

# Marygrove College

## ENGLISH 311: AMERICAN LITERATURE II

Winter 2012, MW 4:30-5:45, MC 291

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

English 311 is a survey of literature produced by (roughly) twentieth-century American writers who articulate some of the contesting ideologies that influence attitudes and behavior in the modern United States. The primary aim of the course is to introduce you to a selection of works of American literature and to help you learn to read them closely—with respect to both content and form—within their historical and social contexts. We will concentrate on these fundamental issues:

- the relationship between humanity and nature
- the relationship between the individual and the society
- the nature of the human self and the possibility for human control over events and outcomes
- beliefs about God or a principle of universal order
- attitudes about race and ethnicity
- attitudes about gender roles and sexuality
- attitudes about money and class
- considerations about place: cities and towns, farms and forests, rivers and seas

This course is designed to realize all three major goals of the College mission: to develop in students the skills necessary to understand and participate effectively in the world; to foster in students the compassion to care about and respect the worth and dignity of people; and to promote the commitment to act responsibly for the building of a more just and humane world.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the ideas and attitudes of writers of the US and to study the ways that their choices of words, themes, and genres reflect the contesting values influencing American culture.
2. To increase your sophistication as a critic of American culture, values, and policies based on the issues raised in the work of modern American writers.
3. To provide occasions for class discussion and negotiation about assigned texts as well as for independent scholarship, analysis, and interpretation.
4. To sharpen your abilities to develop responses to assigned literature, and communicate those responses to others using appropriate evidence.
5. To increase your sophistication of style, organization, and development in writing and speaking critically about literature.
6. To gain confidence in your ability to read, analyze, discuss, and write about literature.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

1. The following required books are available for purchase in the bookstore:  
Baym, Nina, et al., eds. *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol 2. Shorter 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (2007)  
Jen, Gish. *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996)
2. Additional readings will be provided in class and/or on our Blackboard course site.
3. You will need a good college dictionary (*American Heritage* and *Webster's Collegiate* are adequate choices).

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

**1. Weekly Blackboard responses (10%).** Prior to each class, you will post a short response (about one page, double-spaced, in typescript) on our online Blackboard discussion forum taking up some aspect of the required reading that particularly engaged you. Be sure to reference specific passages from the reading in articulating your thoughts and questions. Blackboard responses should be posted \*no later than 4 pm\* each class day.

**2. Midterm and final exams (50%: each 25%).** Periodically throughout the course, you will be asked to demonstrate your close-reading and critical thinking skills on an exam. Though the majority of each exam will take place in class, there will also be a take-home essay portion as well. Additional details TBA.

**3. One formal essay (25%).** Due to the nature of a survey course, we can only hope to scratch the surface of available texts or do justice to those authors whom we will be reading. To compensate for whatever might be omitted, students should adopt an author and a text by that author for close study during the semester. The author should be one assigned in the syllabus, but the text should be a substantial work (or works, if you so choose) NOT assigned in the syllabus. This assignment gives you the opportunity to broaden your understanding about that author and text(s), and report on this process in a paper. A thesis statement of significant critical insight should be carefully and logically developed throughout the paper. "Broadening your understanding" about the texts should include consulting secondary sources, since researching what other scholars have to say helps you think more—or differently—about the texts you have read. Useful questions to ask yourself are these: What is my main interest or point of contact with this author or texts? What do I think about my texts after having read what secondary sources say? The essay should be about 6-8 pages, should have a works cited page, and should follow the MLA style for format and citations. It will be evaluated on the intellectual significance of its thesis, the clarity and thoroughness of its development, and the extent to which it adheres to mechanical and editing conventions.

**4. Attendance and participation (15%)** in all class discussions and activities.

## COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1. Attendance is mandatory. Come to every class and come on time. In a discussion-based class, the process of critical thinking and collective inquiry is as important as the conclusions reached. Therefore, in order to be successful in this course, it is essential that you attend class AND participate. If you are not able to attend, you are responsible for material missed, so make a friend on the first day that you can call to find out what we covered. Understand, however, that no summary of a discussion can replace your own participation in the classroom learning process.
2. If I detect a pattern of absence, I will contact the Dean and your advisor in order to recommend that you withdraw from the course. You cannot pass the course if you demonstrate an extensive pattern of absence.
3. We will usually begin with a check-in round, in which everyone will say a few words about her/his current state of mind. Toward the end of each session, we will take time to reflect on how our seminar discussion went: what have we learned about the topic and our own group process, and why does any of this matter?
4. Using cell phones is not appropriate during class. Make sure you turn off such devices before class begins.
5. You are expected to complete all assignments on time. If you think that you will be unable to meet a deadline, talk with me ahead of time to negotiate a possible extension. Late assignments will be lowered one full letter grade. I only give make-up exams in cases of serious emergency. Your ability to meet the deadlines of this course will be factored into your attendance and participation grade.
6. Plagiarism is a serious breach of academic honesty and discipline. You are responsible for understanding and complying with the policy on plagiarism as described in the undergraduate catalog. Plagiarized assignments are given a grade of 0/E. Any student guilty of plagiarism or cheating is reported to the Dean. Such offenses may result in academic probation, suspension, and/or dismissal from the college.
7. Marygrove College maintains a supportive academic environment for students with disabilities. To ensure equal access to all educational programs, activities and services, students with disabilities should notify the college, provide documentation, and request reasonable accommodations. If you require academic accommodations in this course, you must contact Disability Support Services at 313.927.1427 to establish an accommodations plan with the coordinator; I will be as cooperative as possible in honoring your approved accommodations plan.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1	
T Jan 10	Intro and syllabus overview; getting acquainted
Th Jan 12	What is American literature? <i>Relevant readings:</i> Norton introduction (1-21); Whitman, "Song of Myself," sections: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 13, 21, 24, 27, 28, 31, 37, 39, 42, 44, 48, 49, 52; and Dickinson, "There's a certain Slant of light," "Much Madness is divinest Sense," "Tell all the truth but tell it slant"
Week 2	
T Jan 17	Realism and American experience <i>Relevant readings:</i> Twain, <i>The Adv of Huckleberry Finn</i> , ch I-XI (101-139)
Th Jan 19	Realism and American experience, cont'd <i>Relevant readings:</i> Twain, <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> , ch XII-XVIII (139-180)
Week 3	
T Jan 24	Negotiating American identity abroad <i>Relevant readings:</i> James, "Daisy Miller" (315-356)
Th Jan 26	Whose America?: regional experiences <i>Relevant readings:</i> Jewett, "A White Heron" (414-422) Freeman, "A New England Nun" (443-452)
Week 4	
T Jan 31	Whose America?: gendered experiences <i>Relevant readings:</i> Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (506-519); Chopin bio (426-428) and "Story of an Hour" (handout)
Th Feb 02	Whose America?: racial experiences <i>Relevant readings:</i> Washington, from <i>Up From Slavery</i> (452-462) Cooper, from "One Phase of American Literature" (702-704)
Week 5	
T Feb 07	Whose America?: Native experiences <i>Relevant readings:</i> Zitkala Sa, selected works (661-671)
Th Feb 09	War, industrialization, modernism <i>Relevant readings:</i> Norton intro (705-720); Stein, from <i>Tender Buttons</i> (763-775)
Week 6	
T Feb 14	Negotiating modernist poetry <i>Relevant readings:</i> Stevens, "The Emperor of Ice Cream," "Anecdote of the Jar," "On Modern Poetry"; Pound, "A Pact"; Eliot, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
Th Feb 16	Negotiating modernist poetry, cont'd <i>Relevant readings:</i> Williams, "The Young Housewife," "The Widows Lament in Springtime," "Spring and All," "The Red Wheelbarrow," "This is Just to Say"; and H.D., "Oread," "Leda," "Helen"
Week 7	
T Feb 21	The Harlem Renaissance <i>Relevant readings:</i> Selected writings by McKay, Toomer, Hughes, Cullen (poetry TBA)
Th Feb 23	The Harlem Renaissance, con't <i>Relevant readings:</i> Selected poetry TBA
Week 8	

T Feb 28	Midterm exam review
Th Mar 01	<b>*Midterm exam*</b>
Week 9 Mar 05-11	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASSES
Week 10 T Mar 13	The post-WWII decades: postmodernism, civil rights, consumerism, globalization <i>Relevant readings:</i> Norton intro (1129-42); Ellison, from <i>Invisible Man</i> (1253-1264)
Th Mar 15	Regionalism revisited: the southern gothic <i>Relevant readings:</i> O'Connor, "Good Country People" (1392-1407)
Week 11 T Mar 20	The Beat Generation: a countercultural resistance <i>Relevant readings:</i> Ginsberg, selected poems (1414-1425)
Th Mar 22	Exploring American identity: assimilation and religious difference <i>Relevant readings:</i> Roth, "Defender of the Faith" (1493-1516)
Week 12 T Mar 27	Exploring American identity: the pressures of gender roles <i>Relevant readings:</i> Plath, selected poems (1475-1483) Sexton, selected poems (1438-1443)
Th Mar 29	Exploring American identity: challenging racial assumptions <i>Relevant readings:</i> Morrison, "Recitatif" (1461-1475)
Week 13 T Apr 03	Complexities of contemporary American identity <i>Relevant readings:</i> Kingston, "No Name Woman" (1567-1577) Alvarez, from "¡Yo!" (1615-1624)
Th Apr 05	Complexities of contemporary American identity, cont'd <i>Relevant readings:</i> Selected poems of Clifton, Komunyakaa, Dove, Ríos, Erdrich, Song
Week 14 T Apr 10	A contemporary American novel <i>Relevant readings:</i> Jen, Gish. <i>Mona in the Promised Land</i>
Th Apr 12	A contemporary American novel, cont'd <i>Relevant readings:</i> Jen, Gish. <i>Mona in the Promised Land</i>
Week 15 T Apr 17	New voices in American literature <i>Relevant readings:</i> Alexie, selections (1675-81) Lahiri, "Sexy" (1681-98)
Th Apr 19	Exam review, final wrap-up, course evaluations
<b>*Friday, April 20—Public Reading by Paul Beatty, 8:00pm Alumnae Hall, Marygrove*</b>	
Exam Week T Apr 24	<b>*FINAL EXAM*</b>