

SOUTHERN POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY

Course Syllabus For ENGL 2130

American Literature

Instructor

Nancy Reichert, Ph.D.

Office

D103

Office Hours

MWF: 8 - 8:45 a.m. and MW 11:30 – Noon

TH: 10 a.m. – Noon and 1 - 2 p.m.

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Class Location and Time

Spring 2006, ENGL 2130/001

Bldg. J, Room 134, 10 - 11:15 a.m., MW

Course Description

A survey of important works of American Literature. Includes a variety of literary forms such as poetry, drama, nonfiction, short stories, and novels. The course presents literature as a reflection of culture and the history of ideas.

Prerequisites

ENGL 1102

Credits

3 hours

Purpose

Socrates claimed a long time ago that the unexamined life is not worth living. Literature helps us to examine our lives and our worlds so that we may better understand our own values and the values of others. In American literature conflicting and contradictory social and individual values often play

out because of the cultural diversity that has always been at work in America.

The purpose of this course is to examine American literature in order to understand the culturally diverse world in which we live. The course will also help us to develop language and theories that give us the means to discuss the literature of this country.

Course Outcomes

After completing English 2130, you, the students, should be able to do the following:

1. Discuss the various literary elements and the essential message of a variety of literary genres;
2. Use reading, writing, and discussion to understand issues and ideas pertinent to American literature;
3. Come to comprehend how historical time, and literary movements shape our understanding of the literature;
4. Use the Internet and other library materials to research ideas for papers;
5. Address the ethical issues involved when literature confronts or violates personal and/or societal norms;
6. Contribute ideas and suggestions to small- group and large -group discussion;
7. Gain an understanding of literature as it impacts you and appreciates the readings of others through collaboration;
8. Analyze issues of American identity(ies) in literature in order to understand the American culture(s) that have evolved over time.

Required Materials

- Aaron, Jane E. *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*. 5th ed. New York: Longman, 2003.
- Baym, Nina. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 6th Shorter ed. New York: Norton, 1999.
- a pocket folder for journal portfolio materials

Important Web Addresses

My Homepage:

<http://www.spsu.edu/htc/reichert/index.htm>

Links to American Literature Resources

<http://www.spsu.edu/htc/reichert/AmerLit.htm>

[1](#)

Library:

<http://www.spsu.edu/library/library.html>

Galileo: <http://www.galileo.usg.edu/>

Regent's Exam: <http://www.gsu.edu/rtp>

The Information Technology Workshop:

<http://www.spsu.edu/infotech/labs/workshop.html>

Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the ATTIC at 678-915-7244 or 678-915-7361 as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Regents' Exam

All students who attend a college within the University System of Georgia are required to pass the Regents' Test prior to **earning 45 semester credits**. The Regents' Test consists of two parts: a reading comprehension section and a written essay section. The times and dates the Regents' Test will be mailed to all first semester transfer students and all enrolled students who have earned 15 or more semester hours. You are not required to sign up for a testing session--just show up. Students will be seated on a first come basis so you should have an alternate session in mind.

Students with SAT- I Verbal scores of at least 510 or ACT Reading scores of at least 23 will be considered to have fulfilled the reading comprehension requirement of the Regents' Test and do not need to take the reading portion of the Regents' Test. Scores must be from a national administration of the SAT or ACT. (Scores from institutional SAT or residual ACT tests will not be acceptable for this purpose.) Students must be

reported on SIRS (S415B) as having met the Regents' Test reading requirement through scores on the SAT or ACT (Regents' Website).

Students with College Board Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition or English Literature and Composition scores of at least 3, International Baccalaureate (IB) higher-level English scores of at least 4, or SAT II English Writing scores of at least 650 will be considered as having fulfilled the essay requirement of the Regents' Test and do not need to take the essay portion of the Regents' Test. Students must be reported on SIRS (S415A) as having met the Regents' Test essay requirement through AP, IB, or SAT II scores (Regents' Website).

New Essay Exemptions: You may also exempt the essay section of the test if you meet the following guidelines:

SAT-I Verbal score of 530 and above for students who earn an "A" in English 1101
SAT-I Verbal score of 590 and above for students who earn a "B" in English 1101
ACT English score 23 and above for students who earn an "A" in English 1101
ACT English score 26 and above for students who earn a "B" in English 1101

You can check to see if you have official SAT I, SAT II, ACT, AP, and/or IB scores on BANNER by logging on to the SPSU Banner Student Information System. Once you have logged into the system:

Select "Student Services and Financial Aid"
Select "Student Records"
Select "View Exam Scores."

Attendance Expectations

- As this course emphasizes the development of discussion skills, the ability to work responsibly in a group, and the honing of critical thinking skills, participation in the class discussions and activities is crucial.
- **Excellent or perfect attendance will be rewarded. For more information see the Portfolio Evaluation section of this syllabus.**
- The professor reserves the right to fail students on their **sixth** absence.

Late Work

Late work will be penalized in this class. I expect you to come prepared with journal entries and other assignments when they are due. There are at least two good reasons for this policy.

- This class operates under the assumption that knowledge making is a social, communal act. Therefore, we will share our written work and we will build knowledge as a community of learners.
- It's unfair to students who consistently turn work in on time to extend deadlines for other students. In many ways we could all benefit from extended time to complete work; however, courses are inherently limited by time since we only have a semester in which to work. Therefore, it's necessary to hold students to the established deadlines.

If you can't make class because of illness, but work is due, I expect you to e-mail it to me in time for class.

Exceptional problems will be considered when I take up journal portfolios. Exceptional problems should be accompanied by doctor notes that indicate problems large enough to make it impossible to get the work to class on time. **Address your problems in your letters of reflection/self-evaluation.**

Computer problems will rarely work as an excuse for late work. Therefore, save frequently when you are working on your writing. Use the "save as" command and make sure you are saving to your disk when using the computers at school. Don't wait to print before class. Computers and printers do not always work. I understand that problems do occur, but my understanding gets tested when work is continually late.

No research papers will be accepted after the due date. I may give clearance for exceptional cases, but don't count on it.

You must take quizzes on the dates and times set in the schedule.

Plagiarism

All work you do in this class needs to be your work although you are encouraged to share ideas with your fellow classmates. Save all your drafts to show your writing progress and to avoid worries about plagiarism. If you are concerned about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult me. Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional representation of someone else's ideas or materials (a book, an article, an essay, your classmate's paper, a paper written for you by a good friend, material from the Internet) or the use of work you have already written for another class without citing the source or the use of that work. Students should consult the *Undergraduate Catalog* under "Academic Regulations" for a fuller explanation of this violation of Academic Honesty. The penalty for plagiarism may be failure of the course or dismissal from the university.

Risking failure for a course or dismissal from the university is especially troubling for a plagiarized journal entry, which is graded only on completeness.

THE ATTIC

The ATTIC provides opportunities for individualized assistance to all Southern Polytechnic students. Academic assistants help students through the processes of invention, organization, writing, revising, and editing of essays and research papers. The ATTIC also offers Regents' Test preparation instruction. Those of you who may be interested in getting another reader for your papers may want to consider dropping by the ATTIC. Those of you who really enjoy getting audience feedback on your work will find the ATTIC to be a unique opportunity for such feedback.

The ATTIC is located on the second floor of building J in room 253. You can phone 678-915-7361 for additional information.

IT User Services Lab (The Workshop)

The IT User Services Lab in H242 is available for students who need access to computers. Call 678-915-7493 for more information.

Evaluation

3 Quizzes (30%)

Quiz One: From the Beginning to 1820 (10%)

Quiz Two: 1820 - 1914 (10%)

Quiz Three: 1914 - the present (10%)

Writings

Reader-Response Journals (40%)

Your journal portfolio will consist of two different parts. In the portfolio you will turn in the following items:

1. Individual journal entries
2. A letter of reflection/evaluation

The journal portfolio will be graded based on the criteria I will hand out in a separate contract.

1. Individual Entries

Every **Monday** a one-page, double-spaced, typed response to the literature for the week will be due. Students need to respond to **all** of the readings for the week.

Example: Say you are supposed to read an introduction, and a short story for Monday and that you are supposed to read two poems for Wednesday.

Your entry would have a section for the introduction—three quotes and responses to each quote. Your entry would also have a section for the short story—three quotes and responses to each quote. Finally your entry would have one complete thought/sentence of importance for each poem with response and a short summary for each poem.

A reader-response journal is a **personal** response to the literature we read. Your aim is to attempt to understand the readings for yourself; do not worry whether you are in agreement with your peers, literary critics, or myself. See if you can connect the literature to your life or to other pieces of literature we read during the semester.

The following format may get a bit redundant over the course of the semester, but it should help you to come to a personal understanding of the text.

Format for Individual Entries--see handout of sample entries for an example of the various types of entries.

For responses to **historical introductions** and pieces of **fiction, nonfiction, and drama**, I would like you to select at least three quotes from the text that you see as important to your understanding the text itself. One of these quotes should be near the

beginning of the text, another from the **middle**, and the last one from **the end** of the text.

Write each quote down in your journal. Place quotation marks around the quote and place the page number in parentheses after the quote.

Respond to the quote. Why did you pick it? What makes it interesting? What information does it bring to the text? How does it impact your understanding of the text? Can you relate it to your life or to another text we have read? You will want to write at least one thoughtful response to each quote.

For responses to **poems** select one complete thought/sentence of importance for each poem and respond to it. Then write a short summary for each poem.

You may want to consider if the lines of poetry are acting in a symbolic manner or what type of image they create. Again, don't worry if this agrees with my reading of the poem--simply attempt to get at the meaning. Do you still see some of these images and symbols being used in writings and songs today? Do you see them in other literature we have discussed?

Don't forget to do a summary of the poem--what does it mean to you in its entirety? What message is it sending?

I will select at **random** excerpts from student journals to be shared with the rest of the class on Wednesday. Again, note that these excerpts are being selected at random and not because I think the authors have come up with better responses than anybody else. **Be prepared to have your writings shared with the rest of the class.**

When I return your journal entries to you, you will want to place them in a pocket folder to be turned in at the end of the semester for a Journal Portfolio grade.

2. Letter of Reflection/Evaluation

You will write a letter of reflection/evaluation concerning your journal entries as a whole using the following questions:

- 1) What general strengths and weaknesses can I observe in my journal entries? What did I do well?

What could I have pushed more? (All good writers are aware of their weaknesses as well as their strengths.)

2) When I reread my journal entries, what do I learn about myself from reading them? Are there certain issues that I seem drawn to? When I reread my journal entries, what do I learn about the literature we studied? What does it tell me about the United States?

3) What connections can I make between pieces of literature? What writers seem to have similar ideas? What writers see things very differently? This is an important question for the letter--take some time and answer it well.

4) Which journal entry is my best? Why?

5) Using the criteria set up in the contract, what grade should I get for my journal portfolio?

Participation

You can address participation, but it is not a part of the portfolio grade. Participation is a bonus in this class. If you meet the following conditions, you may argue that your journal portfolio grade be raised a half letter grade.

- You have no more than three absences for the semester;
- You have been late no more than four times for the semester;
- You have been prepared for class. You have journal entries and papers completed before class and you have read your materials ahead of time for class;
- You participate well in classroom activities such as small-group and full-class discussions. Participating well means entering the dialogue among students and professor. Good participants listen well and add their ideas to the dialogue.

Research Paper (30%)

If the purpose of reading literature is to help us examine our lives and our worlds so that we may better understand our own values and the values of others, then it is important to make connections with a piece of literature and to understand what it tells us

about ourselves and about the world in which we live.

Pick an American piece of fiction, nonfiction, or drama that speaks to you in some way. Analyze the reasons why it speaks to you. What does it seem to be saying that you relate to or find challenging? Why are the issues it addresses still important to people today?

Also analyze the text in order to understand what it says about American culture(s). What are the issues raised in the text?

Economic class, religion, region, and race are often issues of concern in American literature. Are any of these issues central to the text you read? How so?

After you analyze the cultural issues, in what ways do you see these issues in today's culture(s)? How might this have impacted how you responded to the text?

Once you have a strong sense of your own reading of the text, research it. See what literary critics have said. You can pull in ideas from the critics that agree or disagree with your own views. Simply discuss their views and then explain how and why your views are similar or different.

You do not have to organize the paper in the order that the questions above appear. Do ensure that you cover the main issues listed above in your paper. Do make sure you follow the guidelines listed below:

- A five-page, double-space minimum for the paper. The works cited page is a sixth page.
- MLA style should be used.
- You will want to find important quotes from the text you are analyzing and incorporate them in your paper. Your chosen text is considered the primary source and it's important to quote from it and list it on your Works Cited page.
- You will want to cite from at least three secondary sources for the paper and ensure that all three sources are listed on your Works Cited page. **Two of your** sources must come from journal articles, books, and reference materials that can be found in libraries or through Galileo. Print sources such as these are more critically

evaluated than any sources found at .COM's and even .EDU's on the web.

- Sources such as Twentieth Century Criticism may be used. Twentieth Century Criticism is a reference source that can be found in the reference section of our library. There are many reference sources such as this in our library. These sources are a good place to start. **Carefully** evaluate web resources before using them. I have some web resources listed at my homepage.

PROPOSED CALENDAR

Week One, January 5 - 6--Don't meet.

Week Two, January 9 - 13

Monday: Survey students concerning their views on American literature, do brief introductions, and hand out the syllabus.

Homework: Skim the syllabus--read the section on journal portfolios closely. Skim the Introduction on Literature to 1700, pp. 1 - 15. Read Columbus's Letter Describing His First Voyage, pp. 26 - 27. Jot down some notes on what his text tells you about his culture. What do you think his cultural values are based on what he writes? Think back on what you have recently viewed on television or heard on the radio. If someone new were coming into our culture, what would they assume to be our cultural values? Think about how the two cultures may be different or similar. Be ready to discuss on Wednesday.

Wednesday: Quiz over Syllabus. I will hand out the contract for the journal portfolio for discussion as well as a handout giving examples of the various types of entries. We will then discuss Columbus and culture.

Homework: Read the creation myths, pp. 17 - 24. You may want to find a Bible to compare and contrast the Christian creation story with the Native American Stories. Journal 1 is due Wednesday on these stories.

Week Three, January 16 - 20 (no school Monday--Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

Monday: No school.

Wednesday: Journal 1 is due. We will discuss the creation myths.

Homework: Read the description of tricksters, pp. 59 - 61 and the readings from *The Winnebago Trickster Cycle*, pp. 65 - 70. Read Ann Bradstreet's poems "Contemplations," pp. 117 - 124, "The Author to Her Book," p. 124, and "To My Dear and Loving Husband," p. 125. Journal 2 is due Monday on these texts.

Week Four, January 23 - 27

Monday: Turn in Journal 2. We will discuss the readings from *The Winnebago Trickster Cycle*.

Wednesday: We will discuss Ann Bradstreet's poems.

Homework: Skim the Introduction from 1700- 1820, pp. 171 - 180. Read from Michel Guillaume-Jean de Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer, pp. 300 - 310, and from Thomas Jefferson's' The Declaration of Independence, pp. 336 - 342. Write Journal 3 on both of these texts. Do consider what these writings may be saying about the American identity that is being created.

Week Five, January 30 - February 3

Monday: Journal 3 is due. We will discuss the introduction and Crèvecoeur's letter.

Wednesday: We will discuss Thomas Jefferson's' The Declaration of Independence.

Homework: Read Phillis Wheatley's "To the University of Cambridge, in New England," p. 367 and "On Being Brought from Africa to America," p. 367. You may want to consider who Wheatley's audience is in these poems and how the audience may influence what she says in her poems. **No journal is due.**

Week Six, February 6 - 10

Monday: No journal is due. We will discuss Wheatley's poetry.

Wednesday: Quiz on literature to 1820.

Homework: Skim the introduction to literature from 1820 - 1865, pp. 425 - 444 and read Emily Dickinson's "The Soul selects her own Society," p. 1175 and "Much Madness is divinest Sense," p. 1178. Read from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," 1, 2, 6, and 8, beginning on p. 1003.

Journal 4 is due on these readings. You may want to consider the values the poets have as they concern individualism

Week Seven, February 13 - 17

Monday: Journal 4 is due. We will discuss the introduction and Dickinson's poetry.

Homework: Take fifteen minutes to go outside and to isolate yourself from others. Pick one piece of grass and contemplate it. Compare it to surrounding pieces of grass: is it unique in any way? Focus in on the natural world around you. Bring your piece of grass to class on Wednesday.

Wednesday: We will discuss Whitman's poetry.

Homework: Read Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," pp. 611 - 619, and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," pp. 714 - 727. Journal 5 is due on these readings.

Week Eight, February 20 - 24

Monday: Journal 5 is due. We will discuss Hawthorne's short story.

Wednesday: We will discuss Poe's short story.

Homework: Read Henry David Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government," pp. 837 - 853 and read from Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, chapters I, VII, X, and XLI, beginning on p. 813. Write Journal 6 on all of these readings. Consider the genres Thoreau and Jacobs have chosen for discussing political issues. Which do you see as more effective? Thoreau's essay or Jacob's autobiography?

Week Nine, February 27 - March 3

Monday: Journal 6 is due. We will discuss Thoreau's essay.

Wednesday: Research Topics are due--have author and text title ready. We will discuss the excerpts from Jacob's "novel".

Homework: Skim the Introduction to Literature from 1865 - 1914, pp. 1223 - 1235. Read Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," pp. 1659 - 1671 and Samuel Clemens' The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Chapters X - XI, pp. 1275 - 1282 and XVII - XVIII, pp. 1310 - 1324. Write Journal 7 on these texts.

Spring Break: March 6 - 10

Week Ten, March 13 - 17 (Regents' Exam will fall this week or next.)

Monday: Journal 7 is due. We will discuss the Introduction and Gilman's story.

Wednesday: We will discuss the excerpts from Clemens' novel.

Homework: Study for quiz 2.

Week Eleven, March 20 - 24

Monday: Quiz 2 over the literature from 1820 - 1914.

Homework: Skim the Introduction to Literature from 1914 - 1945, pp. 1807 - 1821. Read Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," p. 1887, "The Oven Bird," p. 1888, "Design," p. 1892 and "Nothing Gold Can Stay," p. 1890.

Wednesday: We will discuss the Introduction and Frost's poetry.

Homework: Read Langston Hughes's "Mother to Son," p. 2227, "Mulatto," p.2228, and "Democracy," p. 2231. Read Lillian Hellman's Scoundrel Time, (handout) Write Journal 8 over these texts.

Week Twelve, March 27 - 31

Monday: Journal 8 is due. We will meet in the library instead of the classroom. This time will be used to help students with research issues: remember, at least two of your sources must come from materials that are print resources

such as books, journal articles, and reference materials.

Wednesday: We will discuss Hughes's poems and the short excerpts from Hellman's memoir Scoundrel Time.

Homework: Read William Faulkner's "Barn Burning," pp. 2178 – 2190, and Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (handout). No Journal due. Finish research paper.

Week Thirteen, April 3 - 7

Monday: No Journal Due. We will discuss Faulkner's story.

Wednesday: We will discuss Hemingway's short story. **Turn in Research Paper, Research Notes and Research Drafts.**

Homework: Skim the Introduction to American Prose since 1945, pp. 2275 - 2281. Read Tennessee Williams's A Streetcar Named Desire, pp. 2301 - 2363. Read Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People," pp. 2428 - 2441. Journal 9 is due on these texts.

Week Fourteen, April 10 - 14

Monday: Journal 9 is due. We will discuss the introduction and Williams's play.

Wednesday: We will discuss O'Connor's short story.

Homework: Read "Battle Royal," from Ralph Ellison's The Invisible Man, pp. 2374 - 2384, and "The Red Candle" from Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (handout). Write Journal 10 over these texts.

Week Fifteen, April 17 - 21

Monday: Journal 10 is due. We will discuss the excerpt from Ellison's novel.

Wednesday: We will read Tan's excerpt.

Homework: Finish the journal portfolio. Read Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California," p. 2739. Read Anne Sexton's "The Starry Night," p. 2753 and "Sylvia's Death," p. 2754. Read Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" p. 2781. Read Sandra Cisneros's "My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn," p. 2595.

Week Sixteen, April 24 - 27

Monday: The journal portfolio is due. Discuss the poetry of Ginsberg, Sexton, and Plath.

Wednesday: Discuss Cisneros's excerpt and do class evaluations.

Final Exam Week, April 28 - May 3

Date: TBA *Final quiz*

We may not stick with this calendar exactly if we find that we need time to discuss or explore issues and ideas that come up in more detail.

Final Statement

I know that I am asking you to do a lot of reading and writing; therefore, I want to let you know that not only do most of my students pass this course, but with a bit of effort, they actually do quite well in it. If you put the time and effort into being prepared for class, I will try to ensure that the class is interesting and worth your time. Good luck.