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OH: by appointment ([cacatian@usc.edu](mailto:cacatian@usc.edu))

WPH 101, Wednesdays, 2-3:50pm

Freshman Seminar, Fall 2022

**Our Favorite Books**

If a stranger stopped you on a sidewalk and asked you to name your favorite book, would you have an answer? If so, would you know why you answered the way you did? And why ask the question anyway—what do we gain from knowing what others like and don’t like about literature or art?

This freshman seminar is designed to give book lovers an opportunity to reflect on what draws you to specific books and how larger cultural preferences for certain literary texts might relate to, or pull against, your individual tastes. Students will have the opportunity to generate the reading list for the majority of the course, as we walk through a cross section of “our favorite books” read against a backdrop of short, accessible reflections on topics such as: why certain books withstand “the test of time,” why certain books fall out of favor, and how we re-read things differently over time. By the end of the course, you will be able to explain to yourself and others what makes a book a favorite, how these preferences can vary, and why and what we learn from re-reading the books we love.

#### **Learning Objectives**

Conducted in an intimate, low-stakes format, freshmen seminars are meant to explore a particular academic theme of interest to professor and students alike. In this case, our objective is to clarify how understanding books can help you understand your world, how narratives are constructed to influence readers, and how critics have reflected on questions of literary merit. Freshmen seminars are also meant to give you a chance to practice the “invisible curriculum” of college. On this front, we will learn in practice how to negotiate office hours, college level workloads, and time management, among other necessary collegiate academic skills.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Most of the primary texts for this course will be generated by you. I will organize the readings based upon your input, and we will rely upon Amazon / Doheny (our main research library) to obtain texts. I’ll give you the reading list well enough in advance to order books.

Our first primary text will be Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which I ask you to read in the 1818 edition. Norton and Broadview both publish good editions of this text.

<https://www.amazon.com/Frankenstein-Norton-Critical-Editions-Shelley/dp/0393644022/ref=sr_1_1?crid=33WKPZPDOF1F7&keywords=frankenstein+norton+critical+edition+3rd&qid=1659551566&sprefix=frankenstein+norton%2Caps%2C151&sr=8-1>

<https://www.amazon.com/Frankenstein-Broadview-Editions-Mary-Shelley/dp/1554811031/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2AJ679V25K0E6&keywords=frankenstein+broadview&qid=1659551600&sprefix=frankenstein+broadview%2Caps%2C117&sr=8-1>

Our supplementary readings will be uploaded to the HANDOUTS folder on blackboard. Links to certain readings are also embedded in the syllabus.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Our Freshman Seminar will be participatory and discussion-based, and students will be graded Credit / No Credit.

To get Credit for the course, I expect you to attend discussions and complete the following assignments.

**Passage analysis and response:**

This exercise will consist of several components, so please read carefully:

1. On your assigned week, you will choose one passage from our primary text, of about a paragraph in length. Come to class prepared to make three points about your passage. I will model what such an analysis can look like in Week 2.
2. You will also type out your chosen passage and bring **18 hard copies** (for your classmates and me) to class. (I will explain why I think typing and hard copies are important.) You will distribute these to the class, and we will have 10-15 minutes of class time to generate written observations in response to your passage. We will share these observations, offset by your own, subsequently in discussion.
3. You will collect our written observations. You will then have the following week to review and collate our responses intermixed with your own observations. At the beginning of our next class period, I would like you to submit **a 2-3 page write-up that takes into account your own and your classmates’ observations from discussion.**

**Discussion leader / role play a critic:**

For this exercise, I would like you to present one of our short critical pieces to the class from the point of view of the critic.

To do this, you should:

--prepare one statement—say three to five sentences in length—that distills for you the main point of “your” article. If you needed to convert your multi-page manifesto or essay to an elevator pitch, what would you say?

--pull two of your favorite quotations from your piece and say why they are your favorite

--**Type up the above and hand them in to me at the end of class**

--be prepared to field questions from potentially hostile readers

For the other students in the class: come prepared to question the critic. After the presenter has finished speaking, have at least one question that the “critic” will need to answer, if not defend.

**One “theoretical” precis on “Our favorite books”—3pp.**

Using one of our class book selections for inspiration, write a 3pp. critical reflection / editorial / manifesto, styled after some of the short critical pieces we have read. So, for example, you can make a statement about the construction of literary merit, write a defense of the humanities, generate your own assessment of re-reading, or make a case for why an unpopular, maybe even politically incorrect, book is nonetheless important to read. We will collect these papers into a class anthology at the end of the semester.

Students who wish to explore a more public-facing venue for their opinions are welcome to work with me on creating pitches inspired by these pieces for “The Conversation”: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/join-the-conversation/>. If I think your idea has potential for a journalistic story, let me know. The word count for an article here is typically 800-1000 words.

**Note on office hours:** I am very excited to get to know you and spend time with you both inside and outside of the classroom. Since I am currently also working as the Dean of Undergraduate Education, my calendar and my inbox can fill up. For these reasons, please email my scheduler, Tracie Cacatian ([cacatian@usc.edu](mailto:cacatian@usc.edu)), to request an office hours appointment (in person or zoom) with me. Please put “Office Hours” in your subject heading when emailing. For any class related queries or observations, please email me directly at [ehanders@usc.edu](mailto:ehanders@usc.edu). I will respond within 24 hours.

# **SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS (subject to revision)**

**LITERARY CLASSICS**

**Week 1—Aug 24**

-- Italo Calvino, “Why Read the Classics?”

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1986/10/09/why-read-the-classics/>

--generate class book list: novels / short stories / plays

**Week 2—Aug 31**

--Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1818 edition (Norton or Broadview are good editions)

--Percy Shelley “A Defense of Poetry”

<https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/A-Defense-of-Poetry.pdf>

--Jill Lepore, “The Strange and Twisted Life of Frankenstein”

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/02/12/the-strange-and-twisted-life-of-frankenstein>

PASSAGE LEADER: Emily Anderson

Critic(s): \_\_Mariah\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Faith\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 3—Sept 7**

--Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

--Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, “What is a Classic?”

<https://www.bartleby.com/32/202.html>

--T.S. Eliot “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

<https://literariness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Literariness.org-Essay-Tradition-and-the-Individual-Talent.pdf>

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_Faith\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Andrea\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ &\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Sophia\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 4—Sept 14**

**-**--Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

--Zadie Smith, “Some Notes On Attunement”

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/17/some-notes-on-attunement>

--C.S. Lewis, “Epilogue,” from *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967), 130-141. [**handout]**

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Sam, Mariah\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic: \_\_\_\_\_Adam\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ &\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Tania\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ON RE-READING**

**Week 5—Sept 21**

--J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*

--Victor Brombert, “On Re-reading,”

<https://yalereview.org/article/on-rereading>

--William Hazlitt, “On Reading Old Books”

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/31132/31132-h/31132-h.htm#Page_333>

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Mallory, Andrea\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Sarika\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Jillian \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 6—Sept 28**

--Max Gladstone and Amal El-Mohtar, *This is How you Lose the Time War*

--Patricia Meyer Spacks, from *On Rereading* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), pp. 1-22. **[handout]**

--Vladimir Nabokov, “Good Readers and Good Writers”

<http://moodyap.pbworks.com/f/nbkv.GoodReaders_Writers.pdf>

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Elsie, Reagan\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Bella\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Sam\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 7—Oct 5**

--Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*

--Rebecca Mead, “Middlemarch and Me”

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/02/14/middlemarch-and-me>

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_Tania, Adam\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Naomi\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 8—Oct 12**

--Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

--Vivian Gornick, “Notes of a Chronic Re-reader”

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2020/02/05/notes-of-a-chronic-rereader/>

--C.S. Lewis, from *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967), 1-4. [**handout]**

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_\_Sophia \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Mia\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ &\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Elsie \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ON LOVING LITERATURE**

**Week 9—Oct 19**

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

--Zadie Smith, “Love, Actually”

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/nov/01/classics.zadiesmith>

--Rita Felski, Introduction, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 1-22. **[handout]**

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Bella, Joanna\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critic(s): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Mallory\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ &\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Reagan\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 10—Oct 26**

--Madeline Miller, *The Song of Achilles*

--Rita Felski, “On Being Attached,” from *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 1-40. **[handout]**

--Deidre Lynch, from *Loving Literature: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 1-5. [**handout]**

PASSAGE LEADER: \_\_\_\_Jillian, Mia\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Critics: \_\_\_\_\_\_Joanna\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ &\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Week 11—Nov 2**

--class retrospective: Circulate “our favorite books” papers for discussion

I will gather all these papers together into a compendium to circulate to the class by the semester’s end. You have from week 11 till the end of the semester to make any changes to your manifesto, if you wish, before it goes into the compendium.