

Oakland University
College of Arts and Sciences
Fall 2018

English 3440: American Literature 1950 to the Present
MWF 12:00–1:07 Human Health Building 1006

Professor Freed
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Office Hours:
MWF 10:45–11:30
and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the Course Catalog

Studies in American fiction, poetry, and drama from 1950 to the present. Prerequisite(s): ENG 2100. (4 credits) Formerly English 321.

What’s This Course About?

In this course, we’ll place literary texts in context—both historical and aesthetic. We’ll be looking at works of fiction, poetry, and drama, as well as other, newer genres like graphic memoir and lyric essay, written between 1950 and the present. We’ll explore how these works reflect or respond to their historical moment, and how literary style evolved during this time. In particular, we’ll focus on *postmodernism*, the literary movement most strongly associated with this era, the developments that led up to postmodernism’s emergence, and the way literature today is moving forward in its wake. In doing so, we’ll think critically about the familiar account of postmodernism that scholars have constructed: that it centers on a white, male experience and excludes writers from the margins. Instead, we’ll examine a diverse body of literature from the late 20th and early 21st century to construct our own more inclusive understanding of what postmodernism is and does.

What Will I Learn?

By the end of this course, you will be able to

- Recognize key authors from the period 1950 to the present, and identify characteristic and distinctive attributes of their writing.
- Make interpretive claims about literary texts and support them using concrete textual evidence (i.e. “close reading”).

- Interpret works of literature in ways that link them to other works, and/or their larger social and historical context.
- Understand multiple definitions of postmodernism, apply them to literary texts, and evaluate their usefulness and explanatory power.
- Make persuasive arguments about literary texts, and evaluate the persuasiveness of others' arguments.
- Express ideas in writing using clear and compelling language.

OVERVIEW

Texts

Texts marked with an asterisk (*) are available for purchase at the campus bookstore, as well as elsewhere. All others will be available on Moodle as either web links or pdf files.

Literary Texts:

Alan Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California" (1956)

Philip Roth, "Goodbye Columbus" (1959)*

Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* (1964)

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)*

Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)*

Toni Morrison, "Recitatif" (1984)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (1991)*

Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers***

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)*

Secondary/Critical Texts:

Amiri Baraka, "The Revolutionary Theater"

John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion"

bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness"

Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (excerpt)

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (excerpt)

Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp"

You are welcome to read these texts in any format (hard copy or electronic) that they are available to you, as long as you can **bring them with you to class** and **readily find and take notes on specific phrases or passages**. (For more on electronic devices in class, see "Technology," below.)

**Spiegelman's graphic memoir is available only as an expensive, large-format board book. You are welcome to buy your own copy if you wish; otherwise, I will make multiple copies available on reserve at the library, and use the projector to show images for our class discussions.

Reading Quizzes (10%)

These short, multiple choice quizzes are designed to train you to read carefully and attentively, which is a necessary prerequisite for literary analysis. Reading quizzes won't be announced in advance, and can't be made up if you're absent; they are graded on a credit/no credit basis.

This semester, I will be piloting "Plickers" to capture quiz responses electronically. Plickers relies on a series of paper cards that are unique to each student (rather than a smartphone app or clicker device that you would have to purchase). I will distribute Plickers cards to each student at the start of the semester, and it is your responsibility to bring them with you to class every day.

Close Reading Assignments (20%)

These assignments will provide you with a short selection of text to analyze in approximately a paragraph. You will complete these assignments initially on Moodle, then discuss them in class with a peer review partner, before submitting a revised version to be graded. Late initial submissions will not receive the benefit of peer review; I reserve the right not to accept final submissions that are more than 48 hours late.

Papers (40%)

There will be two short (3–4 page) papers for this course, each of which invites you, in a different way, to carry out literary analysis that is meaningfully contextualized. Papers will be graded on a letter scale, and each will be worth 20% of your total course grade for the course. For each paper, I will offer a 48-hour grace period for late submissions; however, students who turn the assignment in on time will unlock the ability to revise and potentially raise their grade.

Culminating Assignment (30%)

For the culminating assignment of the course, students will choose **one** of the following three options:

- a) An in-person, timed, closed-book final exam.
- b) A revised, extended version of one of the two paper assignments.
- c) A creative writing assignment (and accompanying rationale) that will illustrate your ability to apply key concepts from the course.

More details will be provided about each assignment, and students will be asked to commit to one of the three options several weeks in advance.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance and active participation are both baseline expectations of this course, and are essential components of your learning experience. This course is primarily discussion-based; our class time will not be spent “covering” the reading, but instead actively reflecting on and building from it to construct our own understanding of the texts and the subject matter under consideration. To engage in this work successfully, and to make our class time valuable to you, you must arrive prepared, having completed all required reading assignments completely and thoughtfully, and ready to contribute to our joint enterprise. While attendance and participation are not formally graded, therefore, you should view them as essential to your success in the course.

Communication

As your teacher, I want to be a resource to you, and I’m always happy to answer questions, discuss assignments, or explore your ideas with you. My office hours, listed at the top of this syllabus, are my time to be available to you, and you can always stop by during office hours with or without an appointment; in addition, I’m happy to schedule meetings at other times as well.

Email is the most reliable way to get ahold of me outside of class, though talking in person is often easier and clearer. I do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours during the week while school is in session; I am typically away from email over the weekend.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is knowingly or unknowingly submitting another person's ideas or words as your own. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated as such. If you commit an act of academic dishonesty by plagiarizing someone's work or allowing your own work to be misused by another, you will automatically fail the assignment, and possibly the course.

Many instances of plagiarism are easier to detect than you might think: remember, reading carefully and analyzing writing in detail is what I do for a living. But more importantly, any and all plagiarism undermines the foundations of the academic enterprise. It makes the education you receive here less meaningful, and erodes the value of the degree you will earn.

I am always happy to answer questions about proper citation practices, and so are the reference librarians at the Kresge Library. For more detailed information about plagiarism, consult the University’s policy on academic conduct, which can be found at <http://www.oakland.edu/studentcodeofconduct>.

Technology

You are welcome to bring a laptop, tablet, or e-reader with you to class, but I expect you to use it only in ways that contribute to your learning (such as note-taking, consulting and annotating digital readings, viewing shared documents, or searching the web for answers to a question that emerges in our discussion). The same goes for the use of smartphones

and other connected devices. Misuse of technology in the classroom not only limits your ability to learn, but it is distracting, disrespectful, and unprofessional.

Because some students find the use of laptops distracting, we will have a “no-laptop” seating area in class. It’s up to you to make smart choices about what you need to stay focused and productive, and to be considerate of the needs of your classmates.

Late Work and Extensions

My goal in this course is to enable you to do your best work, and to give you credit for it. When it’s possible, therefore, I try to make deadlines at least somewhat flexible, within the constraints of the course schedule and the goals and requirements of the specific assignment.

In many cases, I offer a no-questions-asked grace period for late work, though students who submit assignments late may not have as many opportunities for feedback or revision. I’ve noted this in the general descriptions above, and more specifics will be included on the detailed instruction sheets for each assignment.

If circumstances in your life are making it difficult for you to complete an assignment on time, I encourage you to speak with me about it; I may or may not be able to help, but I always value having a fuller picture of your situation.

Students with Disabilities

I am committed to creating an accessible classroom and firmly believe that accommodating the learning needs of individual students improves the learning of all students. I am happy to provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities, and I will protect the confidentiality of individual students' learning needs. Please contact me within the first two weeks of the term to discuss such accommodations.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Assignments below are listed on the day they are due. Should this schedule change due to unforeseen circumstances, I will update our Moodle page and notify you of these changes in class.

Date	Assignments
Week 1	
W 9/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete the get-to-know-you survey on Moodle• Intro to the course
F 9/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California”
Week 2	

M 9/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roth, "Goodbye Columbus," ch. 1–3
W 9/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Goodbye Columbus," ch. 4–6
F 9/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Goodbye Columbus," ch. 7–8 Close Reading 1 due by 8 am
Week 3	
M 9/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baraka, <i>Dutchman</i> Revised Close Reading 1 due by midnight
W 9/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baraka, "The Revolutionary Theater" Continue discussing <i>Dutchman</i>
F 9/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion"
Week 4	
M 9/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Silko, <i>Ceremony</i>, pp. 1–34 ("not even oldtime witches killed like that.")
W 9/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ceremony</i> pp. 34–85 ("chasing some she-dog in heat.")
F 9/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NO CLASS
Week 5	
M 10/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ceremony</i>, pp. 86–142 ("It had gone below the North.") Close Reading 2 due by 8 am
W 10/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ceremony</i>, pp. 142–163 ("Come home, children, come home.") Revised Close Reading 2 due by midnight
F 10/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ceremony</i>, pp. 164–199 ("Somebody's been looking after them for you.")
Week 6	
M 10/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Ceremony</i> pp. 200–244
W 10/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fredric Jameson, <i>Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</i> (excerpt)
F 10/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> ch. 1–8
Week 7	
M 10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>White Noise</i> ch. 9–15

W 10/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Noise</i>, ch. 16–20
F 10/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Noise</i> ch. 21 • Paper 1 due by midnight
Week 8	
M 10/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Noise</i> ch. 22–26
W 10/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Noise</i> ch. 27–32 •
F 10/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Noise</i> ch. 33–40
Week 9	
M 10/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morrison, “Recitatif”
W 10/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hooks, “Postmodern Blackness” • Close Reading 3 due by 8 am
F 11/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue discussing Morrison and hooks • Revised Close Reading 3 due by midnight
Week 10	
M 11/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sontag, “Notes on Camp” • Kushner, <i>Angels in America</i>, Millennium Approaches Act 1
W 11/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Angels in America</i>, Millennium Approaches Act 2
F 11/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Angels in America</i>, Millennium Approaches Act 3
Week 11	
M 11/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Angels in America</i>, Perestroika Acts 1–2
W 11/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Angels in America</i>, Perestroika Acts 3–4
F 11/16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Angels in America</i>, Perestroika Act 5 • Paper 2 due by midnight
Week 12	
M 11/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiegelman, <i>In the Shadow of No Towers</i> Intro and pp. 1–2 • McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i> pp. 2–9
W 11/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McCloud, ch. 6 (pp. 138–161) • Spiegelman, pp. 3–10
F 11/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiegelman, “The Comic Supplement” and Plates I–VII

Week 13	
M 11/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> pp. 1–55
W 11/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rankine pp. 56–103 Close Reading 4 due by 8 am
F 11/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rankine pp. 104–161 Revised Close Reading 4 due by midnight
Week 14	
M 12/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss Culminating Assignment options
W 12/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commit to Culminating Assignment option by 8 am Group study/brainstorming in class
F 12/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrap-up and review
Finals Week	
W 12/12	Final Exam 12:00–3:00pm <i>or</i> paper/creative assignment due by midnight

GRADE SCALE

The grade scale below determines how your final course grade will be calculated. ***Please note that Oakland University has transitioned to issuing final course grades on the letter scale, rather than the 4-point scale.*** (The 4-point scale will still be used for calculating overall GPAs.)

Grade scales and rubrics for specific assignments will be distributed with the assignment itself. When an assignment is graded on a letter scale, but must be entered as a percentage in Moodle, I will use the highest percentage in the range (so a grade of B+ will be entered into Moodle as a 89%).

Percentage	Letter Grade	4-Point
93%-100%	A	4.0
90%-92%	A-	3.7
87%-89%	B+	3.3
83%-86%	B	3.0
80%-82%	B-	2.7
77%-79%	C+	2.3
73%-76%	C	2.0
70%-72%	C-	1.7
67%-69%	D+	1.3
60%-66%	D	1.0
0%-59%	F	0.0

CAMPUS RESOURCES

This is hardly an exhaustive list, but I've included a variety of resources here for your reference.

Academic Advising

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/business/undergraduate-students/advising/>

Childcare on Campus (Lowry Center)

<http://wwwp.oakland.edu/lowry/>

Counseling and Psychological Services

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/oucc/>

Disability Support Services

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/dss/>

Financial Services

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/financialservices/>

Gender and Sexuality Center

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/csa/gsc/>

Graham Health Center

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/ghc/>

OU Police

<https://oupolice.com/>

Research Support (Kresge Library)

<https://library.oakland.edu/services/you/undergraduates.html>

Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP)

<http://wwwp.oakland.edu/english/academic-programs/STEP/>

Sigma Tau Delta (International English Honor Society)

<http://wwwp.oakland.edu/english/sigmataudelta/>

Veterans Support Services

<http://wwwp.oakland.edu/veterans/>

Writing Center

<https://wwwp.oakland.edu/ouwc/>