll begin to pay more attention to your reactions to the text. It's not a bad idea to keep track of how a text makes you feel while you are reading it. If you find yourself getting angry or growing bored, ask yourself why. Is the
argument or narrative coming apart? If so, where and why? Are there too many details? Not enough? Is the narrator a misogynist? bigot? liberal? conservative? jerk? What do your reactions say about your own values, beliefs, social location, and experiences? Pay attention to such responses and try as hard as you can to move past the “whats” of your opinion and into the “whys,” “hows,” and “to what ends” of your developing argument. Such ruminations might well provide seeds for journal entries, discussion posts, group exercises, class discussions, and exam questions.

Enter the Conversation
When writers compose a book, short story, poem, play, etc., they are, in a sense, inviting you into an ongoing conversation. They are taking a position in some debate and asking you to take yours. When you read actively, intellectually engage the text, and write critically about it, you are entering this conversation. However, in order to enter the conversation fully as a writer/speaker, you must first enter the conversation fully as a reader/listener. Pay attention to the text, underline key passages, mark up the margins with your own thoughts, and collect, organize, and expand on those ideas in longer journal entries. This will better enable you to contribute to the conversation in a way that is relevant, thoughtful, and interesting.

Use the Margins
Maybe the best practical advice I can give you about reading more actively is to make use of the margins. An unmarked book is an unread book!!! Marking a text as you read it ensures that you are reading actively. Even the simple act of underlining a passage requires you to ask yourself what is most important in a text. The act of weighing importance is one way of breaking the habit of passive reading. But you can do much more in the margins than simply make note of important passages. You can ask questions in the margins. You can draw arrows, establishing obscure connections in the text. You can note patterns of imagery or language as you see them. You can locate contradictions. You can get feisty, even, and call the writer out for a debate. Remember, neither I nor any of the writers that we'll read have the last word on any subject. **NOTE: Please DO NOT annotate library materials.

Moving Outside the Text
One important idea to understand when you read, and one that is central to the pedagogy of this course, is that every text is produced, consumed, and understood within a context (or contexts). Remember that every writer is in conversation with other writers, with history, with the forces of their culture and individual experience, with the events of their time. When you understand the context of a work, you can better see the forces that moved the writer to produce a given work and gain a sense for the multiple ways that work might have been understood by a variety of audiences. You will gain clarity about what and why the writer was writing. You may even gain clarity about what you would like to say.

Even if you know nothing about the context of a particular book or writer, you know a lot about the context of a particular reader: you. You are a member of a complex, intersubjective, intersectional experience. Your race, class, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, national origin, ability, affiliations, etc. provide rich contexts that accompany you when you read/engage texts. Note, however, that personal contexts need to be examined with care; don't assume that the context of your own experience is “representative” or will always inform you correctly.
Rather, interrogate your own contexts as actively, rigorously, and critically as you read a text!

Adapted from http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Close_Reading_Passage.pdf, and the Odegaard Writing & Research Center (http://www.depts.washington.edu/owrc)

David Mikics’ 12 Guidelines for Slow Reading in a Hurried Age

1. Be Patient—i.e., SLOW DOWN!
For Mikics, this is the rule from which subsequent guidelines proceed. Without it, you’ll receive only minimal benefits from the others. Mikics writes: “Patience means a lot of things. We must be patient not to be overwhelmed by a book’s difficulties. We must be patient to let ourselves be perplexed; to figure out, by trial and error, how to ask the right questions of a book. We must be patient to put in the time and effort needed to read [and write!] well. [We must possess] a happy, and somewhat obsessive, desire for details … [anchoring] our sense of a book’s characters and its argument in small, significant moments … We must not rush to meaning, or demand that an author deliver the point in an easy, palatable way … we have to remember that struggling with a book’s meanings is the whole point of reading, if reading is going to be worthwhile” (54-55).

2. Ask the Right Questions
All critical inquiry, regardless of discipline or form, is drive by the questions through which we approach our subjects. Indeed, the questions we ask determine the conditions of possibility for how we’ll read and understand a text. Thus, in order to “get from perplexity to engagement” we need to identify useful questions. According to Mikics, “Useful questions connect elements of a book together: What does the beginning have to do with the ending? How do the characters balance or argue against one another? What does a particularly striking passage sum up about the book as a whole … How does the title comment on the work it introduces” (62)? A good indication that you’re asking the right questions is if they consistently lead you back to the text rather than away from it.

3. Identify the Voice
Who is speaking? Is the narrator a participant in the action? If so, how invested are they in the narrative? If not, do they possess comprehensive knowledge of events, characters, time and place, or is their story limited to (or focalized through) one or two perspectives? Does the narrator simply describe events or do they comment upon and evaluate characters and events (i.e. editorialize)? Does one voice or perspective dominate the narrative, or are there competing voices, each vying for narrative authority and claims to “truth?” In what ways do the answers to these questions inform our reading and understanding of the text’s main ideas and arguments (i.e., it’s “basic thought(s))?

4. Pay attention to beginnings and endings
According to Mikics, structure “tells you something about the way [a text] thinks; openings and conclusions are the irreplaceable backbone of structure” (101). How does the story/poem/play open? What does this opening suggest about the action, characters, and events to come? How does the text end? What does the ending suggest about the text’s main argument
or idea? Does the ending reinforce, revise or refute the beginning? If so, how, why and to what effect?

- **EXERCISE:** After reading a text, reread its first and last pages and consider their relationship to each other and to the text as a whole via the questions posed above.

5. **Find the Parts**

This rule draws your attention to the structure of a text and how mapping that structure can lend formal insight into the text’s “basic thought.” Here you’re looking particularly for “the **significant changes in a work**: transformations of topic, time, place, atmosphere,” narrative voice, character, etc. “that announce such a change or that herald the beginning of a new part of the [text]” (145).

- **EXERCISE:** Make a brief outline of the larger **plot** structure of the text (not to be confused with story—events as they happen in chronological order!) and identify, where possible, a signpost action, event, location or image that “provides a signature for a scene” in each plot element.

6. **Identify Signposts**

“A book’s signposts tell you what to pay attention to, where to direct yourself in your journey through its pages. Signposts can take the form of key words, key images, key sentences or passages,” echoes and reflections, as well as shifts in location and time. “Think of reading,” Mikics suggests, “as a kind of travel; signposts help you map out your itinerary” (101). Be on the lookout, however. Signposts won’t always provide you the most direct route; sometimes they’ll force you to double-back, take a circuitous route, or forge a new path entirely (101). If you’ve ever chosen the longer route in a Google itinerary, such detours, while at times tedious and time-consuming, often provide the most beauty and pleasure…

7. **Use the Dictionary and Track Key Words**

“Key words are the vital threads that allow you to trace the argument of a book: to follow the drama of meaning that unveils itself in stages, from first page to last” on the way to “opening new perspectives in the reader” (121, 127). In much the same way as signposts that take you off the beaten path, attending to key words can similarly provide insight into a text’s larger conflicts and arguments. At times meaning will shift as the text moves forward, either becoming more honed and precise or more diffuse and hard to pin down.

8. **Find the Author’s Basic Thought**

The question, “What is this book (or poem, play, movie, television series, song, etc.) **about,**” can be answered in any number of ways. You might describe basic events and characters (plot summary), elements of style, or some of the text’s main conflicts, positions or arguments. None of these responses, however, adequately capture “the deepest and most rewarding answer to the question,” though they are crucial avenues through which to arrive there (127). When trying to find the “basic thought(s)” of a text, think in terms of its “most essential truth(s)” **as you understand it** and the means (i.e. strategies) through which it advance this position. We won’t always agree, but that’s okay. In fact, reasoned argument and informed disagreement are the backbones of literary and cultural analysis, as well as the construction of meaning itself.
9. **Be Suspicious**
Cultivating a healthy skepticism (which is not the same thing as despondent cynicism!) is a good thing, especially when it comes to literary and cultural analysis. Note where and how a text moves your sympathies toward a particular character or situation, but don’t go “all in” right away. As with signposts and key terms, texts will often lead you in one direction only to pull the rug out from under you in subsequent pages, challenging you to question your own motivations, investments, values and beliefs as its moral center gets progressively more messy, ambiguous, absurd, or confounding. Heroes and villains are often more complicated than they would at first appear!

10. **Write It Down!**
See “Break the Linear Tradition, “Enter the Conversation” and “Use the Margins” above. After patience, Mikics sees this element as the most ethically-significant component of active, slow reading: “The give-and-take between author and reader takes place on a two-way street. In this imaginary but essential conversation, the reader has a responsibility to keep the author interested. You will refine your perceptions, and become a better interpreter, the more time you spend trying to do justice to a [text], rather than too quickly making it into something of your own. The [text] has something to say, and you are obliged to listen carefully before talking back” (157).

11. **Explore Different Paths**
“Revision, the writer’s most basic tool, is also important for the reader. It’s always a useful exercise to imagine how the author might have begun or ended a work differently, or changed a crucial moment in its plot. Develop a sense of the decisions a writer makes by practicing thought experiments:” What would the work you’re reading be like without a key character? What difference would it make if lacked this or that scene, this or that action? What if it ended earlier or later than it does? What if it was told through a different narrative voice, or presented non-linearly rather than linearly (or vice versa)? In what ways would any or all of the above “revisions” impact “the basic thought” of the text? As Mikics points out, by considering such questions “you will gain a new knowledge of [and appreciation for!] how writers work, the choices they make” (168).

12. **Find Another Text**
What does the book and your understanding of it look like when read alongside other texts? This component is built into the structure of the course, but I encourage you to perform research on your own and explore other texts across other forms, media and historical moments that speak to the ones we’ll be engaging in class.