

AML 2410: Issues in American Literature and Culture “Story-Truth”

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Office Hours: MW 11am-12pm
and by appointment

Fall 2013
Section: 1629
Time: MWF period 3
Place: RNK 0106
Class website: turkaml2410.wordpress.com

Course Description

The ‘truth’ is never simple, and searching for it requires more than the mere collecting of facts. The truth of a historical event, personal experience, emotion, or cultural attitude is contentious, ever-changing, and always elusive, but perpetually sought by individuals, organizations, and nations. Stories often figure in this quest to convey truth, unearthing insights and perspectives that hard facts tend to obscure. For instance, in his famous short story collection that attempts to capture the surreal horrors of the Vietnam War, author Tim O’Brien argues that “story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth.” This course will explore O’Brien’s claim in light of various (mostly 20th century) American texts that attempt to tell the truth through fiction.

Primary texts will cover a variety of literary forms (short story, poetry, novel, essay collection), which we will read in conjunction with cultural materials that represent the same issues or events, but that ultimately tell very different stories (documentary, propaganda, popular magazines, photographs). Throughout the course, we will think about how different literary forms are used to tell different stories, and in what situations fiction can be ‘truer’ than fact. Students will undertake their own searches for meaning and truth as they read the course texts closely and critically, and write about their interpretations in close readings, discussions questions, a prompt essay, and a final project.

Course Objectives

This course will teach students to:

- Read literature closely. In other words, to perceive nuances and subtleties in a text’s use of language, and differentiate between literal and metaphorical meanings.
- Place literature in historical context. In other words, to recognize the ideological assumptions that various texts display and/or challenge, and think about the ideological assumptions of our own historical context.
- Construct cohesive essays that contain sophisticated thesis statements and an organized presentation of arguments in support of these statements using textual evidence and analysis.

- Engage in active and critical thinking about the complex task of representing “the truth.” This requires embracing doubt and uncertainty without using the idea that ‘the truth is relative’ as an excuse to stop thinking.
- Use the technological resources that are necessary for your success in this class, as well as important for future writing in many fields. This includes properly formatting word documents, communicating professionally via email, and efficiently searching the library research databases.

AML 2410 is a General Education course and provides the student learning outcomes listed in the Undergraduate Catalog. For a full description of course goals, please see the Undergraduate Catalog at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx#learning>

Required Texts

The Bell Jar – Sylvia Plath (Harper, ISBN: 0061148512)

The Bluest Eye – Toni Morrison (Vintage, ISBN: 0307278441)

Regarding the Pain of Others – Susan Sontag (Picador, ISBN: 0312422199)

The Things They Carried – Tim O’Brien (Mariner, ISBN: 0618706410)

*The required short stories, poems, and other readings are available on the course site or elsewhere online as noted in the syllabus.

Note: All books will be available at the UF Bookstore. If you choose to purchase your books elsewhere (Amazon, etc.), then make sure to get the correct edition—namely, the ISBN stipulated above. If the reading is posted online, you are responsible for printing out a copy and bringing it to class.

Assignments

Participation (15%)

Class and small group discussions will be a vital part of this course. You are expected not only to have read all of the assigned readings for each class period, but also to be prepared to discuss them at length. To this end, you should take notes while reading—underlining important passages, noting page numbers, and writing down issues, reactions, and/or questions you might want to bring up in class. Also, be sure to **bring the required text to class on the day we will discuss it**. See the **Participation Grading Rubric** on the class site for more information on how I will evaluate participation.

In-Class Writing Quizzes (10%)

To help focus your reading, a few discussion questions pertaining to the day's reading assignment will be posted on the class site. Ten times throughout the semester, I will open class with about 10 minutes of individual writing, during which you will respond to one of the day's discussion questions. This exercise is primarily meant to generate discussion, but I will also collect your responses and provide you with specific feedback. Since these are in-class writings, I do not expect polished prose or perfect structure, but I do expect proof of close engagement with the daily readings.

Notebook Assignments (10%)

Before each essay is due, you will complete a short pre-writing activity meant to help generate ideas for the content or structure of your upcoming essay. We will go over what is expected for each notebook assignment in class.

Discussion Questions – (20%) (4 at 50pts each, 200 pts. total)

Four times over the course of the semester, you will turn in a set of **three** thoughtful and clear questions, each capable of generating various responses and lasting discussion about the text and its relation to some of the major themes, issues, or other texts we have been thinking about throughout the course. During class, I might ask you to share and/or elaborate on one or more of your questions. **Discussion questions should be emailed to me by 10pm the night before the class period you have signed up for. See the Discussion Question assignment sheet on the class site for more information.**

Essays (45%)

These pieces of writing are meant to help you work through your ideas about a particular text, articulate those ideas in a clear and sophisticated way, and develop your own writing style. Detailed assignment sheets are available for each assignment, but see below for brief descriptions.

Close Readings – 700-750 words, (2 at 100 pts. each, 200 pts. total)

Close reading or explication looks closely at a short passage of text and attempts to unpack its larger effect or significance. **For the first close reading**, pick a short passage from one of the short stories we read in class and quote this at the beginning of your paper. Analyze it closely, paying attention to word choice, rhythm, repetition, sentence structure, and images. Basically, you're picking the passage apart in an attempt to understand how it works. **For the second close reading**, you will explicate a stanza from one of the poems we read in class, and implement the comments and suggestions from your first close reading. This kind of close and careful analysis is slow work, of

course, but it leads to a much greater understanding of the passage and, often, to intriguing and important insights about the text as a whole.

Prompt Essay, 1300-1500 words (100pts.)

I will give you an essay prompt asking you to respond to a question regarding Plath’s *The Bell Jar* or Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. This question will ask you to think about how a certain theme, issue, or image functions across both of the texts. Formulating a **thesis** regarding the prompt, pulling relevant **evidence** from the texts, and **analyzing** that evidence thoughtfully in order to support your thesis are the key goals of this essay.

Final Project, 1500-1700 words (150 pts.)

For the final project, you have two different options: a critical essay or a creative project with accompanying 3-4 page critical essay.

If you choose to do a standard, final essay, you will engage with one or two of the texts we have read in class. The paper should put forward a clear and thoughtful thesis about the text, and support this thesis throughout the paper with textual evidence and analysis. Your paper should also use 2 outside critical sources to support and/or complicate your argument. See the assignment sheet for more detailed instructions.

If you choose to do a creative project with accompanying critical essay, you will use a creative medium (short story, photography spread, drawings, poems, video, etc.) to tell a ‘true’ story about one of the issues or events that we have discussed in class. Your project can be inspired by or react against one of the course text’s methods of truth-telling. You will also complete a short, critical paper (using 1-2 outside critical sources) that explains the theory behind the form and content of your piece. See the assignment sheet for more detailed instructions.

Grades

A: 93-100	C: 73-76
A-: 90-92	C-: 70-72
B+: 87-89	D+: 67-69
B: 83-86	D: 63-66
B-:80-82	D-: 60-62
C+: 77-79	E: 0-59

For more information on Grading Policies at UF, see

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grade Breakdown:

10% - In-Class Writing Quizzes

10% - Notebook Assignments

15% - Participation

20% - Discussion Questions

45% - Essays (Close Readings 20%, Prompt Essay 10%, Final Project 15%)

Here is the meaning behind the grades used to evaluate your work. Consult these descriptions to determine how to work towards a higher grade.

A: An ‘A’ paper shows an exceptional level of thoughtful engagement with the text(s), complex, creative and well-reasoned arguments, and a clear prose style. A-level engagement and argument are demonstrated by a clear and sophisticated thesis statement, a nuanced and judicious articulation and analysis of evidence from the primary text(s) you are writing about as well as any outside sources you use, a recognition of the limits and appropriate relevance of your arguments (i.e. qualification of arguments), and attention to the larger significance or implications of your arguments (the “so what” question). An ‘A’ paper can be informed or inspired by discussions we have had in class about the text(s), but must push well beyond them.

B/B+: A ‘B’ or ‘B+’ paper displays thoughtful engagement with the text(s), well-reasoned arguments, and a clear prose style. B-level engagement and interpretation are demonstrated by a clear thesis statement, a more than competent articulation and analysis of evidence from the primary text(s) you are writing about as well as any outside sources, and a recognition of the limits and appropriate relevance of your arguments. A ‘B’ paper makes a strong case, but needs more attention to one or two of these areas: sophistication and nuance of arguments (a more arguable thesis statement, use of more evidence or analysis, qualification of arguments, etc.), prose style (sentence structure, diction, clarity), or organization (paragraph construction, flow of ideas).

C/C+: A ‘C’ or ‘C+’ paper engages with the text(s) but needs to push further in order to go beyond a surface-level interpretation. Arguments and interpretations in a C-level paper might be intriguing, but need more textual evidence and analysis to support them. Conversely, a C paper might have plenty of evidence and analysis, but the overall argument might not be clearly or convincingly articulated. A ‘C’ paper also needs improvement in clarity of prose and/or organization.

D: A ‘D’ will be assigned to work that follows the general assignment but indicates a superficial engagement with the text, and inattention to argument, prose style, and mechanics.

E: An ‘E’ will be assigned to work that shows little understanding of the assignment, is turned in extremely late, and/ or shows extreme problems with argument and grammar.

Reading Schedule

Readings and due dates are subject to change during the course of the semester. **Readings are due the day they are listed on the syllabus. You must bring a hard copy of the text(s) we will be discussing each day (if the text was acquired online, you are responsible for printing out a copy).**

Unit 1: Close Reading

Week 1

Wed. 8/21 – Course Introductions

Fri. 8/23 – “I Used to Live Here Once” (Jean Rhys) – course website

Week 2

Mon. 8/26 – “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Charlotte Perkins Gilman), “Cultural Contexts: Woman’s Suffrage” – course website

Wed. 8/28 – “The Veldt” (Ray Bradbury) – course website

Fri. 8/30 – “The Lottery” (Shirley Jackson) – course website

Week 3

Mon. 9/2 – **Labor Day – No Class**

Wed. 9/4 – “Close Reading a Text” - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/616/1/>

Fri. 9/6 – **Notebook Assignment #1 due**
Writing Workshop: Close Reading

Week 4

Mon. 9/9 - **Close Reading #1 due.**

Wed. 9/11 - *The Untold Story of Emmett Till* (watch on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvijYSJtkQk>),

Fri. 9/13 – “The Lynching” (Claude McKay), Analysis by Nilay Gandhi – course website

Week 5

Mon. 9/16 – “Strange Fruit” (Abel Meeropol), **Notebook Assignment #2 due**

Wed. 9/18 – “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother

Burns Bacon,” “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” (Gwendolyn Brooks) – on course website.

Fri. 9/20 – “Maids Mild and Dark Villains, Sweet Magnolias and Seeping Blood: Gwendolyn Brooks's Poetic Response to the Lynching of Emmett Till” (Vivian May) – on course website.

Unit 2: Truth and Ideology

Week 6

Mon. 9/23 – **Close Reading #2 due.** Introduction to Unit 2.

Wed. 9/25 – *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 1-5)

Fri. 9/27 – *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 6-10), **Discussion Questions Group 1 due by 10pm Thurs.**

Week 7

Mon. 9/30 – *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 11-15), **Discussion Questions Group 2 due by 10pm Sun.**

Wed. 10/2 – *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 16-20), **Discussion Questions Group 3 due by 10pm Tues.**

Fri. 10/4 – “Developing a Thesis” - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/616/02/>
The Bluest Eye (foreword)

Week 8

Mon. 10/7 – Cultural contexts: class visit to the Baldwin Library of Historical Children’s Literature

Wed. 10/9 – *The Bluest Eye* (1-59)

Fri. 10/11 – *The Bluest Eye* (61-110), **Discussion Questions Group 1 due by 10pm Thurs.**

Week 9

Mon. 10/14 – *The Bluest Eye* (111-163), **Discussion Questions Group 2 due by 10pm Sun.**

Wed. 10/16 – *The Bluest Eye* (164-206), **Discussion Questions Group 3 due by 10pm Tues.**

Fri. 10/18 – **Notebook Assignment #3 due**

Unit 3: Truth and War

Week 10

Mon. 10/21 – **Prompt Essay due.** Introduction to Unit 3

Wed. 10/23 – *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 1-2)

Fri. 10/25 – *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 3-4), **Discussion Questions Group 1 due by 10pm Thurs.**

Week 11

Mon. 10/28 – *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 5-6), **Discussion Questions Group 2 due by 10pm Sun.**

Wed. 10/30 – *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 7-9), **Discussion Questions Group 3 due by 10pm Tues.**

Fri. 11/1 - TBA

Week 12

Mon. 11/4 – “The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial” (Marita Sturken) – available on JSTOR

Wed. 11/6 – *The Things They Carried* (“The Things They Carried” to “On the Rainy River”)

Fri. 11/8 – **Holiday**

Week 13

Mon. 11/11 – **Holiday**

Wed. 11/13 – *The Things They Carried* (“Enemies” to “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong”) **Group 1 Discussion Questions due**

Fri. 11/15 – *The Things They Carried* (“Stockings” to “Speaking of Courage”) **Group 2 Discussion Questions due**

Week 14

Mon. 11/18 – *The Things They Carried* (“Notes” to “Field Trip”) **Group 3 Discussion Questions due**

Wed. 11/20 – *The Things They Carried* (“The Ghost Soldiers” to “The Lives of the Dead”)

Fri. 11/22 – Read over Final Project Assignment sheet, and “Researching” tips on the class site

Week 15

Mon. 11/25 – **Final Project proposal due.**

Wed. 11/27 – *Thanksgiving Break*

Fri. 11/29 – *Thanksgiving Break*

Week 16

Mon. 12/2 – **Notebook Assignment #4 due**

Wed. 12/4 – Course conclusions.

Final Project due: Mon. Dec. 9 (email to me by 10pm)

Course Policies

Submitting Papers

All papers should be formatted with 1 inch margins and 12 pt. Times New Roman (or similar) font. All papers should be submitted electronically or as a hard copy at the beginning of class, as indicated.

Late Papers

Late papers disrupt the movement of the course, especially since the summer session is so brief. Because of this, late papers will not be accepted.

Attendance

Absences

As this is a discussion-based course, attendance is crucial. You are allowed **3 unexcused absences** over the course of the semester with no point deduction. 30 points will be deducted from your participation grade for each additional unexcused absence. **You cannot pass the course if you receive 6 unexcused absences.** **Excused absences** include university sponsored events (athletic, band, theater, etc.). Students who will need to miss class due to an excused absence should let me know before-hand and will be responsible for making up any missed work. As a general rule, you are responsible for making up any work missed due to an absence, excused or unexcused.

Lateness

Lateness is disruptive, so be in class on time. If you arrive after I take attendance at the beginning of class, I will count you as late. Two lates will count as an absence.

Grade Appeals

If you have questions or concerns regarding your final course grade, meet with me first. After we meet, if you want to appeal your final grade, contact Carla Blount, Program Assistant in the Department of English and fill out the appropriate form. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

University Policies

Disability Services

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

Academic Honesty

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

General Education Requirements

Composition (C) and Humanities (H) credit

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

Writing Requirement

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing-and-math-requirement.aspx>