

English 2235: American Literature II

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Hours: MW 1-2 p.m., RF 10-11 a.m., M 5:30-6:30 p.m., and by appt.

Spring 1999
Section 1

Course Description

Ernest Hemingway once wrote, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn* . . . it's the best book we've had. . . . There was nothing before. There has been nothing so good since." In this second course of the two-part American literature survey, we will begin just before *Huck Finn* was written, we will end in the 1990's, and we will cover the major literary movements and some of the major writers during this period. In addition, we will look at some of the historical, social, and political forces that shaped the literature of this period and our perceptions of it. Readings will include primarily short fiction and poetry, 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 the "conflicts" that have been expressed in American literature—the focus is on the person in relation to the self, to others, 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 written about these common "conflicts."

Course Objectives

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

- Read, discuss, and interpret selected works of American literature from approximately 1865 to the present.
- Understand how the selected works of American literature studied reflect the characteristics and values of the people and times in which they were written.
- Explain the literary movements of Romanticism, Local Color, Regionalism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism, and Post-Modernism.
- Place selected American authors within one or more literary movements.
- Understand the important historical events and socio-political movements from the 1860's to the present.
- Recognize distinguishing characteristics of modern American literature.
- Explain the various shades of modern American realism in literature.
- 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, rhyme scheme, 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

Nina Baym, et al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Shorter 5th edition. 1998.

Requirements and Evaluation

Examinations (60%): There will be **five or six** one-hour exams during the semester. The exams may include identification, matching, short-answer, short-essay, and essay questions. Later exams may refer to authors or information covered in earlier exams, and the last exam may contain a "comprehensive" essay question. You will be allowed to bring **one page** of notes with you to each exam. Finally, you may only miss an exam if you are ill, and you need to let me know this **before** the exam begins. All exams must be completed to pass the course.

Quizzes (20%): Short reading quizzes will be given randomly and unannounced; they will contain objective short-answer questions. These quizzes will be on the reading assigned for the day or from previous days, so be sure to keep up-to-date with your reading. 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.

Participation and Attendance (20%): Since this course is based largely on class presentations and discussions that cannot be reproduced, attendance and participation are essential to your success. If you are not here, you cannot learn and apply information that is not covered in the text, and you cannot contribute to the class discussion or learn from the contributions of your peers (contributions include questions, reactions, opinions, and interpretations)—both the quantity and quality of your contributions will be considered. For these reasons, attendance is required. If you miss more than **five** (5) class periods, this portion of your final grade will be lowered one letter. If you miss more than **ten** (10) class periods, this portion of your final grade will be an “F.” As a **bonus**, if you have perfect attendance, you will automatically receive an “A” for the exam of your choice. Finally, this category also includes any informal writing assignments and group work; in-class writing and group work **cannot** be made up if you are absent.

Policies

Absences: If you are absent due to a medical or family emergency, please notify me as soon as possible. This will make it easier for you to stay abreast of the class and/or to determine if an incomplete is warranted.

Late Arrivals: Coming into class late is disruptive and disrespectful to both your classmates and me. However, special circumstances sometimes arise. For this reason, everyone is allowed 3 late arrivals; thereafter, each late arrival will be counted as an absence—no exceptions.

Reading Notebook: I strongly encourage you to keep a reading notebook for this class. In addition to class notes, you can keep track of the literature as you are reading by writing lists, summaries, definitions, details, questions, and personal notes. I will never collect this notebook, but it can help you by providing material for class discussions and for the examination study sheets.

Conferences: Please see me during my office hours or schedule an appointment with me if you have questions or problems at any time during the semester. I am here to help.

Record-Keeping: Please keep all quizzes and exams that are 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** medical emergency in the final weeks of the semester. These students must have completed the given quizzes and the first four exams with an average grade of “C” or better, must not have missed more than 8 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 Final Note About Participation

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.” For these reasons, small- and large-group discussions will be an important part of this class. 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.

With this in mind, I welcome your ideas and questions about the literature and class discussions because they are the only way I know what’s clear, what’s not, what intrigues you, and what frustrates you. And, chances are, your peers will welcome your questions as they might have the same questions, or your idea might prompt them to see the story or poem in a different way. It should go without saying that you will have read the stories or poems scheduled for the day. Don’t worry about whether you understand each one after you’ve read it; just be willing to share your questions, ideas, feelings, opinions, and interpretations with the rest of us.

Schedule

Note: A daily schedule will be distributed soon; until then, please note the following important dates:

- **Class Meetings:** Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 11:00 – 11:50 a.m. in H 223
- **No Classes:** January 18, February 15, March 8-12, April 9 (English Division Retreat), May 14
- **Last Day to Withdraw:** April 13
- **Final Examination:** Monday, May 17, 1999, from 9:40 a.m. to 11:40 a.m. in H 223

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