

Engl 444—The Native American Novel 1967—2017

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Most “Native American Literature” courses do so without investigating what is meant by “Native American” or how that might affect the penultimate descriptor – “literature.” How are we to judge what falls into the subject area of “Native American Literature?” Are we to read only “Native American writers?” How are we to classify who is, and who is not, Native American? By blood or experience? Moreover, what is Indian literature? Literature about Indians, or by them, or both? This course seeks to investigate these difficult questions by reading seminal works that have contributed to a literature about Native Americans. We will read early works by writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, and work forward to include writings by N Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, Leslie Silko, and James Welch. We will explore the development of key images of Native Americans and look at how the sum of these imaginings help constitute an understanding of Indian identity on the page. Instead of being representative, this course will use literature, all of it American Literature, to explore the formation of “Indian-ness” on the page, in order to pull apart the very idea of what constitutes Native American Literature.

Reading List:

Cooper—*The Last of the Mohicans*, Hemingway—*Short Stories*, N. Scott Momaday—*House Made of Dawn*, Louise Erdrich—*Love Medicine*, Leslie Silko—*Ceremony*, James Welch—*Fools Crow* and *Winter in the Blood*, Forrest Carter—*The Education of Little Tree*, Warrior and Smith—*Like a Hurricane*, Tommy Orange—*There There*

Course Requirements: students will write one-page reaction papers to each of the longer works we read, there will be a mid-term exam, a final exam, and a final paper. Students will also be expected to discuss the readings in class. Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for each day they are late.

Grade Breakdown: Reaction papers total: 20%, Mid-Term: 20%, Final Exam: 20% Final paper: 30%, Class participation: 10%

Reading Schedule:

I. The Renaissance in Native American Fiction; the 1970s (weeks 1-5)

In this section of the class, roughly the first third of the term we will familiarize ourselves with the beginnings of what has become known as the “Renaissance in

American Indian Literature.” *House Made of Dawn* and *Ceremony* are the two most important texts of this time. Both books focus on the experiences of two mixed-blood, orphaned, traumatized, veterans of WWII. Both books are set in Indian communities in the desert Southwest. Both contain the key elements by which Native American fiction has come to be recognized (but which should be questioned, of course): non-linear narratives, the inclusion of Native myth and mythic tropes, and copious natural description. Yet they are divergent as well—*Ceremony* positions itself as a book written from a Native perspective (and we will examine what is meant by that) whereas it is impossible not to notice the high modernist influences imbedded in *House Made of Dawn*. One book seems to be drawn from tribal cultures, the other seems to be drawn from other literature. The genre of Native American fiction, it is safe to say, might be drawn from both, but in unexpected ways. In this section we will also read the fake memoir written by the Indian impostor Asa Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*. This book is not usually considered “Native American” but what happens to our definition of the genre when a book written by a non-native, a book that was read as native for many years, and a book that uses the same images and structure and sense as other Native American texts?

II. Evolution—sophistication and modernity in the 1980s (weeks 6-8)

The 1980s saw the introduction of very sophisticated works by more sophisticated writers such as James Welch and Louise Erdrich. These writers—these trained writers—wrote masterful texts that were very well-received and very accomplished. Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* set a new bar and introduced new techniques to the practice of Native American Fiction. What is the role of style (literary, descriptive) in the formation of the genre? How do certain literary styles create a sense of culture? And is it really “native American” and if so, how?

III. Back in Time—image and icon/in and out (weeks 9-15)

As we touched on the first section of the course—what happens to our definitions of the genre when native and non-native writers use the same images, icons, and shortcuts to “signify” Indian-ness on the page? How have understandings of Indian-ness been built on the page through time by writers as separately placed as Ernest Hemingway, James Fenimore Cooper, and James Welch? In what ways is Native American literature understood in time? How is the past constructed? The present? In this section we will read Hemingway’s Nick Adams stories and James Fenimore Cooper’s famous *Last of the Mohicans* as well as James Welch’s *Fools Crow* and search for ties that bind them and approaches that disunite them as we come to a conclusion about how we might better define (and thereby understand) the genre of Native American fiction.

Fine Print:

Evaluation criteria and requirements: This course is traditionally graded using a 100-point grading scale (93-100 = A, 90-92 = A-, 88-89=B+, etc). Factors I take into account when grading assignments: effort (completion of assignments, coverage, length); quality (depth, detail, style, structure, imagery, originality); and progress (improvement over time, thoroughness and quality of revisions).

Academic Integrity: In the context of this class, copying another person's words or ideas (even if paraphrased or changed to your own words) without attribution is plagiarism. Handing in a story that you did not write is a form of academic dishonesty. Handing in a story you have submitted for another course (without discussing the situation with me first) is also academically dishonest. Plagiarized or non-original work will receive a grade of F.

Student Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Students with Disabilities requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity. USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.