

American Literature, Fall 2019

Dr. Phillip Lobo

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Office location: EL-B008D

Office hours: MWF 11:30-12:30 and 2:00-4:00, Th 12:00-1:00, and by appointment.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Seventh Edition, Volumes B-E, Ed. Nina Baym, 2007.
- Additional readings found on Canvas (print and bring to class when applicable).

## 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?

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, focusing on key themes — individualism and exceptionalism, alienation and marginalization, to name just a few — that will enrich 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 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 research and analytical writing, preparing you for complex intellectual tasks useful both in academic and professional settings.

## 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

## Topics by Week

Week of 8/12 *Introductions*

Week of 8/19 *Individualism*

Week of 8/26 *Alienation*

Week of 9/2 **Checking In, Paper Prep**

Week of 9/9 *Marginalization*

Week of 9/16 *Universality*

Week of 9/23 *Disillusionment*

Week of 9/30 *Agency*

Week of 10/7 **Checking In, Paper Prep**

**\*\*\*First paper due 10/11 before 11:59 pm\*\*\*\*\***

Week of 10/14 *Expression/Representation*

Week of 10/21 *Appearance/Invisibility*

Week of 10/28 *Legacy/Modernity*

Week of 11/4 *Boundaries/Transitions*

Week of 11/11 *Survival/Adaptation*

Week of 11/18 *Death/Rebirth*

11/23-30 THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week of 12/2 Introducing Lit Circles

Week of 12/9 Lit Circles, continued

**\*\*\*\*\*Second Paper due 12/14 before 11:59 p.m.\*\*\*\*\***

Week of 12/16 Lit Circles, continued

## ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

Presentation - 10%

Participation - 20%

Daily Reading Notes and Responses - 20%

Analytical Essay - 25%

Research Paper- 25%

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

**Presentation (10%):** At some point during the semester, you will be asked to give a short oral presentation about a given theme; these will typically be scheduled for a Friday, and will ask that you place the works we've been reading earlier that week in conversation. You will present your thesis, defend it by analyzing evidence from the text, and then elaborate on the significance of this aspect of the text. I will be evaluating these presentations based on thesis/argument, organization, clarity, analysis of evidence, timeliness, focus, and overall delivery.

**Participation (20%):** 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 through sharing your ideas, building on other students' ideas, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. Participation is mostly based on you verbally engaging in class discussion. Behaviors that damage your participation grade include lateness, having your cell phone out, disruptiveness, absences, not bringing your texts to class, and not regularly participating in class discussion or other class activities.

**Daily Reading Assignment (20%):** For every reading assignment, you will be asked to compose a response. This will include a.) a question or comment to contribute to the discussion and b.) an analysis of some aspect of the text. Make sure to bring your response into class each day, in a form which can be handed in, and with your full name at the top. I will grade these chiefly on their completeness, as long as they show adequate effort and thoughtfulness. They should also be legible! **For full credit, provide at least one half a notebook page of analysis for each text (you will lose points if your analysis is short).**

Reading notes need to contain the following: your analysis of the way the writer communicates a particular concept or theme using elements of the text (language, symbol, allegory, setting, motif, etc.). Ask yourself: What is the text doing on a deeper level? How does it communicate and execute that concept through various elements within the play or poem?

State your claim in the first sentence and then spend the rest of the time proving that claim through analyzing textual evidence. I am looking for you to thoughtfully and thoroughly engage with each text, demonstrate that you can read below the surface and find deeper meaning, and use textual evidence to support your claims; citations of the text in its specifics will often be necessary. (For nonfiction texts, you might want to adjust the focus of your analysis paragraph a bit: state what the writer is arguing or attempting to communicate and then identify specific methods the writer uses to persuade his/her audience.)

**\*\*\*\*\*Make sure all of the words and ideas in your reading notes are your own. Using someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism.\*\*\*\*\***

**Analytical Essay (25%):** 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 short fiction, poetry or nonfiction. If you write about short 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).

**Research Paper (25%):** This 5 page paper (at least 1500 words) is an exercise in research methods and taking a broad view of a work's place in the historical record. The emphasis will be on placing a text in its contemporary context, understanding it as part of a genre with a genealogy (its generic roots, its references to other works, the works it prefigures) as well as its unique contributions. In addition you will be asked to bring the issue at hand into present-day relevance, reflecting upon how the text can help us understand our world today. It will be graded based on its meeting the requirements of the assignment, as well as its cogency, the strength of its support, as well as its stylistic clarity.

NOTE:

To give you the best chance of success on the papers, I'll be requiring **three conferences** with each of you prior to the paper's submission. The first conference will be to discuss your choice of text(s) and topic, focusing on developing your thesis. The second will be to examine your outline and essay structure. The third will be to check in on the paper's first draft and to make sure it is the best work you can produce. It is your responsibility to make these appointments with me, and to come prepared; I will not read drafts or outlines in their entirety, so be prepared to represent your work to me in a concise manner. Each conference will be 15 minutes long.

For both papers, 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. You will also be marked absent if I see you sleeping.

**LATE WORK:** Late assignments will not be accepted without prior discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. I will collect your reading assignments in class and major papers will be turned in electronically, unless otherwise stated; if I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we have not discussed a plan for, you will not receive credit for it. A plan for late submission will be a rare dispensation, and one that must be approved by me at least 48 hours before the due date. **If you must miss a class, plan ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the rare 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. Keep other electronic devices, such as laptops and iPads, in your bag and off your desk. **Exceptions can be made upon request.**

### 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.

### 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.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

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 and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>. As such, it is important to ensure that your comments and behavior in class is respectful and inclusive. Discriminatory comments or behavior will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action, in accordance with Indiana Academy and Ball State University policy.