

American Literature

Fall 2025

Instructor: Dr. Sarah Bertekap	Classroom: Burris 209
Email: sarah.bertekap@bsu.edu	Class meeting time: Section 3-4 M/W/F 9am-10am Section 5-6 M/W/F 10am-11am
Office: Elliott B027A	Office hours: M/W/F: 11am-12:pm + 2pm-3pm Tu: 2pm-5pm Th: 11:30am-12:30pm *if these times don't work for you, send me an email so we can find a time to meet.*

Our course examines the ways that representations of North American identity develop over time. What does American literature tell us about how expectations and norms surrounding performances of identity evolve and contradict themselves as time passes? How do writers represent the ways that power ebbs and flows amongst people? In our effort to explore these questions, we will also consider how audience reception of these texts can shift by occasionally analyzing creative adaptations in art, film, and music.

Learning Objectives

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

- Demonstrate familiarity with American literary works from a range of genres (short story, novel, folktale, poetry, film/television, etc.) that date from indigenous creation stories all the way to the 21st century.
- Understand America's evolving historical context and its impact on changing power dynamics within American literature. This course does not provide an exhaustive history of America, but you will have the opportunity to dig deeper into the historical context of the works we read.
- Recognize and articulate the themes you see in literary works through your own carefully written and argued analysis.
- Empathetically engage with ideas that may counter your own conception of "American literature."
- Substantiate your own critical readings of literary texts with well-organized, evidence-based close readings.
- Gain comfort in participating in critical discussion and creating a classroom community.
- Use creative methods of composition to represent and highlight the knowledge you have gained in the course while also generating something new (and, hopefully, a little bit fun).

Required Readings

All readings will be in volumes A-E of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* unless otherwise specified. Other readings will be posted on Canvas or printed for you, depending on length.

We will conclude the semester with *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) by Benjamin Alire Sáenz.

I will post the official reading schedule after you collaboratively choose the readings for each volume of the *Norton Anthology*. For each volume, you will have the opportunity to vote for which readings you want to cover. Below is a rough bird's eye view of the reading schedule:

- Aug. 11 – Sept. 1: Volume A
- Sept. 3 – Sept 17: Volume B
- Sept. 19 – Oct. 3: Volume C
- Oct. 10 – Oct 22: Volume D
- Oct 24 – Nov. 7: Volume E
- Nov. 10 – Dec. 10: *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012)

Course Components & Assignments

Deadlines for all writing projects will be made clear in the project prompt and on our class Canvas page. I will always alert you to any schedule changes or due date adjustments.

Class participation (Includes reflective writing, reading quizzes, peer review participation, and class citizenship)	20%
Short close reading paper #1	15%
Midterm concept map	20%
Short close reading paper #2	15%
Final adaptation project	30% (15% for project and 15% for process note)

Grading Scale & Policies

A: 94-100%	C+: 77-79%
A-: 90-93%	C: 74-76%
B+: 87-89%	C-: 70-73%
B: 84-86%	D*: 69% or below
B-: 80-83%	

Grading of Class Participation

Engagement in our course means being a good citizen to our classroom. You prepare for class by reading thoroughly, you respectfully participate in small group activities and conversation, and you make a solid effort to have your voice heard in full-group discussions. To make the labor of being well-prepared for class more legible to me as your instructor, we will also have reading quizzes starting week 2. These are not meant to trick or confuse you, but rather give you real, tangible credit for the hard work that you are putting into preparing for class. Some weeks, I may opt for you to

submit reflective writing instead of a quiz. Quizzes and reflective writing are meant to help measure your class participation and preparation in a clear and equitable way.

There are no make-ups for these short reading quizzes/reflections except for excused absences. If you have an excused absence, contact me to schedule a make-up of a participation assignment.

Extensions

You are allowed one free, no-questions-asked, 24-hour extension on one of the four writing projects this semester: short paper #1 or #2, your 1st draft of your midterm, your final draft of your midterm project, or your first draft of your final project **(due to the tight timeline of finals, you cannot use your extension on the final draft of the final project).**

- If you plan to use your extension, **you MUST email me 24 hours in advance** of the submission deadline letting me know that you want to use your extension.
- Failure to email me asking for your one-time extension will result in your grade being affected by my late policy (see below).
- Failure to submit your writing project before the end of that 24-hour extension will result in your grade being affected by my late policy (see below).

Late Policy

Unless you have a note from our school nurse (Nikki Al Khatib), Dr. Wallpe, or Dr. Schultz, any projects or papers submitted late are subject to my late policy. **I will automatically deduct 1 step of a letter grade each day your project or paper is past due (so, an A paper would automatically become an A minus, then a B plus, etc.).**

Late First Drafts

Deadlines for first drafts are tricky since your lack of a draft will impact your ability to benefit from peer review workshops in class. **Because of this, late first drafts will reduce your grade on the final draft by 1 step of a letter grade (so, an A paper would automatically become an A minus). If you fail to submit a first draft at all, your grade on the final draft will be dropped two steps of a letter grade (so, an A paper would become a B+).**

Just because you don't have a draft to share in peer review does not mean that you can't help others with their work and learn from the workshoping experience itself. **You can still get participation credit for doing peer review even if you are missing your own draft or only have an incomplete draft to be reviewed.**

Academic Dishonesty

You are responsible for the integrity of your work, and you must produce work that is academically honest. This means that all your coursework must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work can have serious consequences. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to, the following: submitting someone else's paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing; and, attempting to take credit for someone else's (or an AI's) words or ideas without properly citing them. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically

honest, please contact me for assistance. Also, please refer to the student handbook for additional information, especially the quoted portions below:

- *Plagiarism: representing as one's own work any material obtained on the Internet (such as term papers, articles, etc.). When Internet sources are used in student work, the author, publisher and website must be identified. (See policy on Academic Dishonesty in the student handbook.)*
- *Students are prohibited from using any electronic device to capture, record, and/or transmit test, quiz, exam, or other class information or any other information in a manner constituting fraud, theft, cheating, or academic dishonesty and students are prohibited from using electronic devices to receive such information.*
- *Plagiarism or violations of procedures prescribed to protect the integrity of an assignment, such as: a. Submitting an assignment purporting to be one's original work, which has been wholly or partially created by another person; b. Presenting as one's own work ideas, representations, or words of another person without customary and proper acknowledgment of sources; c. Submitting as new work, without the faculty member's prior consent or knowledge, one's own work which has been previously presented for another class elsewhere; d. Knowingly permitting one's work to be submitted by another person as if it were the submitter's original work; e. Cooperation with another person in academic dishonesty, either directly or indirectly, as an intermediary agent or broker; f. Knowingly destroying or altering another's work, whether in written or digital form, computer files, artwork, or other format; g. Aiding, abetting, or attempting to commit an act or action that constitutes academic dishonesty.*

Use of AI and LLM Technology

Humanities Division Statement

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.

Instructor Statement

The purpose of this course is to deepen the skills, habits, and knowledge that AI chatbots offer convenient shortcuts through. In the process of generating writing for you, AI typically erases character and identity from the voice of your writing and pulls from uncredited, uncompensated sources of information. It also frequently offers incorrect, unsubstantiated information. **Under no circumstances should you use AI this semester to create writing OR generate ideas that you claim as your own.** If you have any questions about this, I am happy to chat with you about what I mean and what my expectations are.

Classroom Policies

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Students may receive excused absences at the professional discretion of the school nurse, the associate director of mental health services, the associate director of college

counseling and student engagement, the director of academic affairs, and the executive director of the Indiana Academy. Unexcused absences occur when students miss class without prior approval from the aforementioned designated school officials. Continued absences (both excused and unexcused) from Academy classes increase the likelihood of unsuccessful completion.

Alongside steady attendance, students are expected to maintain consistent healthy habits of decorum, respect, and kindness towards their classmates, instructors, and teaching assistants. When students fail to meet these classroom behavioral standards and academic habits, it is the expectation faculty engage appropriately to bring quick and immediate resolution. When students consistently fail to meet these behavioral standards and academic habits in the classroom, an administrative consequence ladder will be adopted, and recorded, in attempt to administratively address, engage, and rectify ongoing challenges.

Wireless Device Policy

We will often do in-class writing as well as participation in collaborative documents, slides, and Padlet posts. Because of this, I encourage you to bring a laptop or tablet daily along with a notebook and pen/pencil. **Your phone should remain silenced and out of sight throughout class.** Part of our course will be helping you realize what study habits work best for you, so use this as an opportunity to try out different methods. If I see too many tech distractions during class, I will not hesitate to revoke laptop/tablet privileges. Our course requires *responsible* use of technology. All students are also subject to the Academy's policy below:

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities prohibits student use of wireless communication devices for non- instructional purposes in the classroom. As such, any and all portable wireless devices, that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more parties, must only be used for academic purposes directly tied to the classroom activity or related educational task. Exceptions to this wireless device policy are eligible through academic accommodations, individualized education programs, or with instructor approval permitting the use of a wireless device for justification related to health, safety, and/or well-being.

The improper use of a wireless device in an active classroom setting is subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to; a verbal warning, temporary seizure of said device by a school official, an unexcused absence for the class in question, written communication to parent/guardian, among other elevated consequences for repeated improper use.

Ball State University Beneficence Pledge

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains outstanding faculty, staff, and students. Ball State is committed to ensuring that all members of the campus community are welcome through our practice of valuing the varied experiences and worldviews of the people whom we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as evident in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State's commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, inclusiveness at the Indiana Academy emerges as one of the priorities of our living and learning

community. We strive to exist together respectfully and compassionately, creating an environment where every member can thrive.

Mutual Respect & Classroom Environment

Throughout the semester, we will read texts that introduce complex, diverse, and sometimes controversial subjects. I want this class to be a space in which we all feel safe and comfortable to share our thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Each of you should regularly remind yourself that your thoughts and ideas are important and valuable. We must consider that each one of us comes into the classroom with our own histories, experiences, identities, values, etc. and each one of us deserves respect, care, and thoughtfulness in listening and communicating our ideas in a shared space. I will never ask you to change your mind, but I will expect your mind to remain open in this course. I will also issue warnings before we discuss sensitive topics. If you need to leave the room during an upsetting conversation, please let me know so I can help connect you with the support you need.

Alternative Texts Note

Important literature is often about the deepest and most difficult struggles of humans to live authentically in a complex world. Through the thoughts and experiences of literary characters, we can examine and evaluate our personal responses to life's mysteries, complexities, disappointments, and joys. In addition, we begin to understand how a writer, in his or her own struggle to experience creatively, has responded to the social, political, and artistic environment of their times. The English Department at the Academy selects reading material that reflects these human struggles, has endured the test of time, and has earned a respected place in the universe of letters. The instructors will often include recently published poems, stories, and articles that reflect the diversity of contemporary cultures and experiences. **If, because of the powerful nature of the reading experience, you are unable to read and study a specific text with reasonable analytic objectivity, please confer with your instructor.** Alternative texts are available.