

English 256: The Making of American Literary Culture Spring 2004
MWF 1:30-2:20 K 227 Professor Sandra A. Zagarell
Office: Rice 126; Ph: 5-8585; email: Sandra.Zagarell@oberlin.edu
Office Hours M 12-1:15, W 2:30-4:30, and by appointment
Student assistant: Cameron Wiggins
email: Kathleen.Wiggins@oberlin.edu

As a "gateway" course, "The Making of American Literary Culture" has several overlapping objectives. [1] It will introduce you to key texts, trends, writers, genres, themes, questions, concerns and problems in nineteenth-century American writing. In doing so, it will situate that writing within contemporary national and international circumstances. While historicizing is always desirable and useful, it is particularly apt for American writing of the nineteenth century, for this writing was self-consciously in conversation with the "America" in which it emerged and much of it sought to affect that "America." [2] It will attend to issues of interpretation--that is, what we do when we interpret written texts and what our choices are--and to some of the questions on which interpretation often builds, such as figurative language and "tone." [3] It will cultivate your skills as writers.

Course format and procedures, requirements and policies.

English 256 will be discussion-based, though I will lecture from time to time. Everyone's commitment to, engagement in, and ability to take part in the give-and-take of focused discussion are essential to the success of the class. That everyone does the reading and written preparation for class is axiomatic; many of the writing assignments are designed to help you get ready for discussion. I will facilitate discussion, but the consistency and caliber of your participation are vital to making the class work for you and everyone else.

Written Assignments

One premise of liberal arts education is that thinking, reading, writing, and communicating orally are often interrelated. Even though each activity requires distinct skills, many of the skills they involve also overlap. They can enrich each other. They are part of and contribute to intellectual and creative growth.

The various writing assignments for "The Making of American Literary Culture" are designed with these interrelations in mind. They are intended to encourage you to use writing as a medium for thinking--to help you formulate ideas and questions, to explore them, to develop them substantively, to present them to a reader. A number of the assignments ask you to identify questions, observations, and/or ideas you'd like to see discussed in class or to raise them in the context of an overarching theme, such as what the responsibilities and rights of an "American" were for antebellum writers. Some assignments are intended to help you cultivate specific interpretive skills. Any of the smaller writing assignments may feed into the more formal papers

you write; several assignments are specifically designed as lead-ins for these papers.

Qs. These **reading questions** are indicated on the syllabus as **Q**. Composing questions gives you an opportunity to formulate your thoughts and queries about the reading. The questions will also spark class discussion. Each question should begin by quoting something from the reading which evokes or shapes the question. Each question should be well thought out and clearly stated. The questions you pose should be questions about the reading (but not questions of fact) which you want to have addressed in class discussion. **Questions should be posted on Blackboard by 7:30 p.m. of the day before the class for which they're due.**

Ps. "Prep. papers." These longer assignments give you the opportunity for sustained exploration of an idea, concept, or question. Prep. papers are intended to stimulate your thinking and lay the groundwork for class discussion. For some Ps I give you guidelines in the syllabus; these are designated by the phrase **guided P**. Otherwise, **P** stands for an assignment in which you take up an aspect of the reading that interests/excites/puzzles/frustrates/challenges you. At the beginning of all prep. papers, guided and free choice, you should specify the aspect of the reading you'll be addressing. You should use the body of the paper to discuss this aspect in a focused manner, citing and analyzing passages, events, images, and other specific aspects of the text. Unless the course schedule specifies a length, all prep. papers should be at least one word-processed page and no more than 1 1/2; if your handwriting is legible, the hand-written equivalent will be fine. **Prep. papers should be posted on Blackboard by 7:30 p.m. of the day before the class for which they're due.**

Prospectus for paper. A prospectus serves to get your ideas for your papers flowing well in advance of the due date of a paper, to give you a medium for provisionally planning out your paper, and to allow feed-back from the class, from Cameron, and from me about your ideas and the way(s) in which you think you'll develop them. A prospectus should identify your paper's subject and probable thesis, specify the material you'll take up, and sketch out the argument you'll make. It can be a formal outline or an overview of what you think your paper will look like. Each prospectus should be one word-processed page long, give or take a line or two. I will not give you keep a grade on your prospectus until I have also seen the paper. Once I've read your paper, I'll determine the grade for the prospectus and average that into your paper grade.

Papers. Papers allow you to develop your ideas and questions in considerable depth and to hone your writing skills. You'll be writing two for English 256, one due March 26, the second due May 16 Papers should be 5-6 pages and should be about **one** text only unless you have discussed an idea involving more than one text with me and I have given you a go-ahead. We'll talk about my expectations and your

objectives for papers before the prospectus for the first paper is due.

All written assignments are governed by the Honor code. Please read the honor code, found at: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html

Remember to sign the Honor code on your assignments: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

Grading policy for late work or work not handed in. You will be penalized a grade per day (e.g. lowered from a B+ to B) for **unexcused late papers**. To get an extension you need a valid reason, which includes an illness or a family emergency, and you should ask for it at least 24 hours in advance (you can email me, or leave a note in my mailbox or under my door if I'm not in my office).

Other writing assignments will not be formally graded during the semester, though I will assess them and occasionally give you feedback. I'll assign them a composite grade at the end of the semester. **Ps and Qs** are essential preparation for class discussions and I will not accept them if they are late unless you're ill or have an emergency. I'll need written verification of the situation from a relevant authority.

Remember: Failure to hand in all written work may result in a failing grade for the course.

Attendance policy: more than three unexcused absences (absences which we discuss and I excuse) will be a reason for receiving a No Entry in the course. I will ask you for documentation from a physician or other relevant authority for absences for which you ask to be excused, preferably in advance of or on the day of the absence.

Final Grade will be based on class participation (25%), **Qs** and **Ps** (30%) and **papers** (45%).

You cannot pass the course unless you have satisfactorily completed all written work, taken part in discussion and attended the course steadily. More than three unexcused absences may result in a No Entry for the course.

We are fortunate to have Cameron Wiggins as a writing assistant for English 256. Cameron has taken a similar course with me and worked with me on devising the design and assignments for this class. A senior who is doing an honors project in Russian, she is an experienced writer who has taken "Teaching and Tutoring Writing" (an advanced course cross-listed in Rhetoric and Composition and in English) and has been a writing assistant in another course. Cameron will be taking part in our class; she and I will conduct the two writing workshops I've indicated on the course schedule. She will also be invaluable to you as you think about the topics and ideas you want to develop in papers and as you draft papers, and will be

available to discuss questions you have about writing in general or your writing in particular. You will be required to meet with her at least once during the semester to discuss one of your papers as you're writing it--we'll set up these appointments when the time comes--but, as I've suggested, you're very likely to want to meet with her at other times. She's most easily reached by email at Kathleen.Wiggins@oberlin.edu

Please also feel free to check in with me if you want feedback on your classwork, if you want to discuss paper topics in advance or your written work after I've read and commented on it, if you have other questions or concerns, or just to talk. My office hours are M 12-1:15; W 2:30-4:30 and by appointment.

Final comments. In recent years, people have sometimes gotten into the habit of coming to class late or drifting in and out to use the bathroom or for other reasons. That's disruptive and it breaks the flow of the class. Please get to class on time, and make sure you've taken care of all needs before class begins (I understand, of course, that emergencies cannot be foreseen). **You must turn off all cell phones, beepers, and the like before entering the classroom.**

Also: you must bring whatever text we're working with to class for each meeting during which we're discussing it.

CLASS SCHEDULE

The semester schedule below uses several abbreviations. Here's the key to them.

Assigned texts:

H = Heath Anthology of American Literature, Concise Edition (2004)
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Riverside Edition, Mark Twain
(The edition we're using is bundled with the Heath and is free of charge)

The Awakening, Kate Chopin

ERes = Electronic Reserve

I have also ordered, and highly recommend, a book that is assigned in excerpts but may interest you in its entirety:

Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Written assignment:

P = Prep. paper. You'll be writing 7 over the course of the semester.

Q = Study questions. You'll be writing 7 sets over the course of the semester.

All of the reading listed below is mandatory; each selection should be read in its entirety in advance of the first class during which we'll discuss it. Headnotes in the Heath Anthology on authors whose works we read will be required reading even when the texts we use by those authors are not in the Heath.

- Feb. 9 First Class
- Feb. 11 Read "Early Nineteenth Century 1800-1865 [H, 605-635].
Go to the timeline at the Heath Anthology Website and enter a date or two from this period to get a deeper sense of it. The address is: <http://college.hmco.com/english/lauder/heath/4e/students/timeline/index.html>
- Also:** Think about what literacy was and how and why it was important in antebellum America.
- Feb. 13 **Q** Steven Mailloux, "Interpretation" [ERes] and Edgar Allen Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" [H]

Representing Life in Antebellum America

- Feb. 16 Harriet Jacobs, from Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl [H, 841-860]
- Feb. 18 **Q** same as above
- Feb. 20 Herman Melville, "The Tartarus of Maids" [ERes]
Guided P Select a detail from "The Tartarus of Maids" and discuss what you take to be its implications for the work as a whole. Identify why you see the detail and the work as you do (i.e., identify your approach to interpretation in this **P**)
- Feb. 23 Thomas McLaughlin, "Figurative Language" [ERes] Emily Dickinson in **H** (specific poems TBA)
- Feb. 25 Dickinson, continued
Guided P on an image in one of the poems and how it unfolds/changes/is altered by the presence of other images.
- Feb. 27 Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" [H, Headnote on Whitman on 1209-11, and "Song. . ." (H, 1225-76]
- March 1 **P** Same as above
- March 3 Same as above

Literature and the rights and responsibilities of "An American"

- March 5 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" [H, 953-68]
- March 8 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" [H, 689-91 and 707-23]
- March 10 **P** same as above
- March 12 **Q** Henry David Thoreau, "Resistance to Civil Government" [H, 749-65]
- March 15 same as above
- March 17 Writing Workshop **PROSPECTUSES for first papers due in class: 4 copies**
- March 19 Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave" {H, 866-930]
- March 22 **P** same as above

What is an American? What is American literature? in the postbellum era

March 24 "Late Nineteenth Century: 1865-1919 [H, 1323-47]

March 26 Kate Chopin, "Desiree's Baby" [H, 1517-23]

FIRST PAPERS DUE

*** **SPRING BREAK** ***

April 5 Q Charles Chesnutt, "Po' Sandy" [H, 1405-6, 1415-22]

April 7 Read the 2 short pieces on "character" on **ERes**, one by M. H. Abrams, one by Michael McKeon (both are listed under Abrams); also read John Oskison, "The Problem of Old Harjo" [H 1429-35]

April 9 Hamlin Garland, "Up the Coule" [H, 1525-55]

April 12 M.H. Abrams on "Tone" and Voice" [**ERes**]; Henry James, "Daisy Miller: A Study" [H, 1454-95]

April 14 Continue discussion of "Daisy Miller"

Guided P on tone in "Daisy Miller"; choose a passage or aspect we did not discuss in class on April 12th

April 16 Continue discussion of "Daisy Miller"

April 19 Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Riverside edition bundled with Heath Anthology)

April 21 P continue discussion of Huck Finn

April 23 continue discussion of Huck Finn

April 26 continue discussion of Huck Finn

The Scope and Variety of Postbellum American Literature

April 28 Q Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat" [H, 1555-73]

April 30 same as above

May 3 Q Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "A New-England Nun" [**ERes**] plus headnote on Freedman in H (1642-4)

May 5 Sui Sin Far/Edith Maud Eaton, "The Americanization of Pau Tsu" and "The Wisdom of the New" [**ERes**]; headnote on Sui Sin Far in H (1670-71)

Prospectus for Second Paper due in class

May 7 Writing Workshop

May 10 Kate Chopin The Awakening (separate text)

May 12 Q " " "

May 14 " " "

May 18 Final Paper Due, 4:30, in my mailbox or under my office door. If you want the graded paper back please give me, at the same time, a stamped, self-addressed envelope. If you give me such an envelope I'll comment on the paper in addition to grading it, and send it back to you. If you don't, you'll be telling me, in effect, that you're not interested in getting comments on this paper, so I'll simply grade it.