

SUMMER 2019 Course Descriptions

ENG 221: American Environmental Literature (Online)

Bogard

In this course we will survey the tradition of American Environmental Literature, beginning in the mid-1800s with Henry David Thoreau and moving to the present day. Our main goal will be to gain an understanding of the American Environmental Literature tradition and to examine its importance for our world—and our own lives—today. We come to our study of this literature at a particularly poignant time. The challenge of dealing with climate change is arguably the most important of the 21st century. For someone aged 18-22 (especially), this means that everything in life—employment, family, children, aging—will happen within its context. As educated citizens, we have a choice: ignore this challenge, or face it with determination and joy. Course work is made primarily of extensive reading assignments and written responses.

ENG 222, Section 4101

Martin

We will read, and discuss, stories from *The Best American Short Stories 2011*, edited by Geraldine Brooks.

The course will involve three quizzes and two exams. No papers required.

In her introduction to *The Best American Short Stories 2011*, Geraldine Brooks draws the comparison between a well-told joke and a good short story. She writes, “Each form relies on suggestion and economy. Characters have to be drawn in a few deft strokes. There’s generally a setup, a reveal, a reversal, and a release . . . In the joke and in the short story, the beginning and end are precisely anchored tent poles, and what lies between must pull so taut it twangs.”

The twenty tightly crafted stories collected here are full of deftly drawn characters, universal truths, and often, like good jokes, surprising humor. Richard Powers’s “To the Measures Fall” is a comic meditation on the uses of literature in the course of a life. In the satirical “The Sleep,” Caitlin Horrocks puts her fictional prairie town to bed—the inhabitants hibernate through the long winter as a form of escape—while in Steve Millhauser’s imagined town the citizens are visited by ghostlike apparitions in “The Phantoms.” Allegra Goodman’s spare but beautiful “La Vita Nuova” finds a jilted fiancée letting her art class paint all over her wedding dress as a poignant act of release. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wryly captures the social change in the air in Lagos, Nigeria, in her story of a wealthy young man who is not entirely at ease with what his life has become.

JMUenglish

a way of thinking

English 222: Lyric Poetry (Online)

Wrenn

This general education course is meant to introduce you to the pleasures of reading and writing about lyric poetry, which focuses on emotion rather than telling a story. William Shakespeare, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sylvia Plath, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost—they're all lyric poets, and we'll be discussing their masterpieces, along with others by the likes of Adrienne Rich, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Li-Young Lee, in order to learn the fundamentals of poetic craft and contend with some central poetic themes. At the heart of this course, though, are the vital skills of critical thinking, close reading, and empathy, and we'll be practicing them often.

ENG 235 (Online)

Rankin

This course offers a chronological survey of English literature from its earliest beginnings until the eighteenth century. Given the size of this topic, the syllabus is by necessity selective, but it will provide students with in-depth analysis of an important sampling. The goal will be to equip students with the toolkit necessary to understand this literature, and to empower their independent further reading. We will consider readings which overlap with as well as diverge from twenty-first century ways of looking at the world, and will emphasize the profound similarity as well as strangeness of the eras under investigation. In particular, the course will familiarize students with pre-Enlightenment worldviews and provide them with tools which they can use to assess the value and explanatory power of current ways of thinking. We will seek to understand the surprisingly paradoxical ways in which writers interacted with and criticized the people, ideas, and institutions which surrounded them. Writers' specific treatment of familiar themes (e.g., heroism, moral behavior, history and myth, sexuality, satire) may appear both familiar and unusual. This General Education Cluster Two course will build critical thinking skills by introducing students to methods of literary study. Students are expected to read all assigned material and attend class in order to a) hone skills in reading and interpreting literature, b) ask questions, and c) learn about the historical and literary contexts in which assigned reading was first produced. Students are expected to think about the meaning of the material as it pertains to those contexts. Completion of the course counts toward credit in Cluster 2 (Arts & Humanities) of the General Education program and the introductory survey requirement of the English major.

ENG 239 (Online)

Muhonja

This course offers an overview of African oral literatures, exploring form and style, relevance and function in specific genres including folktales, witticisms, praise poetry, children's games, and songs. Through an exploration of spiritual, social, and political themes and content of oral literature, this introductory course contextualizes orature as part of the world sense and day-to-day structures and operations of African communities. Discussed as central to oral literature will be the identities performer/creator and the audience/performer. Students will encounter the aesthetics and philosophies of African verbal art as they engage debates on orality, memorialization, and edutainment through a critical African studies lens. To ensure an experience of the performed nature of oral literature, the course will heavily incorporate the viewing and analysis of video and audio recordings of oral performances.

ENG/WGSS 368: Women and the Kunstlerroman (Online)

Thompson

This course explores women's literature through a focus on the Kunstlerroman ("artist's novel"). By drawing on relevant feminist literary criticism, we will identify the characteristics of "women's art," its suppression and expression, and its relationship to the unique experiences of women within patriarchal societies. We will also examine the politics of canon formation and consider the construction of women's identities across issues of race/ethnicity, immigration, disability, social class, sexuality, and place. This course moves very fast and covers a lot of material in four weeks: we'll be reading no fewer than five primary texts in addition to criticism. DO NOT take this course if: you are enrolled in more than one other concurrent course; if you are enrolled in another course and are working full-time; or you will be on vacation and away from your computer for more than a day.

ENG 392: Introduction to Poetry Writing (Online)

Kutchins

This creative writing course will introduce you to the art and craft of writing poetry. Our focus is your own creative process, supported and directed by close readings of accomplished published poems. An intensive 4-week, online course, you will write 4 to 5 poems a week, many of which will be assigned in response to our required readings. You will practice using the poetic tools by which poets construct effective, meaningful, and memorable poems. Through online workshops, you'll learn to provide constructive interpretation and critique of poems written by your peers in this class. And as writers in an online workshop community, you will be guided to write original poems reflecting a wide range of stylistic and thematic choices