

English 116: Introduction to American Literature

“Social and Scientific Frontiers”

Section F ♦ 69 English Building ♦ 2 - 2:50 MWF

Spring 2009

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Required Texts (in the order you need them):

Course packet available at Notes and Quotes (on John St., between Wright and 6th)
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*
Garrett P. Serviss, *Edison's Conquest of Mars*

Course Description:

The aim of this course is to provide you with a working knowledge and appreciation of American literature. Since the history of American literature—even when confined to English-language texts in the United States—stretches back at least 400 years, it would be impossible to read all, or even a representative example, of this canon. This means that our course will survey American literature by reading a small set of selected primary texts and supplementing first-hand knowledge of literary works through discussions, classroom presentations, handouts, and online interactions.

In this section of English 116, we will focus on the theme of social and scientific frontiers. We will examine how the concepts of social and scientific progress shaped popular conceptions of American culture and the role of literature, and discuss how scientific progress was often used to represent or promote social progress. In so doing, we will often debate and theorize the ‘cultural importance’ of these texts. Overall, you will need to read, think, talk, and write about these texts in order to do well in the course. I hope you will enjoy the readings, and I expect that you will read them, take notes about them, and often post your comments on our course Moodle website before coming to class. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the assigned readings through your written and spoken discourse.

Thinking about the ‘cultural importance’ of literature is always a murky subject. Therefore, in addition to promoting discussion about the course theme, texts on this syllabus will allow us to explore a wide range of literary forms — from poetry written on walls through bad (but wildly popular) science fiction. As we read these texts, we will discuss what has historically counted as ‘important’ literature and theorize what types of American literature are ‘important’ *now*. Therefore, in addition to reading specific texts about social and/or scientific frontiers, students in this course will analyze anthologies and eventually produce individually-themed anthologies, which we will discuss throughout the course of the semester.

Course Requirements:

Participation/Attendance	20%
Discussion Leading, Questions, and Responses	25%
Tests/In-class work	20%
Group Anthology Review	5%
Anthology Project	30%

Grading Scale:

A+: 99-100+	A: 93-98	A-: 90-92	B+: 88-89	B: 83-87	B-: 80-82
C+: 78-79	C: 73-77	C-: 70-72	D+: 68-69	D: 63-67	D-: 60-62
F: 59 and below					

Course Policies:

Participation and Attendance: Your attendance at every class meeting is expected and valued, and I look forward to your consistent and thoughtful participation. Each absence will deduct points from your participation and assignment grades. After your **fifth** absence, each absence will dock your **final** grade a third of a letter grade. For example, 6 absences will drop your final grade from an A- to a B+. **Also note that:** I do not distinguish between “excused” versus “unexcused” absences, you are tardy if you are 5 minutes or more late, three tardies equal one absence, and I expect you to turn off your cell phone when entering class.

I will grade participation according to the following scale:

- A: Daily, thoughtful participation in class discussion and activities.
- B: Frequent to occasional participation in class discussion and activities.
- C: Participates only when called on or prompted.
- D: Refusal to participate, even when called on. Attendance problems.
- F: Consistent lack of preparation for class. Attendance problems.

This is an approximate grading scale. Students who participate daily but frequently are not prepared for class (don't have the text we're covering, or their notebook for example), or who are disrespectful to other student's opinions will clearly not earn an A for participation. While I encourage open debate, disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated. Lateness, disorganization, unpreparedness, or overall negative behavior will reflect poorly on your participation grade.

If for any reason you need special accommodations regarding attendance, let me know as soon as possible.

Discussion Questions and Responses: This component of the class will be conducted online the evening before class. The class will be divided into groups. On the days specified for your group, each group member must submit an entry online. Each entry should include

(1) at least two quotations from the readings that you find significant. If you have been assigned to read more than one text, be sure to include at least one quote from each text. A quote may be as short as a phrase or sentence, or as long as a paragraph.

(2) your comments on the quotations you have selected. In your comments, explain why you chose each quote and what you can deduce from it. Who do you think is speaking here, and who is s/he speaking to? What is the speaker talking about, and what do you think s/he's hoping to accomplish by this? Do you have any ideas about how this quotation can help us understand the text or course themes? Is there anything you would like to remember from this text for your own life; if so, what and why? Do you have anything you would like to say back to this author? Do you have any questions for the class?

These quotes and responses are intended to *prompt class discussion*. On your assigned day, make sure your quotations and responses are posted by 7:30pm so that your classmates can read and begin to respond to them in Moodle. We will use Moodle as a jumping-off point for course discussion on the days specified by the syllabus. In the course pack, see “Tips on how to choose quotes for each entry” for more information about this component of the course.

Groups do not have to work together on this assignment. Each of the six group members may post individually. You may find it easier (or more fun) to work together, in which case you should make sure that each group member still posts something on Moodle under his or her name. Note, in addition to the quotations and responses, students may post other information that the text makes you think of, as well, links, pictures, etc. Keep in mind that the ultimate goal of this assignment is to expand our thinking about these texts.

Discussion Leading: Members of each group will lead discussion on the afternoon after they posted their quotations, questions, and/or responses on Moodle. Each member should bring in a print-out of their Moodle post and read through any peer responses. You can begin by explaining why you posted what you did, but be prepared to extend conversation further by preparing questions and supplementary ideas for discussion.

Discussion Responses: I expect each student to engage with Moodle regularly. You are required to respond to *no fewer than five* Moodle posts from students outside of your group. There is no limit to the number of times you can respond — the more you engage the texts and other students’ responses to them, the better. Responding to posts — and even starting new threads even if it is not your group’s assigned day — will positively affect your participation grade as well as your discussion-leading grade, as long as posts are thoughtful and substantive.

Tests and Miscellaneous Assignments: In-class assignments are designed to open creative ways for discussing texts, and to give students the chance to prove that they fully understand the readings. I design tests on a sliding-scale of difficulty based on class performance. If the whole class demonstrates excellent knowledge of the texts through in-class discussions and Moodle participation, then tests will be relatively easy, drawing directly from points raised on Moodle posts and allowing students opportunities for extra credit. If a number

of students do not appear to be keeping up with the reading, tests will be more difficult, requiring in-class essay writing.

Group Anthology Presentation: To prepare each student to produce his or her own anthology by the end of the semester, these group Anthology presentations will assess various anthologies, ultimately providing the class with a working knowledge of the anthology genre, and productive ways to innovate within this genre. For this assignment, groups of 3 will choose an anthology to examine — no two groups may examine the same anthology, so if your group agrees on an anthology (or anthologies) you would definitely like to use for this assignment, let me know as soon as possible.

For this assignment, your group will construct a written analysis of how the anthology frames American literature. You should examine the introduction closely, using quotes in your presentation to describe how it frames its own goals and how it connects to the reader. You should thoroughly analyze the table of contents, as well, and I recommend skimming other front matter and some of the texts in the anthology to get a deeper sense of how this anthology works. I also recommend that you see if your anthology has an online component and to discuss these extra materials in your presentation if you find them. You should be able to answer questions about your anthology and bring a copy with you on the day of your presentation.

You can compare/contrast more than one anthology if you so choose — especially if you'd like to get a sense of a popular series, like the annual *Best American Short Fiction* anthologies.

All Anthology presentation essays should be posted on Moodle for the class to read by March 13th. After these presentations are over, students may want to use the presentation materials for reference when constructing their own anthologies.

Final Project - Constructing and Presenting Your Own Anthology: Select a theme or organizing concept for your own anthology. For example, "American Literature for the Agriculture Major," or "Goth and Vampire Culture in American Literature," or a more historically-focused example, such as "American Literature and Political Activism of the 1960s-1980s." Your completed anthology **must** have a title page, a critical and informative introduction (6 pages minimum), and an annotated table of contents, listing no fewer than 20 texts your anthology includes and 1-2 paragraph descriptions summarizing the importance of each text and why it is included in your anthology. Some of the anthologies we will analyze in class include nontraditional text selections. For example, the *Best American Nonrequired Reading* anthologizes titles of popular facebook groups. You can include nontraditional materials as well, but your introduction and annotations should clearly specify your reasons for doing so and your philosophy/definition of American literature in general. Above all, I want you to use your anthology to investigate literature and cultural production on a topic that you have some investment in, that you are passionate about, or whose existence and recognition is important to you. Your final project can be in a hard-copy format (like a book or report), or can be a working website.

The more time and effort you put into these projects throughout the semester, the better. It will be almost impossible to create a last-minute 'A' project. Therefore, as you

develop your projects it will be beneficial for you to keep me posted on your progress, asking questions or explaining your work as you go. Moreover, I encourage students to add relevant 'bells and whistles' to lend depth to their projects and presentations — including everything from cover art to proposals for using your anthology in a class. Like the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* you may want to add an insert of important artwork that complements your anthology's theme, or subject headings to divide your table of contents. Of course, you may innovate on the concept of an anthology entirely, and add extra materials that professional anthologies do not typically have. In other words, since you will spend time thinking about and working on this project throughout the semester, I encourage you to be creative and make your project thought-provoking, innovative, and fun.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in any form, and could result in the failure of this course. The University's Code of Policies and Regulations defines plagiarism as: "Representing the words or ideas of another as one's own in any academic endeavor" (see Code 1-402). It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with and understand the University's Academic Integrity policy. Whether paraphrasing or directly quoting, you must correctly identify and cite your source. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to cite sources, please ask me. Again, all citations should be formatted according to MLA guidelines.

Office hours: If you feel lost, confused, overwhelmed, or excited about an idea *come see me*. Before you turn in your first response paper, you are **required** to visit me at least once in my office to discuss an issue or text from class, or the paper assignment itself. If you cannot make my regularly scheduled hours, please contact me and we can arrange another meeting time.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

UNIT I: Approaches to Reading Literature		
Week 1		
Date	In-Class Activities	Homework Due
W 1/21	Introduction	
F 1/23	Questions: What does “America” mean? What tensions do these texts incorporate into its definition?	Frederick Jackson Turner, <i>from</i> The Significance of the Frontier in American History “Declaration of Independence” <u>Recommended:</u> Asa C. Matthews, “The United States of the Americas”
Week 2		
M 1/26	Reading non-fiction	“The Cherokee Memorials” “Declaration of Sentiments” <i>*Extra credit - Post responses to these readings on Moodle by 7:30 pm on January 25th for today’s class.</i>
W 1/28	Reading poetry Group A	Langston Hughes, “Let America be America Again” Angel Island Poems, “The Ox Poem” Ana Castillo, “Women Don’t Riot” Mohja Kahf, “Hijab Scene # 7” <u>Recommended:</u> See Angel Island website: < http://www.paperson.com/poems.htm >
F 1/30	Reading drama Group B	Susan Glaspell, “Trifles” Assignment: write a short (~2 double-spaced pages) draft of your own short story based on “Trifles,” bring in 3 copies.
Week 3		
M 2/2	What do you think is the difference between drama and fiction?	“Jury” (Handout)
W 2/4	Group C	Dr. Seuss, <i>Butter Battle Book</i> (Handout) Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Military-Industrial Complex Speech” <u>Recommended:</u> Also watch clips of Eisenhower’s speech on youtube
F 2/6	In-class Anthology Investigation. *Test 1*	“Table of Contents” and “Chapter One” from <i>Literary Value / Cultural Power</i> Mark Twain, “Fennimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses” (first 3 pages required, the rest recommended) *If you have any anthologies of American literature bring them to class

Week 4: Technological fixes and fears		
M 2/9	case study: electricity and American industrialization Group D	Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Birth-Mark" Edgar Allan Poe, "Some Words With a Mummy"
W 2/11	Group E How are America's social and scientific frontiers related?	Thomas Edison, "Electricity Man's Slave" Mark Twain, <i>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court</i> , "A Word of Explanation" - Ch.2
F 2/13	Group F	<i>Connecticut Yankee</i> , Ch. 5-6
Week 5		
M 2/16	Group A	<i>Connecticut Yankee</i> , Ch.7-10, 13
W 2/18	Group B	<i>Connecticut Yankee</i> , Ch. 22-25 * Groups must email me a list of your first, second, and third choices of anthologies to assess for their presentations.
F 2/20	Class cancelled: group Moodle chat about Anthology presentations	
Week 6: Electrocutation and the Columbian Exposition		
M 2/23	Group C	<i>Connecticut Yankee</i> , newspaper scene of Ch. 26, 39-40
W 2/25	Group D *Test 2*	<i>Connecticut Yankee</i> , Ch. 41 - end "Death by Electricity," <i>New York Times</i>
F 2/27	case study: the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition Group E	excerpts from Ida Wells-Barnett, "The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the Columbian Exposition"
Week 7: Pan-Africanism		
M 3/2	Group F	Pauline Hopkins, <i>Of One Blood</i> , Ch. I - VIII (p. 441 - 504)
W 3/4	Group A	Pauline Hopkins, <i>Of One Blood</i> , Ch. IX-XVI (p. 504-563)
F 3/6	case study: "the grid" Group B	Pauline Hopkins, <i>Of One Blood</i> , Ch. XVI - end
Week 8: Alternate Grids		
M 3/9	Group C	Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Bee Wise and Her Ways" and "Dr. Clair's Place"
W 3/11	Group D *Test 3*	D'Arcy McNickle, excerpt from <i>Wind from an Enemy Sky</i> Robert Frost, "The Line Gang" and Muriel Rukeyser, from <i>Book of the Dead</i>
F 3/13	Anthology presentation, group 1-3	

Week 9		
M 3/16	Anthology presentation, group 4-6	
W 3/18	Anthology presentation, group 7-9	<i>email me a proposal for your final Anthology Project's theme by 5pm tonight. Include a list of texts you think you want to use in your anthology, and any other relevant information you have so far.</i>
F 3/20	Class Cancelled - Enjoy Spring Break!	
Spring Break: no class from 3/20 - 3/29		
Week 10: Space - The final frontier?		
M 3/30	case study: space travel How do these stories about space travel reflect on contemporary definitions of American? Group E	<i>Garrett P. Serviss, Edison's Conquest of Mars, Chapter I-VII</i>
W 4/1s	Group F	<i>Edison's Conquest of Mars, Ch VIII-XI</i>
F 4/3	Group A	<i>Edison's Conquest of Mars, Ch XII-end</i> *Make sure you've come to talk to me about your final project by this afternoon
Week 11: Space as an Extension of the United States		
M 4/6		<i>John F. Kennedy, "We Choose to go to the Moon"</i>
W 4/8	Group B	<i>Ray Bradbury "The Taxpayer" and "The Third Expedition"</i>
F 4/10	Group C *Test 4*	Howard Nemerov, "On an Occasion of National Mourning," and "Witnessing the Launch of the Shuttle Atlantis" Ronald Reagan, "The Space Shuttle 'Challenger' Disaster"
Week 12: Social and Technological Frontiers of Today		
M 4/13	what happened to our technological sublime? What do you think are today's 'frontiers'?	'Show and Tell': Bring in something that you think represents a social or technological frontier for your generation. If you don't think any such frontiers exist, bring in evidence to prove why.
	Split day First ½:	
	last ½:	Work on Anthology Projects in class Bring in drafts and/or materials to work on your Anthology project.
W 4/15	case study: immigration to the U.S. Group D	Daniel Chacon, "Godoy Lives"
F 4/17	Group E	Eric Puchner, "Essay #3: Leda and the Swan"

Week 13: Social and Technological Frontiers Today		
M 4/20	case study: LGBTQ issues Group F Test 5	Adam Haslett, "City Visit"
W 4/22	summary discussion of today's tech. frontiers. Troubleshooting final projects.	clips from <i>The Truman Show</i>
F 4/24	Anthology Presentations 1-6	
Week 14: Your Anthologies!		
M 4/27	Anthology Presentations 7-12	
W 4/29	Anthology Presentations 13-18	
F 5/1	Anthology Presentations 19-24	
Week 15: Your Anthologies!		
M 5/4	Anthology Presentations 25-30	
W 5/6	Anthology Presentations 30-36	

Tips on how to choose quotes for each Moodle entry

- * Find a line or passage that offers a powerful statement. You are allowed to define powerful in any way you wish. Sometimes a quotation is particularly persuasive, emotional, descriptive, or meaningful-but there are all kinds of other things that set one line apart from the rest. Decide for yourself what is powerful, and then think about what makes it powerful. *Or*
- * Find a line or passage that helps you understand this text. *Or*
- * Find a line or passage that confuses you. You find yourself wondering if you might understand the whole text better if you could make sense of this part *Or*
- * Find a line or passage that reminds you of another text (or “voice”) from our class readings or your own experience with American Literature. (How is this similar to or different from the other, and how can that comparison or contrast contribute to our understanding of the conversation.) *Or*
- * Find a line or passage that demonstrates a noteworthy way of connecting with and persuading the audience. *Or*
- * Find a line or passage which made a strong impression on YOU. It could be something you seriously disagree with; if so, go ahead and counter the argument. On the other hand, if it's something you like, is this something you want to remember and/or live up to in your own life? Would your life be any different if you do?

REMEMBER: This is a list of suggestions to help you identify the quotations for your commonplace books. You don't have to follow all of these suggestions in each log. If you did, we'd all be worn out.