**English 203: Introduction to American Literature — Syllabus**

**University of Victoria / Spring 2023**

**Dr. Tim Personn**

This course is a ‘greatest hits’ sampler of more than 300 years of American literature, from the early romantics and modernists to the Beats, Black artists, and feminist science fiction writers of the 20th century. The course will take the form of a historical overview of American literary culture, focusing on fiction, poetry, and essay writing. Along the way, we will take side-glances at other media and other disciplines to frame our reading of key US literary works. This will help us understand the unique contributions of American thought to the history of ideas—e.g., transcendentalism, pragmatism, and

pluralism—and the development of the American imaginary as it grapples with some of the defining contradictions that are internal to the project of “America”: the role of the individual vs. the community, the legacy of slavery and genocide, the promise of freedom and the reality of inequality. We will also try to get a sense of what is “American” about these works, and how they cohere as a body of national writing—as a kind of ongoing literary conversation about the United States.

**Contact:**

Dr. Tim Personn

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Office Hours: Wed 1-2 pm, and by appointment

**Course:**

Mon / Thurs 10:00 – 11:20                                                                            Clearihue A207

**Text:**

Robert S. Levine, et. al., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Shorter 10th ed.

Available in the University Bookstore.

**Assignments:**

1/ Five online reading quizzes (15%). Dates: TBA.

2/ One personal response paper (length about one page) that is due the same day as the quiz for the respective reading (5%).

3/ Introduction & Outline Peer Review assignment (worth 10%: 5% draft, 5% peer review). Draft due: March 20th. Peer review due: March 23rd.

4/ Major essay assignment: a single essay of no more than 2,500 words (worth 40%), due April 3rd.

3/ A final exam, which will be closed-book and on the material from the whole term (worth 30%). Date: TBA

**Grading:**

I use the University of Victoria’s scale to calculate grades:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grades** | **Grade Point Value** | **Percentage for Instructor Use Only \*** | **Description** |
| A+ A A- | 9 8 7 | 90 – 100 85 – 89 80 – 84 | **Exceptional**, **outstanding** and **excellent** performance. Normally achieved by a minority of students. These grades indicate a student who is self-initiating, exceeds expectation and has an insightful grasp of the subject matter. |
| B+ B B- | 6 5 4 | 77 – 79 73 – 76 70 – 72 | **Very good**, **good** and **solid** performance. Normally achieved by the largest number of students. These grades indicate a good grasp of the subject matter or excellent grasp in one area balanced with satisfactory grasp in the other area. |
| C+ C | 3 2 | 65 – 69 60 – 64 | **Satisfactory**, or **minimally satisfactory**. These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter. |
| D | 1 | 50 – 59 | **Marginal** Performance. A student receiving this grade demonstrated a superficial grasp of the subject matter. |
| F | 0 | 0 – 49 | **Unsatisfactory** performance. Wrote final examination and completed course requirements; no supplemental. |
| N | 0 | 0 – 49 | Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental. |

**Late Assignments:**

Late work will receive a 2% penalty per day, including weekends. If you ever have a problem with an assignment, talk to me *in* *advance* of the deadline and we may be able to negotiate an arrangement to fit your situation. While I am reasonable and compassionate about giving extensions when this is necessary, *such deadlines are absolutely non-negotiable after you have missed them.* Students who do not submit the essay or write the final exam will receive an “N” in the course (failure through incompletion).

**Attendance**:

Regular attendance is obligatory. Continuous absences may result in a grade penalty or failure in the course through incompletion.

**Code of Conduct:**

Please familiarize yourself with [UVic’s policies on a student code of conduct](https://www.uvic.ca/services/advising/assets/docs/tri-fac-student-code-of-conduct.pdf.), which were developed by a Trifac committee and passed by Faculty Council. The document articulates the Trifaculty’s commitment to values of personal responsibility, respect, honesty, and integrity for all students. It draws together existing UVic policies in one place for ease of reference.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students are part of the intellectual community at the University of Victoria. There are ethical standards we all adhere to; one serious breach of such standards is plagiarism. According to the University of Victoria Calendar, plagiarism is the representation of someone else’s work as one’s own work. This can include intellectual theft or merely inadequate attribution of borrowed material to its author. Plagiarism includes not just the use of another’s words, but also the use of another’s ideas. Plagiarism includes the uncredited use of Internet sources as well as the unattributed use of print or other sources. An assignment that plagiarizes someone else’s work will result in a failure for the course, but there can be further penalties as well, including disciplinary probation or expulsion from the university. If you have questions about plagiarism or the use of other peoples’ ideas, please come and talk with me about them. See the University Calendar online for definitions and regulations of plagiarism, where it says:

**Principles of Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. It is expected that students, faculty members and staff at the University of Victoria, as members of an intellectual community, will adhere to these ethical values in all activities related to learning, teaching, research and service. Any action that contravenes this standard, including misrepresentation, falsification or deception, undermines the intention and worth of scholarly work and violates the fundamental academic rights of members of our community. This policy is designed to ensure that the university’s standards are upheld in a fair and transparent fashion.

Nothing in this policy is intended to prohibit students from developing their academic skills through the exchange of ideas and the utilization of resources available at the university to support learning (e.g., The Writing Centre). Students who are in doubt as to what constitutes a violation of academic integrity in a particular instance should consult their course instructor.

**Plagiarism**

A student commits plagiarism when he or she:

• submits the work of another person in whole or in part as original work

• gives inadequate attribution to an author or creator whose work is incorporated into the student’s work, including failing to indicate clearly (through accepted practices within the discipline, such as footnotes, internal references and the crediting of all verbatim passages through indentations of longer passages or the use of quotation marks) the inclusion of another individual’s work

• paraphrases material from a source without sufficient acknowledgement as described above

• The university reserves the right to use plagiarism detection software programs to detect plagiarism in essays, term papers and other work.

**Proposed Schedule:**

Jan 9          Introduction; Ralph Linton: “One Hundred Per Cent American”

Jan 12        J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur: *Letters from an American Farmer*, Letters III & IX (289-304); Washington Irving: “Rip Van Winkle” (465-476)

Jan 16 Nathaniel Hawthorne: “Young Goodman Brown” (617-626)

Jan 19        Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Nature* (503-532)

Jan 23       Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Nature* [continued]

Jan 26       Henry David Thoreau: *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, “Economy,” “Where I Lived and What I Lived For,” “Spring” (899-961)

Jan 30        Walt Whitman: *Inscriptions* (1062), “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1109-1112), *Song of Myself* [parts 1-10, 21, 24, 44, 48] (1062-1106)

Feb 2        Emily Dickinson: Poems 207, 320, 372, 479, 620, 1108, 1263; “Letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson” (1220-1248)

Feb 6 Edgar Allen Poe: “The Raven,” “Annabel Lee” (664-668); “The Philosophy of Composition” (714-722)

Feb 9        Poe: “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Black Cat” (691-701)

Feb 13      Herman Melville: “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1132-1158)

Feb 16 Stephen Crane: “The Open Boat” (II 567-584); Frank Norris: “A Plea for Romantic Fiction” (II 319-323)

Feb 20-24 **Reading Break**; no classes

Feb 27 Henry James: *The Turn of the Screw* (II 331-403)

Mar 2 Henry James: *The Turn of the Screw* [continued]; “*From* The Art of Fiction” (II 317-319)

Mar 6        Charlotte Perkins Gilman: “The Yellow Wallpaper,” “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (II 480-493), “*From* Masculine Literature” (II 326)

Mar 9        T.S. Eliot: “The Waste Land,” “*Transcript*: He Do the Police in Different Voices” (II 767-781); Ezra Pound: “In a Station of the Metro” (II 732), “*From* A Retrospect” (II 740-742)

Mar 13        Wallace Stevens: “The Snow Man” (II 709), “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (II 714), “The Idea of Order at Key West” (II 716); Marianne Moore: “Poetry” (II 757-8), “A Grave” (II 759)

Mar 16        William Carlos Williams: “*From* Spring and All” (II 721-728); Robert Frost: “Mending Wall” (II 673-4), “The Road Not Taken” (II 676), “Birches” (II 676-677), “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (II 679)

Mar 20 Langston Hughes: “I, Too,” “The Weary Blues” (II 1071-2), “Theme for English B,” “Harlem” (II 1076-77); Zora Neale Hurston: “How It Feels To Be Colored Me” (II 929-931) **Intro/Outline draft due**

Mar 23 Allan Ginsberg: “Howl,” “Footnote to Howl,” “A Supermarket in California” (II 1329-1337) **Peer review due**

Mar 27 Ralph Ellison: From *Invisible Man* [“Battle Royal”] (II 1161-1171)

Mar 31      Toni Morrison: “Recitatif” (II 1488-1501)

April 3 Raymond Carver: “Cathedral” (II 1550-1559) **Term essay due**

April 7 Philip K. Dick: “Precious Artifact”; Ursula K. Le Guin: “Schrödinger’s Cat”; Octavia E. Butler: “Bloodchild” (II 1374-1406)

How to Do Well in this Course[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Read the texts *before* we discuss them. Otherwise, you will not be able to follow lectures or conversations in class. Plus, demonstrating you’ve read the text means you’ll likely do well on the final exam.
* Write while you read. For me, this means annotating a text as I read it. You can annotate print and digital texts. (See me if you need ideas or resources.)
* Come to class with ideas and questions, and perhaps even passages to discuss. Be curious. Seek connections not only between texts but also between this course and other courses you’re taking.
* Take notes during class meetings. Students who take notes not only understand but also retain the material better. This may help when sitting down to compose the essays, too.
* Let me know when you don’t follow what I’m saying (you can do so confidentially by email). I find this stuff fascinating, but I will not always know what you want to investigate or learn more about. If you have questions, then please don’t hesitate to ask them.
* Persuasive writing takes time. Before you submit an assignment, consider circulating drafts to friends or peers. Chat with me during office hours. Consider how your writing can extend and even complicate our class discussions. Also, avoid writing that is primarily descriptive. Push your work into an analysis of the assumptions and ambiguities at work in literature. Further, think about how literature reflects our culture and, at times, even intervenes in it.
* Your writing for the essay should address a significant problem. Be explicit about the problem. Try to figure something out. Your essay should perform intellectual labor. If you can’t tell, after reading it, what work it has done, it is not finished.
* Consider thinking of your essay as making an intervention into an already ongoing debate. Very few, if any, good essays are written ‘in a vacuum.’ The best writing makes its point explicit by showing the ways it responds to what others have said on a topic, often by agreeing (with a difference), disagreeing, or through a combination of the two. For a literature class, this means researching secondary sources that display a critical position to respond to. Come talk to me if you need to be pointed in the direction of contributions to such critical debates on the texts we are reading.
* During class and in writing, be concrete when you comment on anyone’s work (including the texts we're discussing). Quote it. Speak to specific gestures. And then respond with your own interpretations. When the work is by a peer, affirm their ideas (e.g., “I like how you...”).

**Territorial Acknowledgment:**

All University of Victoria classes, including this one, take place on the traditional territory of the WS'ANEC' (Saanich), Lkwungen (Songhees), Wyomilth (Esquimalt) peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. We acknowledge that many of us are uninvited visitors and settlers on these lands and that it is our responsibility to seek and learn from opportunities for truth telling and supporting Indigenous resurgence.

1. Adapted from a syllabus by Dr. Christopher Douglas. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)