

Versions of Classic American Literature
English 236: Gateway to the English Major

Peter Betjemann Rice 110 x5-8204 Peter.Betjemann@oberlin.edu
Office Hours MWF, 12-1:30; and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has two goals: to introduce major texts and themes in American literature, and to consider how those texts and themes have been revised, critiqued, and rewritten from different perspectives. We will pair works accorded "traditional" status with works by writers who engage and transform the terms of that tradition. Thus, for instance, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is paired with Sena Naslund's recent novel *Ahab's Wife*; Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* with Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*; the poetry of Walt Whitman with that of Allen Ginsburg; Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories with Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. Reading across literary canons and across history, this "gateway" course seeks to model the terms by which literature can be critiqued and adapted, read and re-read from various points of view and various cultural situations. Our aim will be to interrogate the meaning of the classical tradition in American Literature at the same time as we encounter the texts that constitute it.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Books – Available at Oberlin College Bookstore

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998)
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Penguin, 1982)
Ernest Hemingway, *The Nick Adams Stories* (New York: Scribner, 1995)
Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (Dover)
Allen Ginsburg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1956)
Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (New York: Owl Books, 1997)
Henry David Thoreau, *The Maine Woods* (Penguin, 1998)
Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself* (New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 2001)

Pending

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2001)
Sena Jeter Naslund, *Ahab's Wife* (New York: Perennial, 2000)

2. Electronic

Emily Dickinson, selections
W.E.B. DuBois, selections from *The Souls of Black Folk*
James Weldon Johnson, selections from *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
Sylvia Plath, selections
Adrienne Rich, selections
Henry David Thoreau, "Economy," from *Walden*
Walt Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"; "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"

REQUIREMENTS (SEE SCHEDULE, BELOW, FOR DUE DATES)

Ongoing: class participation (includes preparation, discussion, exercises) - 30% of grade

1st Writing Assignment: 2-3 page close reading of one paragraph – 10%

2nd Writing Assignment: 4-6 page paper – 20%

3rd Writing Assignment: 2-3 page paper on a visual correlative to a text – 15%

4th Writing Assignment: 6-7 page final paper – 25%

SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READING	OTHER ASSIGNMENTS
Mon, Feb 7	Introduction to Course		
Wed, Feb 9	Prologue	Irving, “Rip Van Winkle”	<u>Film:</u> Tim Burton, <i>Sleepy Hollow</i> (1999). Screening Thursday, 8:30 – or watch reserve copy
Fri, Feb 11		Irving, “Legend of Sleepy Hollow”	
Mon, Feb 14		None – discussion of Irving’s stories, Quidor’s paintings (shown in class), Burton’s film	
Wed, Feb 16	Thoreau/Dillard	Thoreau, “Economy”	
Fri, Feb 18		Dillard, <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i> , Chapters 1-3	<u>Writing:</u> 2-3 pages, analysis of an opening paragraph; include photocopy of annotated page from your text
Mon, Feb 21		Thoreau, “Ktaadn”	
Wed, Feb 23		Thoreau, “Ktaadn,” cont.	
Fri, Feb 25		Dillard, <i>Pilgrim</i> , Chapters 4-8	
Mon, Feb 28		Dillard, <i>Pilgrim</i> , Chapters 8-15	
Wed, Mar 2	Whitman/Ginsburg	Whitman, <i>Song of Myself</i> , Sections 1-23	
Fri, Mar 4		Finish <i>Song of Myself</i>	
Mon, Mar 7		Whitman, Elegies (in coursepack)	<u>Writing:</u> 4-6 pages; include one secondary source (suggested topics handed out in class)
Wed, Mar 9		Ginsburg, <i>Howl</i>	
Fri, Mar 11		None	<u>Performances:</u> <i>Song of Myself</i> and <i>Howl</i>

Mon, Mar 14	Douglass/ DuBois/Johnson	Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass</i> , Chaps. 1-3	<u>Online</u> : View slave narrative title pages and prefaces
Wed, Mar 16		Douglass, <i>Narrative</i> , Chaps. 4-6	
Fri, Mar 18		Finish Douglass	
Mon, Mar 21		DuBois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> , "Forethought" and Chaps. 1-2	
Wed, Mar 23		DuBois, Chap 13. and "Afterthought"	
Fri, Mar 25		Johnson, "Preface" and Chap. 1	<u>Writing</u> : 2-3 pages; comparison of any work and a visual correlative: painting, film, frontispiece, sculpture, etc.

****Spring Break****

Mon, Apr 4	Melville/Naslund	Melville, <i>Moby-Dick</i> , at least through Chap. 88	
Wed, Apr 6		Melville, <i>Moby-Dick</i> , cont.	
Fri, Apr 8		Melville, <i>Moby-Dick</i> , cont.	
Mon, Apr 11		Naslund, <i>Ahab's Wife</i>	<u>Writing</u> : Reading Journal on <i>Moby-Dick</i> (details in class)
Wed, Apr 13		Naslund, <i>Ahab's Wife</i>	
Fri, Apr 15		Naslund, <i>Ahab's Wife</i>	
Mon, Apr 18		Naslund, <i>Ahab's Wife</i>	
Wed, Apr 20	Dickinson/Others	Dickinson, Selections from Coursepack (Thomas Johnson edition)	<u>Film</u> : <i>The Belle of Amherst</i> , Screening Tonight 7:30; or view reserve copy
Fri, Apr 22		Dickinson, Selections from Coursepack (Mabel Loomis Todd Rewritings)	
Mon, Apr 25		Rich, Coursepack Selections	
Wed, Apr 27		Plath, Coursepack Selections	<u>Writing</u> : emerging themes; one paragraph on each of 3 possibilities for final paper sometime this week
Fri, Apr 29	Hemingway/ Palahniuk	Hemingway, <i>The Nick Adams Stories</i> ,	

Mon, May 2		Hemingway, <i>Nick Adams Stories</i>	
Wed, May 4		Finish Hemingway	
Fri, May 6		Palahniuk, <i>Fight Club</i> , Chaps. 1-9	<u>Film</u> : <i>Fight Club</i> , Screening Saturday 7:00, or view reserve copy
Mon, May 9		Palahniuk, <i>Fight Club</i> , Chaps. 10-17	
Wed, May 11		Finish <i>Fight Club</i>	
Fri, May 13	Conclusion		<u>Writing</u> : Final Paper due May 21, 6-7 pages