

**English 238: Introduction to American Literature
Spring 2017, T/R 12:30-1:45 p.m., 120 Simpkins Hall**

Professor: Dr. Timothy Helwig

Office: 010 Simpkins Hall

Office Phone: 298-1213

Office Hours: T/R, 11:00-12:00; W, 1:00-3:00; and by appt.

Email: TW-Helwig@wiu.edu

Course Objectives

In 1782, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur confidently asserted, “We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed; we are the most perfect society now existing in the world.” Published just one year after the end of the American Revolution, *Letters From an American Farmer* captures the hope and enthusiasm of a young republic, and inaugurates some of our most enduring American mythologies: America as a pastoral ideal, America as a classless society, America as a racial melting-pot, and America as a land of limitless opportunity. And yet given the realities of the displacement of Native peoples, the systematic enslavement of Africans, and the indentured servitude of European immigrants in early America, Crèvecoeur’s idealism appears at best naïve.

In this survey course of American literature from its Puritan origins to the present, we will study how diverse writers represented, challenged, and helped to create the dominant cultural mythologies that remain powerfully influential in our nation today. During the semester we will read a wide array of American authors, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Emily Dickinson, Harriet Jacobs, Henry James, Charles Chesnutt, Ernest Hemingway, and Raymond Carver. Through guided discussion and independent research, we will strengthen our ability to read and write critically about literary texts, and we will gain a deeper appreciation of American literary history as a rich terrain of contested values that can help us to understand who we are today.

Required Texts

Baym, Nina, and Robert S. Levine, eds. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Shorter Eighth Edition, 2-Volume Set. New York: W.W. Norton, 2013.

NOTE: All additional texts are available as PDFs on our Western Online course site and are listed as (WO) on our reading schedule.

Course Policies

1a. Attendance and Class Participation. Although I will provide background and context for our reading at the start of each class period, the course will rely upon your active participation, including your own analysis and exploration of our texts. Because our class discussions depend upon everyone’s thoughtful contributions, it is essential that you maintain regular attendance and that you come prepared to discuss the reading material each day. Each student is allowed *four* absences total in this skills course. I do not expect or require students to explain nor document these absences, and I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Students who have

five absences will receive an automatic “0” for their class participation grade (10% of your final grade in the course). Students who have six or more total absences will receive an automatic F for the course. Finally, chronic tardiness and/or absenteeism will negatively affect your class participation grade, so please arrive promptly to class.

1b. Laptop and Cellphone Policy. Typing on a laptop or texting on a cellphone is distracting to me and to your peers. Therefore, unless you have a documented reason that permits the use of a laptop for note taking, you are not permitted to use a laptop during class. Cellphones, which can play a valuable role in the event of an emergency, should be set to vibrate at the beginning of class. Cellphone texting during class is strictly prohibited and will result in dismissal from the classroom and the loss of a full letter grade of class participation for each infraction following an initial warning. In the event of a personal emergency, please excuse yourself from the classroom to use your cellphone.

2a. Essay Assignments. Over the course of the semester, you will write two essays in response to specific prompts. Each essay must develop a clear thesis statement and include appropriately documented evidence from the texts you are analyzing. Essays that are not turned in by the deadline will be docked one full letter grade for each class period that passes without submission; essays more than three class periods late will receive a “0.” Finally, as a condition for passing this course, both essays must be turned in no later than the start of our final exam.

2b. Electronic Submission. Essays will be submitted electronically on Western Online, and the assignment sheets will review how to submit your essays. If you are unsure about how to submit your essay, please speak with me well before the due date. Because you will submit essays electronically, you should save your work in several formats (on a hard drive, on a flash drive, by emailing the essay to yourself). Technology problems are not an excuse for submitting an essay late. You will submit your essays as Word files (.doc or .docx); essays submitted in any other file format or corrupted files will be returned to you and considered late until resubmitted as a Word file.

3. Western Online Discussion Posts. Five times this semester, you will be asked to complete a short writing assignment related to that week’s reading and to post your response of 200-250 words to Western Online by the deadline. Each discussion post is worth 3% of your final course grade and must be submitted on time to receive credit. Each discussion post will be graded on a scale of 0-25, as per the rubric provided for you on our Western Online course space.

4. Academic Integrity. Academic integrity is an important part of our intellectual community at Western Illinois University; therefore, acts of plagiarism and cheating will result in failure for the course and referral for academic discipline. Please review the university’s Student Academic Integrity Policy online at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>.

5. Exams. You will have a mid-term exam and a cumulative final exam in this course.

6. Quizzes, which cannot be made up due to an absence or tardiness, may occur at the start of any class. Each of the twelve quizzes will consist of three questions about the day’s reading assignment. At the end of the semester, I will drop your two lowest quiz scores.

7. Office Hours and Email. Over the course of the semester, you are encouraged to visit me during my office hours. They are available to you to use without setting up an appointment, although you are welcome to set up an appointment, too. If you are not able to meet during my office hours, please email me to set up an appointment. The best way to keep in touch with me during the semester is by email: I will respond to email inquiries within 48 hours. Over email you may make appointments to meet with me and you may ask questions regarding the assignments.

8. University Writing Center. The University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available at the University Writing Center is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The University Writing Center is located on the 3rd Floor of Malpass Library and in satellite centers in Simpkins, Bayliss, and Tanner. Call 309-298-2815 for an appointment, and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.

9. Disability Support Services: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.

10. University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php. If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: <http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php>.

11. Please review your **Student Rights and Responsibilities** online at www.wiu.edu/provost/students, and see me if you have any questions.

Breakdown of Final Grade

15% Essay #1
15% Essay #2
15% Mid-Term Exam
20% Final Exam
15% Western Online Discussion Posts
10% Class Participation
10% Quizzes

+/- Grading Scale

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

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Please note that the assignments are subject to change based upon the needs of our class, and that you are responsible for keeping apprised of announced changes in the schedule.

WEEK ONE

- 1/17 **VOLUME ONE.** Introduction: John Winthrop's "A City Upon a Hill," p. 101.
- 1/19 "Beginnings to 1700," pp. 3-17; "The Iroquois Creation Story," pp. 21-23, and William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, pp. 74-90. **Student Questionnaire Due on Western Online.**

WEEK TWO

- 1/24 **Western Online Discussion Post #1 Due.** Mary Rowlandson, *Captivity Narrative*, pp. 127-143; Benjamin Franklin, "Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America," pp. 244-247.
- 1/26 J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, pp. 309-323; Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," p. 403.

WEEK THREE

- 1/31 Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly*, pp. 414-443.
- 2/2 "American Literature, 1820-1865," pp. 445-463, and Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle," pp. 470-482.

WEEK FOUR

- 2/7 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, pp. 508-511, "The American Scholar," pp. 536-549, and "Self-Reliance," pp. 549-566.
- 2/9 **Western Online Discussion Post #2 Due.** Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," pp. 605-614, and "The Minister's Black Veil," pp. 636-645.

WEEK FIVE

- 2/14 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven," pp. 688-691, "Annabel Lee," pp. 691-692, and "Ligeia," pp. 692-701.
- 2/16 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," pp. 702-714.

WEEK SIX

- 2/21 Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature, pp. 761-769; Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, pp. 1128-1153.
- 2/23 Herman Melville, *Benito Cereno*, pp. 1154-1183; Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?", pp. 1002-1005.
- 2/26 **Essay #1 Due by 11:59 p.m. on Western Online.**

WEEK SEVEN

- 2/28 Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," pp. 1102-1128.
- 3/2 **Class canceled: Western Online Discussion Post #3 Due.**

WEEK EIGHT

- 3/7 Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," pp. 1069-1073, and Emily Dickinson, "Because I could not stop for Death—" and "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—," pp. 1206 and 1213. Mid-Term Exam Review.
- 3/9 **Mid-Term Exam**

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 13-17—NO CLASSES

WEEK NINE

- 3/21 **VOLUME TWO.** "American Literature, 1865-1914," pp. 3-16; Walt Whitman, "The Wound-Dresser," pp. 71-73, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," pp. 73-79, and "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (WO).
- 3/23 **Western Online Discussion Post #4 Due.** Henry James, "Daisy Miller," pp. 327-365.

WEEK TEN

- 3/28 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," pp. 485-497.
- 3/30 **Class canceled.**

WEEK ELEVEN

- 4/4 Mark Twain, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," pp. 101-105, and Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," pp. 584-600.
- 4/6 Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, pp. 449-457; W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 533-547; and Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Wife of His Youth," pp. 465-473.

WEEK TWELVE

- 4/11 "American Literature, 1914-1945," pp. 653-670; Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," p. 739; Wallace Stevens, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," p. 769; and T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," pp. 822-825 (WO—illustrated version).
- 4/13 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Mother to Son," and "I, Too," pp. 1038-1040; Claude McKay, "If We Must Die," pp. 928; and Helene Johnson, "Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem" (WO).

WEEK THIRTEEN

- 4/18 F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Winter Dreams," pp. 965-980, and Ernest Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," pp. 1021-1037.
- 4/20 **Western Online Discussion Post #5 Due.** William Faulkner, "Barn Burning," pp. 1004-1016, and Richard Wright, "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," pp. 1061-1069.

WEEK FOURTEEN

- 4/25 "American Literature Since 1945," pp. 1071-1083; Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," p. 1196; and Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People," pp. 1340-1353.
- 4/27 John Cheever, "The Swimmer," pp. 1179-1186; Louise Erdrich, "Captivity" (WO); and Pat Mora, "La Migra" (WO).

WEEK FIFTEEN

- 5/2 Raymond Carver, "Cathedral," pp. 1495-1505, and Michael S. Harper, "American History" (WO).
- 5/4 **Essay #2 Due by 11:59 p.m. on Western Online.** Final Exam Review.

FINAL EXAM

- 5/9 **Final Exam from 1:00-2:50 p.m. in 120 Simpkins Hall.**