

English 263

AMERICAN LITERATURE
Fall 2019, TTH 9:30-10:50am, WPH B30

Prof. Bill Handley
Office: THH 404E
Office hours: Wednesdays 12:45-3 (or other times by appt.)
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Course Description:

This introduction to American literature will address some of the major themes of human experience and culture, from the Puritan period to the present. These include the individual in relation to the social world; the meaning and fashioning of the self; class, race and democracy; and the myth of the American West. In exploring these themes, we will seek to understand the artistic and social meaning of particular literary genres such as autobiography, drama, essay, novel, short story, and poetry. Additionally, we will aim to develop literary critical skills, to improve our capacities as readers, thinkers, and writers. By understanding and analyzing such elements in interpretation as context, audience, figural language, and narrative structure, we will explore how literature not only represents and informs us about U.S. culture but also shapes it.

Course Objectives:

Reading, thinking, speaking, and writing carefully to better understand the culture that surrounds us and to think critically about the past's relation to the present. An aim of any survey course is not to check boxes of "the hits" but to get the big picture – often through the details.

Required Texts:

Thomas Shepard, *Autobiography* (1634; handout)
Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography* (1791)
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self Reliance and Other Essays*
Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*
Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)
Walt Whitman, "The Sleepers" (1855; handout)
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), selected poems (handout)
Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918)
Allen Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California" and "America" (1955)
Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (1963; handout)
Flannery O'Connor, "Everything that Rises Must Converge" (1961; handout)
Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968)
Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles*, (1992)
Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (1993; 2013)

Requirements and Grading:

1. Two papers (20% each): 5-7pages, due Oct. 22 and Dec. 5.
2. Mid-term examination, Oct 10 in class (20%): Identifications, short answer.
3. Final examination, Thursday, Dec. 12, 11am-1pm in classroom (20%): Identifications, short answer.
4. Participation (20%): includes attendance, participation in discussion, and short writing assignments.

*Late papers will be marked down two-thirds of a letter grade for each day they are late.
More than four unexcused absences will result in a failing participation grade.*

Schedule

Aug. 27 Introduction

Aug. 29 Shepard, Autobiography; Franklin, *Autobiography* (to p. 28)

Sept. 3 Franklin, to p. 105.

Sept. 5 Emerson, "The Over-Soul" (1841)

Sept. 10 Emerson, "Self-Reliance" (1841), "Divinity School Address" (1838)

Sept. 12 Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" (1849)

Sept. 17 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (handout)

Sept. 19 NO CLASS (Handley away at a conference)

Sept. 24 Frederick Douglass, Chs. 1-9

Sept. 26 Douglass, Chs. 10-11 and Appendix

Oct. 1 Walt Whitman, "The Sleepers" (handout); Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California" and "America" (handout)

Oct. 3 Emily Dickinson, selected poems (handout)

Oct. 8 Flannery O'Connor, "Everything that Rises Must Converge"

Oct. 10 **Midterm Exam**

Oct. 15 Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, Book I

Watch "Willa Cather: The Road is All" on line

Oct. 17 NO CLASS (Fall Break)

Oct. 22 Cather, Books I and II **1st paper due.**

Oct. 24 Cather, Books III, IV, and V

Oct. 29 Didion, Parts I and II

Oct. 31 Didion, Part III

Nov. 5 Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*

Nov. 7 Smith, *Twilight*

Nov. 12 Smith, *Twilight*

Nov. 14 *Angels in America*, Part I

Nov. 19 *Angels in America*, Part I

Nov. 21 *Angels in America*, Part I

Nov. 26 *Angels in America*, Part II

Thanksgiving Recess, Nov. 27-30

Dec. 3 *Angels*, Part II

Dec. 5 *Angels*, Part II **2nd paper due**

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

USC Support and Advocacy (USCSA) – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Definition of Excellence in Teaching USC Department of English

All writing is creative, and all civic engagement requires a sophisticated understanding of discourse and interpretation. The USC Department of English is committed to the power of the story, the word, and the image. We analyze and organize complex ideas, evaluate qualitative information, anticipate how real audiences respond to language, and study behaviors of complex characters leading uncertain lives with competing values. We develop critical abilities for a successful life, but our stories tell us why life is worth living.

Excellence in teaching is an active engagement with these commitments, perspectives, and values. A student with a major in **English** should graduate with an appreciation for (1) the relations between representation and the human soul, and (2) the relations between words and ideas. Teachers will encourage this appreciation through their knowledge and conveyance of the subject, the appropriateness of instructional materials, and the quality of their students' responses. We expect our students to:

- understand the major representations in English discourse from earliest beginnings to the current moment; all literatures exist in conversation with earlier literatures;
- organize and interpret evidence;
- feel the experiences of others, both by engaging in literatures and by their own efforts to create new literatures;
- understand how periods, cultural intentions, and literary genres differ;
- grasp the skills and theories of interpretation, and the history of our own discipline;
- see how interpretive interests shift with time and place;
- attend to linguistic details of semantics, phrasing, and structure;
- assume there are reasonable alternative understandings of a text;
- adjudicate differences through reasoned arguments that honestly engage counter-arguments.

Our students will have lives in very different arenas, but all calling for skills in discourse, empathy, civil argument, and civic engagement. We cannot and should not say what those careers will be; we train students for jobs that have not yet been invented.

English Department students with an interdisciplinary major in **Narrative Studies** should expect instruction that inculcates an appreciation for all of the above, and coordinates with definitions of teaching excellence in USC's corresponding departments.

The Department of English adheres to the modalities of instruction published in the "USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching."

Approved September 18, 2018
Undergraduate Studies
Committee
Department of English