

# Comprehensive Course Syllabus

## Literary Explorations I

Composition, Rhetoric, and Early American Literature

### Course Description:

In this section of Literary Explorations I, you will discover many of the important texts in American literature, from the colonial era until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Your explorations will span time and genre, from poetry and essays to short stories and excerpts from novels. You will learn and develop skills of writing, research, and rhetoric.

### Extended Course Description:

What – or who – is an “American?”

This seemingly simple question has surfaced repeatedly in the news after the 2016 election. Yet this is not the first time the country has tried to answer it. Great minds have been trying to answer this question since America’s colonial beginnings.

In this course, we will join this conversation by exploring some of the literary works – poems, essays, speeches, stories, and books – that recorded and contributed to this nation’s early history.

We will read the young writers of the new nation: poets like Longfellow, and storywriters with names like Hawthorne, Poe, and Irving. A new group of thinkers, called Transcendentalists, also arises, led by people like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and searches for an American identity that is unique from that of old Europe.

But casting a long shadow over this identity looms the institution that will divide the nation: slavery. We will read from the biographies of two former slaves, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which Abraham Lincoln said helped start the Civil War – called the “greatest single event of our history” by Nobel Prize-winning author Robert Penn Warren. We will read Lincoln’s own explanation of what the war was really about, delivered in just a few short minutes at a battlefield in Pennsylvania.

Finally, we will study the unique American voices that come to the fore in the war’s aftermath: A new style called “Naturalism,” heavily influenced by Darwin and led by writers like Jack London, emerges. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson spark the beginnings of modern poetry. And as thinkers like Booker T. Washington and WEB DuBois debate the role of Black Americans in the new century, writers like Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman critically examine the future of women.

By the end of this course, you will have a better sense of the early literature of this nation and be able to form your own ideas of what it means to be American. Along the way, you will learn many skills of writing, grammar, speaking, and argument that will help you in and out of the classroom. Perhaps most importantly, you will be able to critically read, write, and form your own thoughts about the ideas and principles that helped form this country, divided it in a bitter war, and still continue to impact us – sometimes controversially – to this day.

**Instructor:**

Dr. Kotlarczyk

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**Meeting Days, Time and Room(s)**

TBA

**Text(s) / Materials:**

McMichael, George, editor, et al. Concise Anthology of American Literature. Fifth Edition. (2001).

Note: This text will **frequently** be supplemented with online readings.

**Essential Content/SSLs and Outcomes:**

- Students will understand conventions of poetry, drama, and fiction as genres and be able to explain their uses and effects [English A.1-3, B.2-4, E.1; SSL IV.A-D].
- Students will evaluate the influence of historical context on form, style, and point of view [English A.4, A.7-8; SSL II.A].
- Students will work collaboratively to come to an understanding of readings [English A.5-6, C. 1-2, E.2, E.5; SSL I.A-B].
- Students will develop greater autonomy as readers and writers by generating and responding to their own substantive questions about authors and literary works [English B.1, D.1-3, E.3; SSL I.B].
- Students will experience writing as an incremental and recursive process by drafting, critiquing, and revising creative and expository works [C.3-5; SSL I.A, II.A, III.A, IV.A-D].
- Students will reflect upon literacy learning as a lifelong endeavor and set goals for themselves as literacy learners based on their strengths, needs, and aspirations [English E.3; SSL II.A, III.B, V.C].

**Instructional Design and Approach:**

Literature is, at its core, an articulation of the history of ideas. As such, it is both part and product of history, anthropology, philosophy, art, psychology, science, and other fields. Our examination of literature will thus study it through these various lenses, while also fostering an appreciation for its aesthetic value and approach. We will explore literature through reading, writing, discussing, researching, and – sometimes – performing it. Activities and assignments will range from individual to small group to broad class discussion. With every reading, students should challenge themselves to consider three questions: do I like this, what does this mean, and why is it important today?

**Student Expectations:**

To succeed in this class, you must: arrive on time, be prepared by having read AND prepared to discuss or ask questions about the assigned materials (not just online summaries), be active in small group **and** classroom discussion, and demonstrate originality, thorough research, and comprehensive thought on papers and assignments. Being funny doesn't hurt, either.

### Revision

You may revise up to three papers this semester, including one required revision. To do so, you must complete a “Plan for Revision” document (available on Moodle) and attach it to your original and revised drafts. The revised paper must be turned in no more than two weeks after your graded original is returned to you.

### Late Papers

I will accept, with penalty, late papers up to two weeks after the due date. In the first week, late papers receive a letter grade deduction. In the second week, late papers receive a two-letter grade deduction. **After two weeks, you will receive no credit on your paper;** you may still turn it in for feedback.

### Participation

My expectation is that, at least once per class, you voluntarily respond to a question or comment from your teacher or another student. As to why participation in class is important beyond your grade, consider these statements from some of today’s business leaders:

*“We are routinely surprised at the difficulty some young people have in communicating: verbal skills, written skills, presentation skills. They have difficulty being clear and concise; it’s hard for them to create focus, energy, and passion around the points they want to make.”*

-- Mike Summers, VP for Global Talent Management at Dell

*“I want people who can engage in good discussion—who can look me in the eye and have a give and take. All of our work is done in teams. You have to know how to work well with others. But you also have to know how to engage customers—to find out what their needs are. If you can’t engage others, then you won’t learn what you need to know.”*

-- Clay Parker, engineer and president of the Chemical Management Division of BOC Edwards

*“People who’ve learned to ask great questions and have learned to be inquisitive are the ones who move the fastest in our environment because they solve the biggest problems in ways that have the most impact on innovation.”*

-- Mike Summers, VP for Global Talent Management at Dell

All quotations taken from “Rigor Redefined” (2008) by Tony Wagner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

### Notes...

I expect you to take notes in this class. Frequently, material that comes up in class discussions will appear on exams. If I think a topic is important enough to put on the board, or to have groups research and present, it’s probably important enough to be on an exam and something I expect you to know.

### ...and Laptops

**The default position for your laptop in this class is closed.** This means, from the moment class starts, unless I ask you to use it, I don’t expect to see it open. We will use the laptops frequently for in-class work and even for online readings, but to the greatest extent possible, this will be a laptop-free class. Here’s why:

Researchers have repeatedly found that students who use laptops in class learn less than their “disconnected” peers (see Cornell’s 2003 study “The Laptop and the Lecture”). Studies at

Princeton and the University of California have found students who take notes on laptops performed worse on evaluations such as quizzes than those who took notes by hand “even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing” (“The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard,” 2014).

But laptop use in class harms more than just the user – it also negatively impacts students seated nearby. Sana, Weston, et al (2013) found that:

participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.

Therefore, I will require that you please keep your laptop closed during class unless you have been specifically asked to use it, and I would encourage you to keep it closed in other classes, as well.

If you have a special need that requires accommodation in this area, please see me.

**Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes:**

Essays/Writing	60%
Mid-Term Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%
Participation/Presentations	10%

Details of assessment will vary by assignment and be explained on individual prompts.

Items on this syllabus are subject to change.

## **Sequence of Topics and Readings**

### **Summer Reading**

Week One (short A, B): Summer Reading

### **The Puritan Imagination**

Week Two: Edwards "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Bradstreet (poetry)

### **Immigration and the Neo-Classical Mind**

Week Three (no I): Crèvecoeur, "Letters From An American Farmer," Letter III, Franklin excerpts from *The Autobiography*, Wheatley "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Freneau "On the Emigration and Peopling of the Western Country," Lazarus "The New Colossus"

### **Revolution and the Romantic Mind**

Week Four: Paine "The American Crisis," Irving "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Hawthorne "The Minister's Black Veil,"

Week Five: Poe (poetry) "To Science," "The Raven," (fiction) "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Fall of the House of Usher"

Week Six: Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Fireside Poets

### **Transcendentalism**

Week Seven (short C, no D): Emerson "Nature," "The American Scholar"

Week Eight (DIAD): Thoreau *Walden* (excerpts)

### ***Mid Term Exam***

### **Slavery, Abolition, and Civil War**

Week Nine: Stowe from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Whitman and Melville war poems, Lincoln "Gettysburg Address"

Week Ten: Legacy of the Civil War presentations

Week Eleven: Legacy of the Civil War presentations

Week Twelve: Whittier "Massachusettes to Virginia," Douglass from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Harriet Jacobs from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

### **Postwar Voices**

Week Thirteen: Whitman *Song of Myself*

Week Fourteen (A, short D only): Dickinson "I'm Nobody," "I cannot live...," "A Day," "Because I could not stop for Death," "I heard a fly buzz," "I felt a funeral in my brain"

Week Fifteen: Washington "Atlanta Exposition Address," DuBois "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," Dunbar poetry

### **Naturalism**

Week Sixteen: London "To Build A Fire," Crane "The Open Boat"

Week Seventeen: TBA

Week Eighteen: Final Exam

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