

## AMERICAN LITERATURE, Fall 2023

Dr. Phillip Lobo

Email: plobo@bsu.edu

Office: EL-B008D

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:00-2:00pm; Tuesday 11:15am-1:00pm & 2:00-4:15pm; digitally for three hours on Thursday, by appointment.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Seventh Edition, Volumes A-E, Ed. Nina Baym, 2007.
- *Angels in America*, Tony Kushner.
- Additional readings found on Canvas.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is American Literature? What stories do we tell ourselves, what ideas have we enshrined in the creation of an American identity? What (and who) has been left out of that telling, and how have excluded voices found ways to be heard?

This course is designed as an exploration of American ideals, values, history and identity through some of its most influential and important texts. We will move through the literature in roughly chronological order, exploring a range of texts as decided collectively within our class groups, in the interests of enriching our understanding of the American character. **A major focus of this course is critical reading:** the ability not only to **understand what the text says**, but also to **interpret what the text does on a deeper level**. To do so we will examine **how each text was received in its historical moment** as well as determining **what we can take from it today**. Your insights and interpretations, particularly with your fellow students, will be the building blocks of our class sessions; it will be a dialogue with the past and a meditation on the present. You will be expected to articulate your perspective on the texts and engage with other perspectives in a respectful and productive manner. In addition, we will develop the skills of research and analytical writing, preparing you for complex intellectual tasks useful both in academic and professional settings.

Central to the course will be your **cohort**, a group of fellow students in your class with whom you will work throughout the semester. Together you will discuss the texts, develop interpretations, and select class readings. Make sure you communicate with, provide support to, and are supported by your cohort-mates.

## COURSE GOALS

- Develop critical thinking and critical reading skills
- Understand American literature in relation to its historical and cultural context
- See our readings in conversation with one another
- Understand literary devices and techniques, and identify how writers use them
- Analyze literary texts both orally and in writing
- Develop strategies for effective academic writing

## READINGS BY WEEK

Weeks of 8/12, 8/19 & 8/26 – Vol. A.

Weeks of 8/26, 9/4, 9/11, 9/16 – Vol. B.

Weeks of 9/16, 9/23, 9/30, 10/4 & 10/9 – Vol. C.

Weeks of 10/14, 10/21 & 10/28 – Vol. D.

Weeks of 10/28, 11/4 & 11/11 – Vol. E.

Week of 11/18 – *Angels in America*

## IMPORTANT DATES

**11/24 - Last chance to submit papers with a chance for revision.**

**12/15 - Final deadline for paper.**

## ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

In-Class Participation - 25%

Reflections, Questions and Contributions - 40%

Analytical Essay - 35%

Grading: A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ starts at 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D\* 69 and below

**Presence and Preparation (25%):** Your participation in each class session will be vital for the overall experience. Come to every class on time, prepared with your reading notes and your book, and be ready to contribute to our discussion. You will be expected to play an active role in each session, sharing your ideas, building on those of other students, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. Participation is mostly based on you verbally engaging in class discussion within your groups, and taking at least occasional initiative in larger class conversations.

**Thoughts and Discussion (40%):** The groundwork for class discussion is laid through sharing reflections about the assigned reading within your cohort. Three times each week you will reflect on the reading by presenting or responding to a well-framed question or interpretation on your online cohort discussion board; you should focus on a specific aspect of the text, using direct textual reference. Throughout the semester your cohort will choose readings for the class from the appropriate volume of the anthology. Engaging with the texts, working with your cohort, and contributing to the class will secure this part of your grade.

**Analysis and Argument (35%):** This 4 page paper (at least 1250 words) is an exercise in analysis: you will make an insightful and analytical claim about the text and then prove it by analyzing evidence from the text (connect the evidence to your claim). Your analysis should go below the surface: try to say what other readers might not notice. You will choose one of the texts that we have read up to this point, either fiction, poetry or nonfiction.

If you write about **fiction**, you will show how the text communicates a particular concept or theme using elements of the story, such as symbolism, motif, setting, characters, narration, and/or point of view. For instance, you could argue in *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin uses the ocean to represent the struggles and stakes of acquiring a sense of independent personhood; you would then prove this claim by analyzing evidence of this concept in the text, closely reading the sections where the text describes the ocean and the main character's interactions with it. You will also need to address the significance of this theme or concept in the story and beyond it.

If you write about **one or more poems**, you will need to focus on how the text(s) use the poetic form to convey their message, with special attention paid to structure, word-choice and imagery; poems can be very short, so be sure to give yourself enough material to work with.

If you write about a **nonfiction text**, your essay will be more of a rhetorical analysis: say what the text is arguing or communicating, then identify specific methods the text uses to persuade its audience. For instance, you could argue a text is designed to instill fear in its audience in order to scare them into calling for war. If that were your thesis, you would then show evidence of the text trying to conjure fear through the specific language and structure of the text. You will also need to make a claim about whether or not the overall method is effective (say why).

There is **only one essay for this course**; it can be written about any text we have read during the semester, and it **can be submitted at any time before the start of Finals Week**. If you turn the essay in **at least two weeks before Finals Week, the essay may be revised once for a chance at improving the grade**; revisions must be submitted by the end of Friday during finals week.

You will need to use **MLA citation** to cite the literary works both in-text and in a Works Cited page. We will go over this in class, but if you have questions please ask me or visit the OWL Purdue website. **Most importantly, make sure the words and ideas in your paper are your own.**

## **COURSE POLICIES**

**ATTENDANCE:** Regular and punctual class attendance is expected and required of all students. If you are not in class when it officially begins, you will be marked tardy. If you show up to class ten or more minutes late, you will be marked absent for the day.

**LATE WORK:** Late assignments will not be accepted without an in-person discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. If I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we do not discuss a plan for, you risk receiving no credit for it. Please make every effort to make sure assignments are timely, and that you meet the deadlines as outlined in the syllabus. **If you must miss a class, plan ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the case of an excused absence (those deemed so by the school), you will need to contact me via email to make arrangements to get your missed work in.

**TECHNOLOGY:** Please render your cell phones silent before you enter class, put them out of sight, and refrain from using them in class unless otherwise instructed. Laptops use is for designated in-class writing and research assignments only. Unauthorized use will earn a warning, followed by an improper use of computer designation in the attendance record.

### **INDIANA ACADEMY UNEXCUSED ABSENCE POLICY**

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor. Four or more unexcused absences in any particular class a student takes will lead to academic and residential consequences to be determined by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Residential Life that may include detention, residential groundings, parent/principal conference, among others.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

You are responsible for the integrity of your work and you are required to produce work that is academically honest. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. Submitting someone else's paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. Attempting to take credit for someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism. Direct and indirect plagiarism, both of which we will discuss in class, are unacceptable and have serious academic consequences. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, contact me and we can sort it out. Please refer to the student handbook for additional information, including information that is new this year.

### **APPROPRIATE USE OF LLM/'AI' TECHNOLOGY**

**Official 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:**

Large language models (colloquially known as AI chatbots) are powerful tools which are rapidly altering the landscape of humanities scholarship. As with many such devices, there are benefits and drawbacks. Take for example motorized transport: automobiles made remarkable things possible for transit and logistics. It has also fostered a sedentary lifestyle, with all the concomitant health problems (i.e. driving instead of walking causes your legs to wither, your heart to weaken, your lifespan to contract).

Similarly, while large language models can accelerate a number of tasks, **it risks replacing invaluable skills and leading to the atrophy of the very capacities this class is meant to exercise and refine.** Letting an LLM write for you will not only produce mediocre, intellectually vacuous work, it will also cause your own abilities to shrivel precisely when they should be developing. It is also a priori plagiaristic: **all the words a LLM uses are drawn from uncredited, uncompensated sources.** It is not a voice from nowhere; it is stolen language. I want you to use your own words and ideas, and credit the words and ideas of others when you use them.

For the purposes of this class, **LLM/AI chatbots can be legitimately used for research purposes:** you can ask them questions (though always double check, since they frequently ‘hallucinate’) to increase your awareness of a topic, with the understanding that proper sourcing and citation must follow. **They may not be used to produce prose that represents itself as your own.** If you have doubts about the appropriate use of this technology, simply get in touch with me and we can clarify.

### **IA WIRELESS DEVICE POLICY**

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.

### INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE STATEMENT

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State's commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, Inclusive Excellence 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. Unfortunately, there might be occasions when something occurs that disrupts our progress toward meeting these objectives. In this case, we encourage any member of the Academy community to file a Campus Climate Report (CCR) [https://bsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6mbRbL5acAntUTI](https://bsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mbRbL5acAntUTI). All reports will be taken seriously, and appropriate responses will be carried out by Academy administration.

### DISABILITY SERVICES

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The [Office of Disability Services](#) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or [dsd@bsu.edu](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu).

### LITERATURE 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 his/her 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.