

# American Literature

## Syllabus

### Fall 2007

#### Holliman

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**Course Description:** In this course, we will survey early American literature (and literary periods) dating from roughly 1500—1910. Students will get a taste of the extent and assortment of literature spanning a few centuries, literature representing the many voices contributing to American tradition: men, women, black, white and Native American to name some. Our readings will introduce (or maybe reiterate, depending on the student's experiences) key incidents, writers and concepts which impacted and influenced the development of what we know as the United States of America (and which forcefully altered who and what inhabited these lands prior to European settlement). Additionally, we will explore the rise and expression of cultural, political, literary, economic, social and worldview thinking recorded in the writings of early American authors.

#### Essential Questions:

1. What are some fundamental ideas—assumptions, myths and beliefs—expressed by early American writers that continue to influence the way(s) Americans view themselves and the world today?
2. As *suggested* by the readings, what *was* the America of old?
3. Which early American writings intrigued you or spoke to you? Why did they stimulate your curiosity and interest? Why, if any, did some of the writings rub you the wrong way?

#### Goals:

- Students will develop critical thinking skills.
- Students will develop the essential skill of listening.
- Students will frequently practice articulating their thoughts and ideas.
- Students will make writing a practice, writing frequently and working to write clear, fluent, expressive and provocative pieces.
- Students will exit the course aware of early American authors and writings (and especially well informed of the one the individual chooses to research and write about).
- Students will exit with a healthy awareness of popular American literary themes and styles.
- Students will extend their knowledge of the English language.
- Students will lead and sustain conversations of various sorts.
- Students will exit the course as more confident public speakers.
- etc.

#### Grade Expectations & Vital Result Standards Addressed and Assessed:

- 1.1. Reading Strategies
- 1.3 Reading Comprehension
- 1.4 Reading a Range of Texts
- 1.5 Writing Dimensions
- 1.6 Writing Conventions
- 1.7 Response to Literature

- 1.9 Narrative
- 1.8 Report/Research
- 1.13 Clarifications and Restatement
- 1.14 Critique
- 1.15 Speaking
- 1.23 Poetry
- 2.1 Students ask a variety of questions
- 3.10 Teamwork
- 3.11 Interactions
- 4.2 Democratic Process

## Course Content:

### Writing:

- **Author study** (fiction/non-fiction combination): students will select an early American author of their choice to research and write about. The writing (essay) will be written autobiographically (memoir), where the student assumes the point of view of the author (writing in first person) and goes on to reveal things about his/her life.
- **Persuasive Essay**: students respond to something we read and attempt to convince and audience (reader) to either agree or disagree with his/her assertions.
- **Thesis paper(s)**: In this/these formal writings, students will assert and opinion in response to a piece of writing and then go on to defend the assertion using textual references and clear, thoughtful explanations. **Student writers must avoid writing in first person: no “I” references.**
- **Original sermon** (written and delivered). **NOTE**: the nature of your sermon **will NOT** take a religious slant. This activity will be done in conjunction with reading Jonathan Edwards sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”
- **Narrative**: written as we read *Huckleberry Finn*—a way of gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of Twain’s work and the narrative.
- **Journaling**: a time (2 to 3 days per week for 10-15 minute) for students to write freely.
- **Reader Responses**: writing generated as you read or immediately following, a way of showing your thinking and being prepared for discussions of a particular text.
- **Poetry**: we may experiment writing poems in the style or form of the American poets of whose verse we read.

### Reading:

- Over the course of the 20 week semester, we will concentrate on four units of study. Each unit will span “approximately” five weeks.

**Unit 1: A Gathering of Voices: 1500—1750**

**Unit 2: A Nation is Born/The New Land: 1750—1800**

**Unit 3: A Growing Nation/Literary Nationalism: 1800—1870**

**Unit 4: Division, Reconciliation and Expansion/American Classic: 1870—1910**

Readings within each of these units will consist of: **essays, letters, poems, short stories, speeches, autobiographical pieces, diary entries and sermons.**

- I am assigning only one required novel to read in its entirety this semester (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain). It is likely that we’ll read **parts** of other early American novels.

- **Self-selected reading:** I am asking that you choose and read two books written by American authors, past **or** present. Students will give a book talk to the class in which they attempt to convey themes present in the book and how/what the themes may suggest about living in America or being an American citizen.
- **Main Textbook:** *Prentice Hall Literature: The American Experience*  
**Other Textbooks I will borrow from:**  
*Norton Book of American Short Stories*  
*Norton Anthology of American Literature*  
*Oxford Book of American Short Stories*  
*The United States in Literature: America Reads-Seventh Edition*

### Teaching Methods:

- Mini-lessons (10-15 minutes) usually at the beginning of the block to review concepts, strategies, ideas, vocabulary, writing conventions, or address areas of confusion/struggle
- Some direct instruction (e.g. brief lectures and demonstrations)
- Group discussions (whole class and small group)
- Writing conferences (one on one or in small groups)
- *Lots of reflection and spontaneity, which means that I don't always know what method may emerge!*

### Grading Criteria: (%) indicates percentage of total grade

- Class participation (**speaking, working during the block, preparation—taking responsibility for yourself and your work, ability to listen to and respect others, including me, attendance, attitude during our times together**)—**25%**
- Formal Writing (essays)—**25%**
- Daily/nightly homework challenges (reading and responding, drafting)—**25%**
- Quizzes, Tests, Projects and Presentations—**10%**
- Final exam—**15%**

**Your grade** will be as accurate a representation of your personal efforts put forth in this class. I will do my best to be as objective and fair in the grading process as possible. But please note; grading, especially writing, projects, and presentation is NOT an exact science. It would make me feel happy to see an **A** next to each one of your names come the end of the semester. But that can only happen if you are willing to take responsibility for your own learning. To me, that means taking an interest in what we're covering or talking about, working thoughtfully, engaging each challenge, following through, and even challenging me in respectful ways if and/or when you feel the need to speak out or say something.

I will make every effort to be well prepared, to create meaningful learning experiences that have clear connections to the direction(s) we move in together. I hope that your pursuit of the grade that "works" for you isn't at the complete expense of developing or maturing into a deeper, stronger person. And with that said, if you're putting forth effort throughout the semester, then you **will** pass this course.