

English 342
An Introduction to American Literature

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*O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues!
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.*
—Walt Whitman, from *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

Overview: This course is an intensive introduction to American literature from its origins to the contemporary period. Throughout the semester, we will explore how the various—and often conflicting—voices that compose this tradition imagine “America,” and the possibilities and problems that this designation represents. Following a roughly chronological path through approximately four centuries of material, we will begin by examining the ways in which language, both written and spoken, shaped the founding and development of the new nation as well as debates about the kinds of people who ought to govern it. After studying the establishment of a supposedly distinctive literary tradition, which we have come to know as the American Renaissance, we will turn our attention to the problems of disunion, equality, rights, and slavery that led to the Civil War. As we consider the reunited nation that emerged from this internal conflict, we will focus on genre, exploring the ways in which American writers have experimented with form in their engagements with questions of gender, race, and ethnicity, from the Harlem Renaissance to the contemporary period. We will read texts both by authors familiar (such as Emerson, Douglass, and Faulkner) and less familiar (such as David Walker, Anzia Yezierska, and Maxine Hong Kingston), and we will pay special attention to the multiple forms—poetry, political documents, sermons, letters, and war narratives, to name just a few—that constitute imaginative production in the United States. Throughout the term, we will interrogate the selection and categorization of the texts on the syllabus, with a view toward the manifold ways of imagining “America.”

Objectives: The primary aim of this course is to introduce you to the major texts and themes in American literature and to provide you with tools for interpreting and analyzing these works and ideas. To this end, you will:

- practice the skills of close reading, study important historical contexts, and learn and apply key literary terminology (e.g. gothic and postmodern) and theoretical concepts (e.g. jeremiad and republican virtue);
- use these skills, terms, and concepts to interrogate the organization of our course texts and to propose alternative groupings and genealogies;
- cultivate your ability to formulate a compelling argument about a literary text and support this argument with evidence of various kinds and analysis; and
- lay the foundation for the future study of American literature, through other English courses, independent study, and possibly graduate-level work.

Required Texts (be sure to purchase the specific edition of the *Heath* listed below):

- *The Heath Anthology of American Literature: Concise Edition*, gen. ed. Paul Lauter. New York: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2004. ISBN 0618256636
- Additional readings available on SharePoint (print hard copies for yourself)

Recommended Texts/Resources (available in the library and/or online):

- *A New Literary History of America*, ed. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012)
- *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Available online at: www.oed.com
- *America: History and Life*. Available online at: <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search/advanced?sid=97a485b9-6859-47b6-af28-3e8491695ff1%40sessionmgr12&vid=1&hid=13>
- *MLA International Bibliography*. Available online at: <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search/advanced?sid=3b4e29e8-f296-4e45-94d1-9409ceac689f%40sessionmgr14&vid=2&hid=13>
- Lexis-Nexis Academic (news and legal archive). Available online at: <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>
- Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXERCISES

Participation: This course requires your active, informed, and energetic participation. Participation counts for 20% of your final grade (as much as the final essay), and as such it will have a significant impact on your overall course performance. You will receive feedback about your class participation at the midpoint of the term. Besides attending all class meetings and bringing the appropriate materials to class (e.g. readings, essays), to receive a strong participation score you must also contribute in a meaningful way to the discussion in every class session. To “contribute in a meaningful way” signifies to answer a question, ask an informed question, respond to a colleague’s point, or put forth your own idea, and in so doing to move our conversation forward. In other words, both the quantity and the quality of your contributions matter. In order to focus your thoughts, be sure to review the Guiding Question posted on our SharePoint site before each class session. At a minimum, you should be prepared to respond to this question. Your comments should emerge from your engagement with the readings, and thus you should be able to refer to specific page numbers to support your points. So that we can engage in genuine face-to-face discussions, laptops are prohibited unless a special class activity requires their use.

Terms and Concepts Wiki: Working in collaboration with a group of your classmates, you will create and maintain a wiki that tracks the key terms and concepts we explore in class, recording their definitions and applying them to authors and texts in ways that move beyond our discussions. For example, you might ask: if we read Thoreau’s *Walden* as a “declaration of independence,” how does this change our understanding of Jefferson’s text and even the definitions of “liberty” and “slavery”? You will be expected to record one entry for each term we cover. Each entry should be approximately 200 words long, and should be written in complete sentences. Your group’s wiki will be evaluated at the midpoint of the course and again at the end of term. This assignment is designed to help you prepare for the final essay and especially the final exam (see below), which will require you to propose original ways of organizing and categorizing the texts we have studied together.

Text and Context Exercises: Our course texts cannot be divorced from their social contexts: that is, the historical events to which they allude and the political and cultural concerns with which they are engaged. On two occasions throughout the term, you will identify a context for one of the works on our syllabus and explore how that context illuminates or complicates our understanding of the work. For one of the exercises, you will pursue a context specific to the historical period of the text (e.g., the meaning of “race” in Wheatley’s poetry); for the other, you will meditate on the way a work’s ideas, questions, or problems have been taken up in the contemporary United States (e.g. Ronald Reagan’s allusion to Winthrop’s “city on a hill”). In both cases, you will complete a Text/Context Tool, and post this document to the Text/Context Archive section of our SharePoint site. While you will not formally present your findings, you will share your insights on the day we discuss your texts in class and thus help to deepen our discussion. You will sign up for your texts early in the term. These exercises will be assessed as part of your participation grade.

Essays: You will write two essays for this course: a close reading paper (3-4 pages) in which you trace the meaning and resonances of a word or a pair of words across any two texts on the syllabus; and a final paper (5-6 pages) in which you develop an original argument about how a work *not* listed on our syllabus—a play, a novel, or a collection of poems—fits into the literary tradition we have traced in the course. You will choose your text for the final essay early in the term, and you will submit a proposal later in the semester that outlines your intended focus.

Final Exam: This course has a cumulative final exam that will provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate your mastery of the texts, terms, and ideas we have studied throughout the semester. The exam will ask you to define and apply in innovative ways key terms and concepts; forge formal and thematic connections across the texts on our syllabus; and sketch out a unique genealogy of the American literary tradition. We will devote some time toward the end of the semester to practicing for the exam, but know that the best way to prepare for this final exercise is to complete all of the reading assignments, participate actively in our class conversations, and compose detailed, innovative wiki entries.

Assessment: Your performance in this class will be based on the quality of your two essays and your wiki project, as well as on the strength of your class participation, which includes your text/context exercises, and the exam you will complete at the end of the term. All written work will be assessed based on the *clarity*, *complexity*, and *precision* of the *argument*, *evidence*, and *analysis* you put forth. Your final grade will be calculated according to the percentages outlined below.

Grading Breakdown

Before PROG

Terms and Concepts Wiki I: 10%

Participation: 10%

Essay 1 (3-4 pp.): 15%

After PROG

Terms and Concepts Wiki II: 10%

Participation: 10%

Essay 2 (5-6 pp.): 20%

Final Exam: 25%

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

Course SharePoint Site: Announcements, questions to guide your reading of the assigned texts, electronic versions of course documents, and other useful information will be available on our SharePoint site, which you can reach at:

<http://eis.usafa.edu/academics/english/courses/342/default.aspx>.

Communication: E-mail is an official mode of correspondence for this class. As such, you are responsible for all communiqués I send to your USAFA e-mail address. E-mail is also the best way for you to contact me.

Extra Instruction: I am available for extra instruction should you need it. Send me an e-mail, and we will work together to arrange a meeting at a mutually convenient time. Please note that while I will not review complete essay drafts, I will gladly listen to your ideas and help you to think through the steps of your argument or a particularly challenging paragraph or two. Should you wish to have someone review a draft of your paper, please visit the Writing Center. Be sure to seek any assistance you may need well in advance of paper deadlines.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments outlined below on the course calendar will be discussed in class on the day on which they are listed. Most readings are in the *Heath Anthology*; the relevant page numbers are listed on the schedule below next to the letter “H.” All other readings are available on our SharePoint site within the Additional Readings tab and are marked as “SP” below. Please read the assigned piece(s) by this date, review the guiding question posted on SharePoint, annotate key passages in the text, and come prepared to engage in a lively discussion about the text(s). Note that electronic versions of our readings are not permitted; you must bring a paper copy of whatever work(s) we are discussing with you to class.

Writing Assignments: Unless otherwise noted, all written work is to be submitted in hard copy form at the beginning of the class session in which it is due. Please submit all your major essays in the folder that I will give to you, and keep your papers in this folder until the end of the term. Late assignments will be penalized. Because of the frequent writing assignments required for this course, and so that I can return your graded work promptly, extensions will not be granted except under extraordinary circumstances. Only typed papers will be accepted; please double space your essays, set your margins to one inch, and use a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) at the 12 pt. size. Number your pages in the upper right-hand corner, only print on one side of each page, and staple your essay before turning it in. Be sure to give your paper a provocative title that speaks to the essay’s argument (e.g. not “Essay 1”). Finally, follow MLA guidelines; for details, see our SharePoint site.

Documentation and Academic Integrity: Crucial guidelines and resources regarding documentation standards for your written work and the Dean’s policy on academic integrity are posted on our SharePoint site under “Documentation Resources.” Be sure to review these items. You are required to abide by these regulations; failure to do so will hurt your grade and may cause you to commit plagiarism inadvertently.

COURSE SCHEDULE

<u>Class</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
1	Mon 7 Jan	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Toby Keith, “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)” (lyrics on handout)</p> <p>Nas, “America” (lyrics on handout)</p>
I. Encounters		
2	Wed 9 Jan	<p>“Creation of the Whites” (Yuchi) (H 14-16, 40)</p> <p>Handsome Lake (Seneca), “How America Was Discovered” (H 363-365)</p> <p>John Smith, from <i>The Generall History of Virginia, New-England and the Summer Isles</i> (H 125-132)</p>
3	Fri 11 Jan	Mary Rowlandson, from <i>A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson</i> (H 206-232)
4	Tues 15 Jan	J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Letters I, II, III, IX (H 435-453) and XII (SP), from <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i>

II. Revolution; or, Slavery and/vs. Freedom

5	Thurs 17 Jan	<p>Thomas Jefferson, draft of the Declaration of Independence, from <i>Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson</i> (H 478-484); Query XIV “Laws” (SP) and Query XVIII “Manners” (H 495-496), from <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i></p>
<i>Martin Luther King Jr. Day</i>		
6	Tues 22 Jan	<p>Phillis A. Wheatley, “To Maecenas” (H 569-572); “To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c.” (H 572-573); “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (H 575); “To His Excellency General Washington” (H 577-578)</p>
7	Thurs 24 Jan	<p>David Walker, from the <i>Appeal... To the Coloured Citizens of the World</i> (H 801-812)</p> <p>Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” (H 866-867, SP)</p>

III. Self, God, and Governance in America

- 8 Mon 28 Jan John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity” (H 147-157)
Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”
(H 315-317, 328-339)
- 9 Wed 30 Jan Anne Bradstreet, “The Prologue” (H 187-190); “The Author
to Her Book” (H 190); “To My Dear and Loving Husband”
(H 194); “A Letter to Her Husband, Absent upon Public
Employment” (H 195); “Upon the Burning of Our House
July 10th, 1666” (H 197-198)
- 10 Fri 1 Feb Abigail Adams, letter to John Adams, March 31, 1776 (H
471-472, 473-474)
John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776 (H 474)
Publius, *Federalist* 10 (H 503-504, SP)
Preamble to the United States Constitution (SP)

IV. In Search of an “American” Literature: Some Candidates

- 11 Tues 5 Feb Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar” (H 689-91,
694-706); “The Poet” (SP); “Days” (H 726)
- 12 Thurs 7 Feb Walt Whitman, from the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* (H 1209-1276)
- 13 Mon 11 Feb **Due: Essay 1**
- 14 Wed 13 Feb Nathaniel Hawthorne, “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” (H
953-967)
- 15 Fri 15 Feb Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (H 988-
990, 1001-1014); “The City in the Sea” (SP)

Presidents’ Day

- 16 Wed 20 Feb Henry David Thoreau, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived
For” (H 749-751, 765-775); “Higher Laws” (H 775-782);
and “Conclusion” (H 792-800), from *Walden, or Life in the
Woods*

NCLS

- 17 Tues 26 Feb Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (H 1055-1083)
- 18 Thurs 28 Feb **Due: Terms and Concepts Wiki I**

V. The Civil War and Its Aftermath

- 19 Mon 4 Mar Abraham Lincoln, Address at the Dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery (H 834-836); Second Inaugural Address (H 836-837); Samuel Langhorne Clemens (Mark Twain), “The War Prayer” (H 1359-1361, 1399-1401)
Due: Final Paper Text Selection
- 20 Wed 6 Mar Emily Dickinson, “I reckon—when I count at all—” (H 1295-1297, 1305-1306); “Publication—is the auction” (H 1309-1310); “Death sets a Thing Significant” (SP); “I’m ceded – I’ve stopped being Their’s” (SP); “Color – Caste – Denomination” (SP); “It feels a shame to be Alive—” (SP); “Mine – by the Right of the White Election!” (SP)

Recognition Training

- 21 Mon 11 Mar W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” (H 1747-1754); “Of the Dawn of Freedom” (SP); and “The Sorrow Songs” (SP), from *The Souls of Black Folk*
- 22 Wed 13 Mar Stephen Crane, *The Monster* (H 1555-1556, SP 9-30)
- 23 Fri 15 Mar Crane, *Monster* (SP 30-65)

VI. Writing Realism(s)

- 24 Tues 19 Mar William Dean Howells, from *Criticism and Fiction* (H 1443-1444, SP); “Mr. Charles W. Chesnut’s Stories” (SP)
Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Sheriff’s Children” (H 1405-1406, SP)
- 25 Thurs 21 Mar Henry James, “The Art of Fiction” (H 1454-1456, SP); “The Beast in the Jungle” (SP)

Spring Break

- 26 Mon 1 Apr Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wall-Paper” (H 1596-1609)

VII. Modernism in Black and White

- 27 Wed 3 Apr Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro” (H 1831-1833); “A Pact” (SP)
William Carlos Williams, “Spring and All” (H 1850-1852,

1853-1854); “The Red Wheelbarrow” (H 1856)
 Wallace Stevens, “The Snow Man” (H 1954-1955, 1958-1959)
 Marianne Moore, “The Fish” (H 1944-1945, SP)

- 28 Fri 5 Apr Alain Locke, preface to *The New Negro* (H 1987-1996)
 Jean Toomer, “Portrait in Georgia” (H 1997-1998, SP)
 Langston Hughes, “I, Too”(H 2006-2007, 2010); “Dream
 Variations” (2010-2011); “Harlem” (H 2011)
 Claude McKay, “If We Must Die” (H 2043, 2044); “America”
 (H 2045)
- 29 Tues 9 Apr William Faulkner, “That Evening Sun” (H 1960-1961, SP)
- 30 Thurs 11 Apr **Due: Final Paper Proposal (3 copies)**

VIII. Boundaries and Borders

- 31 Mon 15 Apr Randolphe Bourne, “Trans-National America” (2052-2065)
 Anzia Yezierska, “America and I” (H 2065-2073)
- 32 Wed 17 Apr Gloria Anzaldúa, Preface; “The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro México*”; and “*La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness*,” from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (H 2491-2492, SP)

IX. War, Conflict, and Postmodern Protest

- 33 Fri 19 Apr Alan Ginsberg, “Howl” (H 2352, 2367-2375); “America” (H 2375-2377); “A Supermarket in California” (SP)
- 34 Tues 23 Apr Michael Herr, from *Dispatches* (SP)
- 35 Thurs 25 Apr Elizabeth Bishop, “12 O’Clock News” (H 2299-2301, SP)
- 36 Mon 29 Apr **Due: Terms and Concepts Wiki II**

X. Language, Memory, and Power

- 37 Wed 1 May Maxine Hong Kingston, “No Name Woman” (H 2476-2485)
- 38 Fri 3 May Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck” (H 2346-2349);
 “Power” (H 2349-2350); “Not Somewhere Else, but Here”
 (H 2350-2351); “XIII (Dedications),” from “An Atlas of
 the Difficult World” (SP)

