

Bergen Community College
School of English
Department of Composition and Literature
Course Syllabus

LIT-201: American Literature to 1880

Instructor:
Office
Phone:
E-mail:
Office Hours: TBA

This course is a study of representative American literature from its origins to the late nineteenth century. Students read selections from such areas as exploration narratives and Native American poetry, and from such authors as Bradstreet, Edwards, Douglass, Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, and Whitman.

General Education Course. Lecture (3.00). Prerequisite: WRT-101.

Student Learning Objectives:

The students who successfully complete the requirements of this course will be able to:

1. Identify and discuss the themes and styles that characterize early American literature.
2. Employ close textual analysis to interpret and evaluate works of American literature.
3. Recognize the emergence of an American identity through the works of writers from diverse cultures and backgrounds.
4. Demonstrate, in both class discussion and written assignments, an understanding of the major genres of early American literature as well as the various literary techniques that writers use in constructing their texts.
5. Apply appropriate theoretical lenses to critically and analytically read works of American literature from colonization through the mid-nineteenth century.
6. Produce a properly formatted written evaluation of selected works of American literature; and demonstrate competency in both research methodologies and literary analysis.

Course Requirements:

Students will be required to do the following:

1. Analyze works of literature using a variety of approaches.
2. Participate in class activities such as discussion, writing, and presentations.
3. Write 15-20 pages or 3750-5000 words for the course. This may include the following: journals, quizzes, papers, exams, research papers, class presentation, summaries, and responses.

Sample Texts:

Melville, Herman. *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade*
The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volumes A & B

Evaluation:

Over the course of the term, you will write several short (1-2 page) response papers that will be both analytical—in terms of text and sociopolitical context—and critical. You will also be given a midterm and final exam, which will consist of a series of short essay questions to be completed at home. You will also give a short presentation on one of the texts for which you will give the class a series of discussion questions; and there will be a term paper of approximately 5-7 pages.

Response papers: 50%

Class presentation: 10%

Midterm & Final Exams: 15%

Term Paper: 25%

Attendance Policy:

Your presence is vital to our classroom community, so regular attendance is required. You will be permitted *four absences* after which your grade will be negatively affected. You are expected to come to class every day prepared to discuss assigned texts and to produce written responses both in class and at home.

A note on plagiarism: please give credit where credit is due! Honesty is expected of you. It is expected that the work you hand in will always be your own, and that you will never copy sentences, phrases, paragraphs, or whole essays from any other person's work, for that is plagiarism. If you are ever unclear about how to cite another person or author's ideas, come see me or consult the staff in the writing center.

Written assignments must be formatted according to MLA standards. You will find citation guides on our library's website. Please note that you will also be expected to produce a documented term paper with secondary sources; and you may find appropriate—relevant—resources in our library. You are encouraged to schedule an appointment with one of our reference librarians if you did not attend an instructional seminar in your writing class.

BCC's Writing Center is located in L125, and you are encouraged to work with our faculty and professional writing tutors. Please note that the center is indeed a tutoring center—you are not to drop off your paper for proofreading as this is not a function of the center.

Sample Class Schedule/Reading List (subject to change depending upon class progress):

Week 1:

Native American Narratives

“The Iroquois Creation Story” 19-23
“Pima Stories of the Beginning of the World” 23-33
“Native American Trickster Tales”—Winnebago, Sioux, Koasati, Mourning Dove, Chinook, and Navajo 120-156

Week 2:

Spanish Explorers

Christopher Columbus’ letters 34-37
Bartolome de las Casas: “The Very Brief Relation of the Devastation of the Indies” 39-41
Howard Zinn: “Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress” (handout)
William Apress: “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man” 1079-1084 (Vol. B)

Response Paper #1

Week 3:

The Puritans

William Bradford: from *Of Plymouth Plantation* 157-173
Anne Bradstreet: “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” 263
 “To My Dear and Loving Husband” 263
 “On My Dear Grandchild Simon...” 268
Mary Rowlandson: “A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration...” 308-340
Edward Taylor: “Huswifery” 360

Week 4:

The Colonial Period

Jonathon Edwards: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” 498-508
Cotton Matther: “A People of God...” 392-394 & “The Trial of Martha Carrier” 394-397
Nathaniel Hawthorne: “Young Goodman Brown” 1263-1272 (Vol. B)

Response Paper #2

Week 5:

Forming an American Identity

Crevecoeur: “Letters from an American Farmer—III. What is an American?” 657-667
Thomas Paine: Introduction to *Common Sense* 706
 From *Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs* 706-711
Thomas Jefferson: from his *Autobiography* 726-732

Week 6:

The Formation of the Republic

“The Federalist Papers—Hamilton & Madison 739-747
Catharine Maria Sedgewick: “A Reminiscence of Federalism” 1051-1070 (Vol. B)

Response Paper #3

Week 7:

The American Dream...Who is American?

Benjamin Franklin: “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America” 534-537
Howard Zinn: “Drawing the Color Line” (handout)
Abraham Lincoln: “A House Divided” 1609-1615

African American Voices...

Oludah Equiano: from *The Interesting Narrative...* 747-781
Phillis Wheatley: “On Being Brought from Africa to America” 810
 “To His Excellency General Washington” 819-20

Week 8:

African American Voices (cont.)

Harriet Jacobs: "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" 1757-1778

Frederick Douglass: "The Narrative..." 2032-2096

Midterm Exam

Week 9:

Spring Break!

Week 10:

Dissidence & Transcendentalism

Henry David Thoreau: "Resistance to Civil Government" 1792-1806 & "Walking" 1993-2016

Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Self-Reliance" 1160-1176

Response Paper #4

Week 11:

19th Century Lyricism: Social Responsibility & The Duty of the Poet

Walt Whitman: "Preface to *Leaves of Grass*" 2131-2145 & *Leaves of Grass* 2147-2189

"Reconciliation" & "Spirit Whose Work is Done" 2225

Martin Espada: excerpt from "Poetry Like Bread: Poets of the Political Imagination" (handout)

Week 12:

Edgar Allan Poe: "The Valley of Unrest" 1515-1516

"Alone" 1516

"The Raven" 1518-1521

Toni Morrison: "Romancing the Shadow" (handout)

Emily Dickinson: 280, 315, 465, 505, 712, 754, 1129, 1545

Adrienne Rich: "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" (handout)

Response Paper #5

Week 13:

19th Century Prose

Nathaniel Hawthorne: "The Minister's Black Veil" 1280-1289 & "The Birthmark" 1289-1300

Herman Melville: "Hawthorne and his Mosses" 2292-2303 & "Bartleby the Scrivener" 2330-2355

Week 14:

Social Criticism & the Postmodern Novel

Herman Melville *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade*

Response Paper #6

Week 15:

The Confidence Man & selected criticisms

Week 16:

Final Exam & Term Papers Due