

## English 301: FOUNDATIONS OF THE ENGLISH MAJOR (TEXTS & CONTEXTS)

Fall 2017 | Gerlinger 302 | TR 12:00-13:20 + discussion section

Professors: Warren Ginsberg, Heidi Kaufman, & Priscilla Peña Ovalle

GEs: Will Conable and Alexander Cavanaugh

Professor Ginsberg's Office Hours: TR 11-12 (PLC 257)

Professor Kaufman's Office Hours: Wed 12-2 (PLC 365)

Professor Ovalle's Office Hours: Tue 2-4 (PLC 266)

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Additional email, office hours, & other contact information can be found at  
<http://english.uoregon.edu/profiles/faculty>

The Foundations of the English Major is a three-course sequence (ENG 301, ENG 302, ENG 303) that introduces students to the discipline of English as it is practiced at the University of Oregon. The entire sequence provides English majors with a common intellectual experience and a foundation for future coursework in literatures, media, and folklore. The course provides a solid foundation in the histories, theories, debates, and critical reading practices used to study different kinds of texts. The department strongly encourages students to take these courses sequentially. If necessary, however, students may begin the sequence with ENG 301 or ENG 302, but not with ENG 303.

### 301 Course Description:

ENGLISH 301 is divided into three parts to address the following questions: What is a cultural context? How are cultural contexts tied to the historical imagination? To answer these questions, each part of the course studies its literary and media forms within their cultural and historical contexts. We use comparative *methodologies* to appreciate how cultural, historical, biographical, and archival concerns frame the way we understand and approach each text. These are skills you will continue to practice as an English major.

In the **Medieval** portion of the term, we examine such contextual factors as how the difference between orality and writing in the Old and Middle English periods and the status of English in a bi- and tri-lingual society influenced the production and reception of literary texts. In the **Victorian** portion we focus first on print culture and the Victorian experience of reading. From there we'll read Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (serialized from 1837-8) within the context of a number of social and political debates in the Victorian period. In the **Newer Media** portion we ask similar questions of context and reception to explore the historical, cultural, and technical/technological traditions that led to a newer media classic: *Citizen Kane* (1939).

**By the end of this course, students will be able to:**

1. Define key terms ("text" and context") and explain how they relate to specific historical moments and media.
2. Identify the *methodologies* that informed readers use to interpret literary, auditory, and visual texts according to their historical context.
3. Identify how these cultural texts in turn shape their contexts.
4. Define "reception" and analyze examples of reception culture from the Medieval, Victorian, and early twentieth-century periods.
5. Practice contextualized textual analysis by working with secondary sources to do the following: acquire relevant historical and cultural information; properly acknowledge and cite sources; and write convincing interpretive analyses showing how literary, auditory, and visual texts engage their own times and places.
6. Evaluate comparative historical methodologies for understanding and analyzing literary, auditory, and visual texts.

**Department Learning Outcomes:**

1. Read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their generic 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 and other cultural texts.
4. Write focused, analytical essays in clear, professional and grammatical prose.
5. Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
6. Employ primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

**Required Course Materials and Texts: Available at the Duck Store. Please use the specific editions listed below**

1. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt, eds, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th edition, Volume A (WW Norton, 2012).
2. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, Broadview Encore Edition (2005; ISBN 1-55111-758-4)
3. Candles for Victorian reading exercise
4. Additional materials will be available on Canvas and as hyperlinks on the syllabus
5. Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) "MLA Works Cited Page" (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.(<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/05/>)

## **Attendance Expectations, Assignments, Grade Breakdown, and Grading Policy**

Consistent and full attendance at both lecture and discussion sections is required. Grades will be assigned in accord with competencies and performance levels outlined in the English Department's Undergraduate Grading Policies:

<http://english.uoregon.edu/resources/attachment/english-dept-u-g-grading-policies-6>

### Grade Breakdown

10% Lecture Participation\*

10% Discussion Section\*

20% Average of 3 Contexts Exercises (one for each section of the course, 2 pages each)

60% Average of 3 Interpretive Essays (one for each section of the course, 4-5 pages each)

\*See "Absences & Grade Reduction" below

### Lecture Participation & Discussion Sections

You must come to class having read/screened the assigned material and prepared to discuss it with your instructors and peers. The lecture participation and discussion section grades reward students who take an active and engaged role in discussions, who are willing to contribute thoughtfully and constructively to the collaborative process of in-class dialogue, and who conduct themselves in a collegial and respectful way. In addition you will be expected to participate during lectures using a clicker; clicker grading policies and how they factor into this portion of the grade will be addressed in the first week of class.

### \*Absences & Grade Reduction

Lecture and Discussion Section attendance are both mandatory; however, grade reductions are affected differently in the two course formats.

Two Lectures absences are allowed. Lecture attendance is determined by clicker questions. Your final course grade will drop by two points for each subsequent absence unless arrangements have been made in advance; see clicker policies below for additional information. (Example: a final course grade of 94 would drop to a 92; a grade of 88 would drop to an 86)

One Discussion Section absence is allowed; your final course grade will drop by four points for each subsequent discussion section absence unless you have contacted your GE and worked out an agreement in advance on alternative arrangements. You are responsible for work due or assigned on days you are absent. (Example: with a second absence, a final course grade of 94 would drop to a 90; with a third it would drop to 86).

If you miss a Lecture or Discussion Section it is your responsibility to contact a fellow student to find out what you've missed.

## Written Work

In this course you will complete three short writing Exercises and one longer formal essay per portion of the term. The short Contexts Exercise (2 pages) will ask you to interpret a specific passage from a text or to respond to an aspect of its production. The formal Interpretive essay (4-5 pages) will ask you to pay attention to context in analyzing some aspect of a work.

## Late Work

Assignments are due by the day/time indicated on the syllabus. Late assignments will be docked 3 points (approximately 1/3 of a letter grade) for each day they are late, unless explicit arrangements have been made in advance with your GE discussion instructor.

## Grading Scale

A+ 100	A 94-99	A- 90-93	
B+ 87-89	B 84-86	B- 80-83	
C+ 77-79	C 74-76	C- 70-73	
D+ 67-69	D 64-66	D- 60-63	F 0-59

## Class Policies Lecture and discussion etiquette:

We expect to have your full attention for the duration of lectures and discussion meetings. Please arrive to class on time, with appropriate texts in hand, and ready to focus on the day's activities. Turn off and stow all cell phones before class begins. Earphones should be removed. In rooms as acoustically-live as large lecture halls, it is difficult to lecture over "cross-talking." Also, talking during lecture may impede other students' learning, so plan to hold your individual conversations outside class time. Any activity that disrupts or distracts others from course material is not only rude and disrespectful, but may also violate the university's code of academic conduct. Please be considerate and respectful of those around you.

## Inclusive Learning Environments:

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify one of the professors teaching this course if there are aspects of the instruction or course design 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](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

## Lecture Notes and Missed Classes:

Lectures may not be copied, taped, or videotaped in any manner unless you have documented a communication-related disability with the University and have received permission from the course instructor. Should you miss a lecture or discussion, it is your responsibility to obtain notes from your colleagues, so be sure to get to know others in the course who would be willing to help you and whom you would be willing to help. Missing lecture should, however, be a rare event. In no case should you take notes regularly for another student, unless you obtain the

professor's approval. However, comparing notes with a study partner or a small group could assist you with the course and clearly that kind of activity is something we'd all applaud.

### **Tutorial Help:**

Meaningful and successful learning often requires more than students and teachers can accomplish individually. Programs, workshops, courses, tutors, and mentors are among the many resources the Teaching and Learning Center provides to help students with educational pursuits at the University of Oregon. For example, the TLC offers courses, tutorials, and drop-in assistance for students' academic writing. The TLC is located in 68 PLC and their website is <http://tlc.uoregon.edu/>. Please note that any other assistance (beyond the UO TLS office) that you receive on papers, from organizing your paper to identifying your main points, from typing or proofreading papers to editing or revising papers, must be cleared with your GTF or one of the professors.

### **Academic Integrity:**

The University of Oregon values academic honesty. Students are informed of the University's expectations about conduct and academic honesty when they matriculate. You are here because you clearly have the ability to engage your own mind in rigorous intellectual work.

Consult the UO's Student Conduct Code, also available here:

<http://policies.uoregon.edu/vol-3-administration-student-affairs/ch-1-conduct/student-conduct-code> for definitions of plagiarism and information on documentation should you need it. See your GTF and/or your 303 professors should you have any concerns about documentation and/or academic honesty.

In accord with English Department policy, cases of clearly established plagiarism or cheating, a final course grade of "F" will be the minimum penalty; all incidents will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, as required by the University.

The University Student Conduct Code defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the student's obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at [researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism](http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism). **Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas without due acknowledgment. It may be intentional or unintentional. To make sure you have avoided plagiarism in your work, you should:**

- Accurately quote the original author's words.
- Enclose the quotation within quotation marks.
- Follow the quotation with an in-text citation.

- Introduce quotations with a phrase that includes the author's name (Baxter argues that...) Provide a list of references with full citation information at the end of the paper.

**Vericite is a plagiarism detection service employed by the UO that identifies potentially plagiarized or improperly cited text.** The service automatically checks submitted work against an index of online sources. It can be accessed through your Canvas course site if your instructor has activated it for particular assignments.

**Quick Tips for Paraphrasing:** Paraphrasing or summarizing doesn't mean just changing a couple of words from the original work. You must acknowledge the source through in-text citations immediately following the paraphrase. For example, In Joan Smith's view, apples are the healthiest fruit (52).

**Clicker Grading:**

The fractions on the left represent the number of classes attended that include a clicker quiz. The grade on the right is the grade you will receive for those sessions as your Lecture Participation grade, which counts for 10% of your final grade. See "Grade Breakdown" (above) for further details.

Lecture Participation Grade

16/16 = A+ (100%)	15/16 = A (93.75%)	14/16 = B+ (87.5%)	13/16 = B- (81.25%)
12/16 = C (75%)	11/16 = D+ (68.75%)	10/16 = D- (62.5%)	9-0/16 = F (0-59%)

Clicker quizzes count towards your 10% Lecture Participation Grade and also determine your lecture attendance (see section on "Absences & Grade Reduction").

**Clicker Grading Policies:**

- \*\* It is your responsibility to bring your clicker to class, confirm that your clicker works, and ensure that your clicker grade has properly posted to Canvas.
- \*\* Clicker grades will begin accumulating on Tuesday of week 2.
- \*\* If you have not registered your clicker by the beginning of class on Tuesday of week 3, you risk losing your week 2 points.
- \*\* Guest Clicker Policy: If you forget your clicker, you may check one out from your GE on a first come, first served basis (this will be at your GE's discretion for repeat clicker loans). It is your responsibility to confirm with your GE that your guest clicker session has posted, according to the following class policy.
- \*\* Clicker Point Confirmation: You will have 1 week to confirm that your clicker points have properly posted to Canvas. You must notify your GE if you do not see your clicker grade within

the week after your grade goes live. If you do not do so within that time, you will not receive credit for the session.

### Course and Readings Schedule

#### Week 1: Introductions and Beginnings

- Tuesday 9/26      Course Introductions  
What is a text? What is a context?  
Medieval, Victorian, Newer Media Texts and Contexts
- Thursday 9/28      Introduction: The Middle Ages to ca. 1485  
Readings to Discuss: Norton: pp. 1-21 and Caedmon's *Hymn in Bede's Ecclesiastical History* (Norton: 24-27); *Dream of the Rood* (Norton: 27-29); *Judith* (Norton: 100-08)

#### Week 2: Christianity and the Heroic Tradition

- Tuesday 10/3      Discussion of Caedmon, Dream of the Rood, Judith continued
- Thursday 10/5      *Beowulf*  
Readings to Discuss: (Norton: 29-80)

**\*\*\* DEADLINE: 10/8 Sunday 11:59pm PST — Medieval Context Exercise Due\*\*\***

#### Week 3: The Hero and the Knight in Late Medieval England

- Tuesday 10/10      *Beowulf* (continued)  
Readings to Discuss: Norton: 80-100
- Thursday 10/12      *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*  
Readings to Discuss: Introduction, Parts 1 & 2 (Norton: 162-85)

#### Week 4: Medieval to Victorian (Print Culture)

- Tuesday 10/17      *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (continued)  
Readings to Discuss: Parts 3 & 4 (Norton: 185-213)

Thursday 10/19      **Readings to Discuss: Broadview edition, *Oliver Twist* (chapters 1-7)**  
**Kate Flint, "Victorian Readers" (active link)**  
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/victorian-readers>  
**Matthew Taunton, "Print Culture" (active link)**  
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/print-culture>

**\*\*\* DEADLINE: 10/22 Sunday 11:59pm PST — Medieval Essay Due\*\*\***

#### **Week 5: From Crime Fiction to Criminal Outcasts**

Tuesday 10/24      **Reading to Discuss: *Oliver Twist* (chapters 8-19)**

Thursday 10/26      **Readings to Discuss: *Oliver Twist* (chapters 20-30)**

#### **Week 6 Victorians and Murder**

Tuesday 10/31      **Readings to Discuss: *Oliver Twist* (chapters 31-40)**  
Discussion will focus on this selection of chapters as well as earlier chapters depicting Oliver's morality (does he have it?) and Fagin's efforts to poison Oliver's soul (can he succeed?).

Thursday 11/2      **Readings to discuss: *Oliver Twist* (chapters 41-53)**

**\*\*\*DEADLINE: Victorian Exercise Due on Canvas Sunday, 11/5 at 11:59 PM\*\*\***

#### **Week 7 Victorian Poor Laws (Crime and Punishment) to Newer Media**

Tuesday 11/7      **Readings to Discuss:**  
**Ruth Richardson, "Oliver Twist and the Workhouse" (active link)**  
<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/oliver-twist-and-the-workhouse>  
**Liza Picard "The Working Classes and the Poor" (active link)**  
<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-working-classes-and-the-poor>  
**Dickens's "A Visit to Newgate" (active link)**  
[http://charlesdickenspage.com/visit\\_newgate.html](http://charlesdickenspage.com/visit_newgate.html)

**Thursday 11/9: An Intro to Light & Moving Images: Stages, Screens, and Special Effects**  
Screenings (In-Class):



- Magic Lantern Techniques & Early Trick Cinema

Materials to Discuss:

- Theodore Barber, "Phantasmagorical Wonders: The Magic Lantern Ghost Show in Nineteenth-century America," *Film History* 3.2 (1989): 73–86. (PDF on Canvas)
- Questions to Consider: What kind of essay is "Phantasmagorical Wonders"? What are the "texts" in this essay? How can this kind of essay enhance our contextual understanding of pre-cinema technologies, early cinema, and advertisements?

Exercise (Starts In-Class):

- Advertisements: Text or Context?

**\*\*\*DEADLINE: Victorian Essay Due on Canvas Sunday, 11/12 at 11:59 PM\*\*\***

**Week 8 Power/Technology/Performance: Radio and Orson Welles**

Tuesday 11/14: From Magic Lanterns to the Theater of the Mind

Listenings/Readings:

- Montgomery Ward Catalogue of Magic Lanterns, Stereopticons, and Moving Picture Machines (ca. 1899) (this catalog appears near the very bottom of the page)
- Mercury Theater's "A Tale of Two Cities" (Audio Recording Jul 25, 1938) 59:49
- Questions to Consider: How would you classify these sources (primary or secondary)? How do we take notes using these kinds of sources? What are the texts and how do we identify their context? How can these kinds of sources enhance our contextual understanding of pre-cinema technologies and their advertisements—or of radio and Orson Welles?

Exercise

- Sound Experiments Part One

Thursday 11/16: Listening as Context/Listening to Context

Items to Discuss:

- Mercury Theater's "War of the Worlds" (CBS, 1938) 51:25
- "Mercury Theater Remembered" (Audio Recording, 1988) running time: 39:35
- "Podcast #23: War of the Worlds Revisited." *Sounding Out: A Sound Studies Blog*, Nov 28, 2013. (60 minute pre-recorded broadcast — active link)
- TBD

Exercise (Bring a hard copy to class):

- Broadcasting Schedule (radio schedule oct 1938.pdf)
- Advertising (Variety mercury advertisement.pdf active link)
- Questions to Consider: How would you classify these sources (primary or secondary)? How do we take notes using these kinds of sources? What are the texts and how do we identify their context? How can these kinds of sources enhance our contextual understanding of radio and Orson Welles?

**\*\*\*DEADLINE: Newer Media Essay Due on Canvas Sunday, 11/19 at 11:59 PM\*\*\***

## **Week 9 *Citizen Kane*/Citizen Welles**

### Tuesday 11/21: Seeing and Hearing *Citizen Kane*

#### Items to Discuss:

- Citizen Kane* (1941)
- American Film Institute catalog entry on *Citizen Kane* (search for "Citizen Kane"—read entry after you have screened the film)

#### Exercise

- Sound Experiments Part Two

### Thursday 11/23 ENJOY YOUR THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

## **Week 10 Concluding Thoughts**

### Tuesday 11/28 Catching Up/Wrapping Up

#### Items to Discuss:

- Citizen Kane* (1941) continued
- Citizen Kane* trailer
- Hamel, Keith James. "From Advertisement to Entertainment: Early Hollywood Film Trailers." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 29.3 (2012): 268-278.

### Thursday 11/30 Closing Session

## **Course Guide to Close Reading/Screening\***

1) Begin your reading by turning off, removing, or distancing yourself from all distractions (phones, computers, televisions, radios, a noisy roommate, etc.). Once you find a quiet space, read the text SLOWLY, weighing well the sound, style, tone, and suggestiveness of each word, phrase, symbol, and piece of punctuation. Next, re-read the passage with a pencil, paying attention to language, syntax, imagery, and tone. Annotate the text, or mark lines, words, images, or anything that strikes you as interesting. Write questions or thoughts in the margins of your book. Alternately, you can keep notes on a blank piece of paper. In that case just be sure to write down the page number of the passage you're studying so you know how to connect your notes back to the passage.

When screening a film or program, be sure to turn off or remove distractions (cell phones, tablets, computers, etc). Screen or read in an environment where you can focus without interruption. Find the biggest screen possible with the best sound quality possible (unless an assignment specifically requires mobile media, bigger screens and better speakers/headphones allow you to see and hear more detail for close-reading a visual/aural text). Close-reading a film

or television program is an active process and requires participation and engagement. It's not something that can be done passively!

2) Pay attention to words, sentences, and contexts. Begin by looking up unfamiliar words in *Dictionary.com*. Keep in mind, the meanings of words change over time. While modern dictionaries tell you today's meaning of the word, etymological dictionaries, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* (available through the "databases" link on our Library's home page--scroll down to "O" to find the OED). *The Oxford English Dictionary* will give you the etymology of the word, enabling you to see the meaning of the word during the period when the text was written, and its evolution through time. Perhaps the text you're studying played a role in changing the definition of that word? You will also want to consider the **syntax of the sentences or paragraphs** in the passage you're studying. According to *Dictionary.com* "syntax" refers to "the study of the patterns of formation of sentences and phrases from words." Consider how the patterns or order of the words shape the logic of the sentence or emphasize details. Finally, be sure to study the **footnotes or endnotes** in your edition of the novel. They've been included specifically to help you read closely and carefully. How do those notes or annotations help you to interpret the the passage? Consider how the notes bring out or clarify aspects of the passage you're studying.

3) Identify patterns in the passage or film/program--repetitions of themes, ideas, sounds, contradictions, extended metaphors, etc. Underline or note those repetitions. Make a list or word groupings of these ideas and the words that support them. Does the passage, for example, make references to the Bible, to nature, to character development, or to music? Does a character seem to wear the same colors as another character in the film? Is there a rhythm to the way the shots are edited together? Do the shots tend to keep characters at a distance, etc?

4) Formulate questions about the passage, scene, or shot. Your questions might pertain to how a word shapes the meaning of the passage; why a character makes a particular observation or movement; how the narrator's choice to focus on one perspective forecloses other perspectives; or how features of the writing lead you to respond to a character or passage in a particular way. How does the writing prompt your response?

5) Try to answer the questions you raised in 4 by returning to the passage to search for evidence.

6) Close reading of any text requires time and attention to detail. Close reading cannot be completed at the last minute or on the fly. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time and a quiet space where you can absorb yourself in the text's complexities.

\*Many of these tactics are also important when reading criticism.

## Contexts Exercises

### Medieval Contexts Exercise (2 pages)

The hall, the monastery, and the court were the three sites in which Old and Middle English poems were most likely to be performed. Imagine you are in the audience at one of these places. What can you say about yourself? (What is your status? Can you read? What, if anything, is happening during the recitation? What, if anything, are you doing?) How are your expectations and responses conditioned by the setting? (Do your expectations change if you are a man or a woman? If the poem is religious, what is the nature of the community it creates if you hear it in a hall or at court? If the poem is not religious, what is the nature of the community it creates if you hear it in a monastery? If you can read the poem, how does your experience of it change?)

In this exercise, choose one of the poems we've read (you can choose Sir Gawain if you know it) and respond to each of these questions. The first set (what can you say about yourself) may require only a sentence or two. When relevant, indicate the source(s) you've consulted for information. The questions about expectations and responses may require a brief paragraph. The most important thing is that you note your ideas (for example, what you think you would expect of a poem, depending on where you hear it, if you're a man and if you're a woman); you should also cite a source you might want to look at to learn more about the matter.

### Victorian Contexts Exercise: The Victorian Reading Experience (2 pages min.)

For this assignment you'll complete half of one night's reading assignment of *Oliver Twist* by candlelight--a technology used by Victorian working and middle class audiences. Just as Victorians would have read at night, at the end of their work day, you should complete your candlelight reading after the sun has set. Light as many candles as you need to see without eye strain. If you get a headache or experience vision problems stop reading immediately. Hopefully you'll be able to read long enough, however, to get a sense of the experience of reading a nineteenth-century novel at night by candlelight. Please be VERY, VERY careful to keep an eye on your candles. Do not leave the room while they are lit, and be sure to keep them in a safe place where they're unlikely to fall or set something on fire. Be particularly mindful of curtains and other hanging cloth items. Fire accidents are not part of this assignment.

Once you complete the reading assignment, write a reflection essay about the experience of reading a Victorian novel by candlelight. Your essay should consider one (or a few) of the following questions:

How did the context of reading by candlelight affect your thoughts about the novel's content, form, or style?

Did features of the narrative become clearer (or less clear) because of the context in which you were reading?

What does reading by candlelight illuminate about our contemporary reading contexts (electric light, prescription eyeglasses, furniture, book size, etc.)?

How did your relationship to the story or the physical book shift when you read the narrative by candlelight? Did you notice descriptions of night or candles?

Other thoughts and revelations about the significance of Victorian experiences of reading by candlelight?

Reflection essays should be 2 pages (min) and should *not* be written by candlelight. Upload to Canvas by the deadline. This is an essay that requires you to consider the experience of reading as an important context in our analysis of a text. Therefore, your discussion should not include research or use secondary sources.

### **Newer Media Context Exercise (2 pages)**

STAY TUNED! More information soon...

## **Formal Interpretive Essays**

### **Medieval Essay (4-5 pages)**

In all the poems we've read, one figure stands forth as a hero. In "Caedmon's Hymn," it is God, in the "Dream of the Rood," it is the cross; in "Judith," *Beowulf*, and *Sir Gawain*, it is the character after whom editors have named the poem (None of the works is titled in the manuscript that contains it). Discuss the idea of heroism in at least one of these works. How does the context in which it was composed and performed affect the manner in which its hero is presented and judged both inside and outside the poem itself?

You will be evaluated on the clarity of your thesis statement, your ability to write clear sentences and to organize them into coherent paragraphs, and your success in supporting your ideas with evidence (both from the text and, when relevant, from secondary sources).

### **Victorian Essay (4-5 pages)**

Two of *Oliver Twist's* most controversial characters are Nancy, a prostitute trapped in a criminal underworld, and Oliver, a workhouse orphan with a hidden past. Do you see these characters enforcing the popular Victorian notion that poverty and crime are inseparable, and hence the poor are destined to be criminal and immoral? Or do you believe Dickens's characterization of Nancy and Oliver challenge Victorian assumptions about the morality of the poor?

Your essay should focus on Nancy or Oliver (not both). You should develop a clear argument about whether or not one of these characters reinforces or challenges Victorian views of poverty and morality. Essays should point to specific examples from the text to support your thesis. At the same time, you should consider the character's entire life story in your analysis—including

their final outcome at the end of the novel. In short, don't base your analysis on a single passage, but on what we understand about the character's development throughout the novel.

Essays on *Oliver Twist* will be evaluated on the strength of the thesis statement, your ability to write clear sentences and to organize them into coherent paragraphs, and your success in developing a persuasive argument with supporting evidence (both from the text and, when relevant, from secondary sources). Use only sources listed on the syllabus for this assignment.

#### Newer Media Essay (4-5 pages)

In the last weeks of class, we analyzed a constellation of media texts that preceded a key film in cinema history, *Citizen Kane* (1941). How do you contextualize a film like *Citizen Kane* in terms of power, technology, or performance? Using the contextual sources from this class, as well as evidence or ideas from listening/screening *Citizen Kane* using the methods of the Newer Media Context Exercise, explain how you now "read" Orson Welles and *Citizen Kane*. For example, you may choose to contextualize the *Citizen Kane trailer* in terms of Orson Welles' fame or persona. Or, you might contextualize your reading of a scene or sound in *Citizen Kane* by making connections to *Mercury Theater on the Air* programming like "War of the Worlds" or "A Tale of Two Cities." Or, you might focus solely on advertisements to better contextualize Orson Welles persona. The choice is yours, but the goal of this essay is to provide a contextual argument (about power, technology, performance or ???) based on textual evidence.

Your paper will be evaluated on the clarity of your thesis statement, your ability to write clear sentences and to organize them into coherent paragraphs, and your success in supporting your ideas with evidence from at least one primary and one secondary source. Use only sources listed on the syllabus for this assignment and be sure to properly employ and cite them (both within the essay and in your MLA Works Cited page).