

English 2230: American Literature I

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Hours: M 1:00-2:00, M 5:30-6:30, W 1:00-3:00, R 10:00-11:00, and by appt.

Fall 1999
Section 1

Course Description

This first course of the two-part survey will cover major American literary movements, genres, and writers from the Colonial Period (c.a. 1500) through the Romantic Period (c.a. 1860). Our primary focus will be on the literature, but we will also consider some of the historical, social, and political forces that shaped the literature of these periods and our perceptions of it. Readings will include a variety of genres—autobiography, journals, diaries, essays, sermons, poetry, and fiction—and works from writers of different genders, races, and religions will be included for a more comprehensive view of “American literature.” As we read, we will look at four major concerns of human beings as these ideas have been expressed in American literature—the person in relation to the self, to society, to nature, and to the supernatural. Our goal will be to discover how a variety of people of different backgrounds and philosophies have stated their thoughts and feelings on these subjects.

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to:

- Read, discuss, and interpret selected works of American literature from its beginnings to approximately 1865.
- Explain the three major literary periods from 1600 to 1865: the Colonial Age, the Age of Enlightenment, and the Age of Romanticism.
- Place selected American authors within one or more literary periods.
- Understand how the selected works of American literature studied reflect the characteristics and values of the people and times in which they were written.
- Understand the important historical events and socio-political movements from the 1600's to the 1860's.
- Explain the Puritan religious belief system, its vision, and its mission.
- Define and explain such 17th century concepts as Faith, Atonement, Evil, Nature, and Omnipotence.
- Define and explain such 18th century concepts as Nature, Reason, Compromise, Empiricism, Deism, Mechanism, Classicism, Art, Sublime, Noble Savage, and Gothic.
- Define and explain such 19th century concepts as Romanticism, Reason, Transcendentalism, Oversoul, Feeling, Correspondence, Self-Reliance, Nature, and Pantheism.
- Analyze and discuss specific works of literature using terms such as character, point of view, plot, structure, conflict, setting, theme, symbol, allegory, metaphor, simile, scansion, meters, feet, end rhyme, metonymy, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, and irony.
- Read selected works of American literature and present, through activities such as group discussion, journals, response papers, critical essays, reviews, and examinations, a personal interpretation and evaluation of the selected works of literature.
- Appreciate the ways in which literature helps us understand ourselves, other people, and the world around us.

Required Text

Baym, et al. The Norton Anthology of American Literature. Shorter 5th edition (1999).

Requirements and Evaluation

Participation (10%): Your active participation in class discussions is expected and will be evaluated; both the quantity and quality of your participation will be considered.

Examinations (60%): There will be four (4) one-hour exams during the semester; all exams must be completed to pass the course. The exams may include identification, matching, short-answer, short-essay, and full-essay types of questions. You will be allowed to bring **one page** of **handwritten** notes with you to each exam. Finally, you may only miss an exam in the event of an emergency, and you must notify me **before** the exam begins.

Response Papers and/or Quizzes (30%): You will write and submit one response paper each week. To receive credit, papers must be submitted on the day we discuss the reading assignment you have written about. Only **one** paper will be accepted each week, and late papers will **not** be accepted. Please see the response paper assignment sheet for more details. In addition, if we want a change of pace, short, reading quizzes will be given in place of the response papers. These quizzes will be given randomly and unannounced, and they will contain objective short-answer questions. Obviously, I will not give quizzes early, and missed quizzes cannot be made up under any circumstances since the answers are discussed immediately after the quizzes are collected.

Course Policies

Attendance: Since this course relies heavily on class discussions and lectures (none of which can be reproduced), attendance and participation are essential to your success. If you are not here, you cannot learn and practice information that is not covered in the text, you cannot contribute to class discussions or group work, and you cannot learn from the contributions of your peers. Most importantly, you need to be here to share your ideas and questions with the rest of us. For these reasons, attendance is required. If you miss more than **six** (6) class periods for any reason, your final grade will be lowered one letter. If you miss more than **twelve** (12) class periods for any reason, you will receive an “F” for the course, regardless of your other grades. As a **bonus**, if you have perfect attendance, your lowest exam grade will be raised one letter. Finally, if you are absent due to a medical or family emergency, please notify me as soon as possible.

Class Disruptions: Coming into class late or leaving class early is disruptive and disrespectful to both your classmates and me. However, special circumstances sometimes arise. Thus, more than three (3) late arrivals or early departures will be considered absences—no exceptions. Other disruptions will be handled on an individual basis.

Record-Keeping: Please make back-up copies of all your work, and keep all papers and exams returned to you. If questions about grades arise, you will need to produce the original documents.

Incompletes: Incompletes will only be granted to students who have a **documented** emergency in the final weeks of the semester. These students must have completed all the other work for the course with an average grade of “C” or better, must not have missed more than six (6) hours of class, **and** must demonstrate the ability and willingness to complete the work before the third week of the following semester. It is **your** responsibility to notify me as soon as possible if this scenario applies to you.

Plagiarism: Knowingly presenting another person’s ideas or writing as your own without appropriate citation will result in an “F” for the course and notification of the appropriate college officials.

A Note about Class Discussions

In my experience, both as a student and as a teacher, the best literature classes are those which have stimulating and enjoyable discussions. We understand, enjoy, and appreciate literature more when we have an opportunity to discuss it, which is also active learning, as opposed to passively listening to lectures. For these reasons, small- and large-group discussions will be an important part of this class. (Of course, I will often need to provide you with information, but I will work hard to keep these lectures short.) If the discussions are good, this class will be both informative and enjoyable. A silent class, or a class filled with lectures, is too much work and no fun for anyone.

Since most classes will be a mixture of lecture and discussion, you will understand the lectures better and be more willing and able to participate in discussions if you are prepared for class. I expect that you will (1) prepare for each class by reading, thinking, and writing about the assigned readings; (2) attend each class; and (3) be willing to participate in small- and large-group discussions. Bring your books, notes, and papers with you each day, and volunteer to share your thoughts, feelings, ideas, opinions, and interpretations. Most importantly, bring your questions and don’t be afraid to ask them. There is no such thing as a bad question; often, others have the same question, they make excellent starting points for discussion, and they allow me to know what’s clear, what’s not, what intrigues you, and what frustrates you.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change; changes will be announced in class.