

ENGLISH 3390: American Literature from Whitman
“Negotiating Borders: Self, Other, and Society in the American Imagination”
Asynchronous Online Course

Instructor: Dr. Tim DeJong

Office: Carroll Science Building 402

Office Hours: MWF 8:00-9:00, MW 1:30-4:30, and online via Zoom by appointment

E-mail: Timothy_DeJong@baylor.edu

Course Description

This course involves a detailed analysis of several works of American literature in each of the four major genres (poetry, drama, the novel, and short fiction) from the end of the nineteenth century to the present. The works we will study are various and expansive enough that we will not limit ourselves to any one theme. Some of the ideas with which we will grapple include the effects of technology, the changing human relation to the natural world, and how writers respond to markers of difference including race, class, gender, and ethnicity. But as the course title suggests, the overarching idea we will pursue is that of the *border* – literal borders, such as those that separate nations, of course, but also figurative ones. Borders exist to define, to keep in, and equally to keep out. Borders between self and other, citizen and immigrant, and so on, invite us to investigate basic but important political questions. Among them: what is the role of the individual in a society? What responsibilities does the citizen owe his or her country? What compromises or commitments are required for the good of the social whole?

We will pursue answers to these questions alongside the writers we study. Each author works from a particular place, time, and position within American history; adding our perspectives to theirs, we will work together to broaden our collective sense of the possibilities, frailties, and successes in the last 130 years of the American experiment.

Course Objectives

As participants in this course, we will expand our knowledge of various figures in recent American literary history. We will practice and develop critical thinking, writing, and collaboration. We will study the insights of others in order to develop insights of our own. Perhaps most essentially, we will read and appreciate works of American literature for their power, beauty, and truth.

This course will provide you the opportunity to

1. discuss various works of American literature in detail with your peers and instructor in an online format;
2. develop written sight readings of selected passages from several American texts;
3. research, outline, draft, and revise a short essay that provides an in-depth analysis of a course text;

4. research, outline, draft, and revise a longer essay that develops a complex original idea about a course text or texts at some length, using peer-reviewed outside sources to buttress or contextualize main claims;
5. construct a multifaceted multimedia presentation that analyzes and explains an American work of short fiction.

Course Texts

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The Complete 1855 and 1891-2 Editions*

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Annie Baker, *The Flick*

Octavia E. Butler, *Kindred*

Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

Grade Breakdown

Online Discussion Responses	20%
Reading Responses (5x3%)	15%
Short Essay	10%
Long Essay	25%
Multimedia Presentation	10%
Final Exam (take-home)	20%

Online Discussion Responses

On Canvas, I'll activate Discussions for each text we read. These can be found on the sidebar by clicking "Discussions." Your task over the rest of the semester is to offer **at least twenty contributions of about 100 words each** about any of the texts we are reading. I am not necessarily looking for profundity here. Rather, think of your posts as evidence that you are reading the texts and thinking independently and carefully about them. It's fine to be relatively informal with these. Try to write in clean, effective prose, but keep in mind as well that the occasional spelling or grammatical error is not a big deal.

You can write **a maximum of two discussion posts about any single text**. You can also write a discussion post and a reading response about the same text. Your ideas can even overlap. It's fine, too, to use ideas you test out on the discussion board as the basis for a reading response – though straight copy-and-pasting will not necessarily be the wisest plan. What I'll do to begin each discussion is list some things to look for or think about as we read the text together. You might write a post that responds to my suggestions, or that suggests a possible reading response topic, or that adds to something you've already written in a previous reading response.

As much as possible, **try to make the Discussion posts "conversational" by referring to what others have already said so far**. It's fine to bring in new ideas, of course, but think of the principles of good in-person conversation as you write. Just as you don't completely ignore what a friend has said in a regular conversation, you should try to gesture to others' entries in

written discussions. In fact, a good discussion post might simply be a short paragraph explaining your agreement (or friendly disagreement!) with something posted by a classmate, and justifying your position. However, make sure to do more than just agree and repeat. Add something new to the conversation!

Throughout the semester I'll be tabulating the responses on the Discussion boards. At the end of the term I will give you a **holistic grade out of ten based on the number and quality of your posts**. Remember that you need to have at least twenty posts, but you're welcome to write more than that, and doing so will have a positive impact on this element of your grade.

General Expectations Regarding Scheduling and Timeliness

Since this is an online course, you will be able to be a little bit more flexible with the readings. Hence I have listed the readings by the week rather than by specific date. Generally, though, the due dates in this course will be on **Tuesdays and Thursdays at 11:59 P.M.** Check the reading response due dates in particular: it will be important to **complete the course readings well in advance of these deadlines** in case you want to write a reading response on a particular text. Additionally, I will close the discussion boards to new posts for a given text on the day we begin our discussion of the next text, so you will want to make sure to read the text in full and join the discussion during the same week that that text is being introduced.

Reading Responses

During the term, you will be required to write five reading responses to the texts under discussion. Reading responses will be submitted online via a Turnitin link on Canvas. Check the schedule at the back of this syllabus or use Canvas to see when the responses are due.

You may not write two reading responses for the same text. Additionally, the due dates are set up to force you to submit **one reading response per genre** for each of poetry, drama, the novel, and short fiction. You can then submit one extra response at any point in the term for any text you wish, in any of the four genres. This "extra" response is "Reading Response #5." It is due at the end of term, but note that **you should submit your extra reading response for whichever genre you choose during the time period in which we are discussing the text on which you want to write**. So, if you want to write two reading responses on the poems, submit your first response under "Reading Response #1: Poetry" and your second reading response under "Reading Response #5: Extra," and make sure to submit both before the poetry unit has ended.

Each reading response should list your name, the course name, the instructor's name, and the date, in the left hand margin. They should begin with an interesting, provocative title. They must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman, and be **400-600** words in length. A separate handout will be provided on Canvas that will offer more detail about what I am looking for in a reading response.

Essays

Essays must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. They must follow current MLA format and must include a Works Cited page that lists the work you are discussing. It is advisable to retain at least one hard copy of the essay in case of loss or damage to the original. Essays will be graded for, in descending order of importance: originality and import of argument; ability to support the argument with reference to the primary text; use of secondary texts to further enhance the argument; rhetorical persuasiveness; syntax; grammar; spelling; accurate bibliographic citation; and general adherence to MLA format.

The short essay should be at least **1000 words** in length. It will be due on **February 25**. The longer essay should be **2000-3000 words** in length. It will be due on **April 8**. A separate handout will be provided on Canvas that will offer more detail about what I am looking for in each essay. As with your reading responses, you will hand in your essays online via a Turnitin link on Canvas. All essays not handed in on this date will be considered late. Essays will be penalized for lateness at a rate of 2% per day, weekends included, to a maximum of 14 days, at which point the essay may no longer be submitted. Essays submitted late may also receive minimal comments and will be returned at my leisure.

Tips for Reading Effectively and Well

As a college student, you obviously know how to read. However, my experience has been that busy schedules and competing demands often lead many students to read in cursory ways. I invite you to be a deeper thinker than a “busy-driven” culture often demands. Here are a few practical tips for retaining more of what you read and concentrating on analyzing assigned texts.

1. Don't read late at night or while lying down. You'll retain less and engage more superficially with the material if you're tired.
2. Read by yourself, or at least where the movement and noise of others won't distract you. You may also want to use headphones and listen to white noise by using websites such as simplynoise.com.
3. Read in bright light. Bright light is a substitute for caffeine.
4. Set reading goals. It's really tempting to check TikTok, or whatever the newest trendy app is, in the middle of a long reading assignment, but don't do it! Set goals such as, “I won't text, check my email, or tweet until I finish this chapter.”
5. Write out definitions of unknown words. If you don't know the definition of a word, look it up and write in the margins of the page.
6. Read with a pencil. In addition to underlining in the books themselves, you can also try creating a reading notebook in which you write questions you'd like to raise in class or copy passages you find difficult/interesting. This exercise may pay big dividends for papers and final exams.

Important Dates

February 3 is the last day to drop and add classes without receiving a W (Withdrawal) on one's transcript. **March 29** is the last day of the semester on which a class can be dropped.

Grading Policy

Grades will be distributed according to the following scale established by the College of Arts and Sciences at Baylor University:

93-100%	A
90-92%	A-
87-89%	B+
83-86%	B
80-82%	B-
77-79%	C+
73-76%	C
70-72%	C-
60-69%	D
0-59%	F

Note on Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. One form of plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as one's own, whether in part or in full. A second form of plagiarism is using sources without including the proper citation. This includes copying words from a source, but also includes borrowing ideas, *even if paraphrased*, without giving credit. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence which will result in, at minimum, a grade of 0 on the paper in question and, at maximum, automatic failure of the course. Instances of plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will also be reported to the Honor Council. You are expected to be familiar with Baylor's Honor Code and policies, available to read online at www.baylor.edu/honorcode.

Title IX

Baylor University does not discriminate on the basis of sex or gender in any of its education or employment programs and activities, and it does not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of sex or gender. This policy prohibits sexual and gender-based harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, intimate partner violence, and retaliation (collectively referred to as prohibited conduct). For more information on how to report, or to learn more about our policy and process, please visit www.baylor.edu/titleix. You may also contact the Title IX office directly by phone, (254) 710-8454, or email, TitleIX_Coordinator@baylor.edu.

Academic Accommodations

Any student requiring academic accommodation owing to a mental or physical disability should inform me immediately at the beginning of the semester. As student, you are responsible for obtaining appropriate documentation and information regarding needed accommodations from the Baylor University Office of Access and Learning Accommodation (OALA) and providing it to me early in the semester. Contact the OALA at 254-710-3605. More information is available online at <http://www.baylor.edu/oala>.

WEEK OF	READING (poems other than Whitman's and short stories all on Canvas)	DUE (via Canvas, 11:59 P.M)
January 19-21	Course Introduction. Introduction to Unit One, Poetry. Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i> 188-230 ("Song of Myself" 1-37)	
January 26-28	Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i> 230-247 ("Song of Myself" 38-52) Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i> 250-258 ("I Sing the Body Electric") Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i> 307-313 ("Crossing Brooklyn Ferry")	
February 2-4	Robert Frost, "Birches" Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning" Sylvia Plath, "Blackberrying" John Ashbery, "The One Thing That Can Save America"	
February 9-11	Matthew Dickman, "Wonderland" Carrie Fountain, "First" Tracy K. Smith, "It's Not," "Solstice" Introduction to Unit Two, Drama. Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> , Act I (10-69)	Reading Response #1 (Poetry) due February 9
February 16-18	Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> , Act II (71-139)	
February 23-25	Annie Baker, <i>The Flick</i> Act I (1-101)	Short Essay due February 25
March 2-4	Baker, <i>The Flick</i> Act II (103-177). Introduction to Unit Three, Novels. Octavia E. Butler, <i>Kindred</i> 1-74	Reading Response #2 (Drama) due March 2
March 9-11	Wellness Day (March 9). Octavia E. Butler, <i>Kindred</i> 74-131	
March 16-18	Butler, <i>Kindred</i> 131-264	
March 23-25	Don Delillo, <i>White Noise</i> 3-163	

WEEK OF	READING (poems other than Whitman's and short stories all on Canvas)	DUE (via Canvas, 11:59 P.M)
March 30- April 1	Delillo, <i>White Noise</i> 165-326	Reading Response #3 (Novel) due April 1
April 6-8	Introduction to Unit Four, Short Fiction. Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"	Long Essay due April 8
April 13-15	Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain" Lauren Groff, "The Midnight Zone"	
April 20-22	Student Multimedia Presentations	Presentations due April 20-22 Reading Response #4 (Short Fiction) due April 22
April 27	Course Wrap-Up and Exam Prep	Reading Response #5 (Extra) due April 27