

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

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Office Hours: MF 3:45-5pm, W 12:45-1:45pm
and by appointment

Summer B 2013
Section: 4H19
Time: MTWRF period 5
Place: TUR 2346
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 tmth, unearthing insights and perspectives that hard facts tend to obscure. In his famous short story collection that attempts to capture the surreal horrors of the Vietnam War, for instance, author Tim O’Brien argues that “story-truth is truer sometimes than happening-tmth.” 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, picture book, 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 tmth as they read the course texts closely and critically, and write about their interpretations in bi-weekly discussion questions, a close reading, a prompt essay, and a final paper.

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 ideological assumptions of our own historical context.
- Write clearly, concisely, and carefully, with attention to diction, sentence structure, and paragraph construction.

- Construct cohesive essays that contain sophisticated thesis statements and an organized presentation of judicious 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 proficiently 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

A Wreath for Emmett Till - Marilyn Nelson (Graphia, ISBN: 0547076363).

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, Gwendolyn Brooks’ poems, and selections from John Trimble’s *Writing with Style* 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. 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 (15%)

To help focus your reading, a few discussion questions pertaining to the day's reading assignment will be posted on the class site. Throughout the semester (about once a week), I will open class with 10 minutes of free-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. As these are in-class free-writes, I do not expect polished prose or perfect structure, but I do expect proof of close engagement with the daily readings. See the In-Class Writing Quiz grading rubric on the class site for more information on how I will evaluate these writings.

Discussion Questions -1 page, double-spaced (3 at 100 pts. each, 30%)

Three times over the course of the semester, you will turn in a set of **four** thoughtful and clear questions, each capable of generating various responses and lasting discussion about that week's 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.

Essays (40%)

Close Reading - 2 pages, double-spaced (100 pts.)

Close reading or explication looks closely at a short passage of text and attempts to unfold or unpack its larger effect or significance. Pick a short passage from the text (a paragraph from a short story, or a stanza of poetry) 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. 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 - 4 pages, double-spaced (150 pts.)

I will give you an essay prompt asking you to respond to a question regarding either Plath's *The Bell Jar* or Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (you may choose to write about either text). This question will ask you to examine how a certain theme, issue, or image functions in the text, and how this theme, issue, or image can lead us to a greater understanding of the text as a whole. Formulating a **thesis** regarding the prompt, pulling relevant **evidence** from the text, and **analyzing** that evidence thoughtfully in order to support your thesis are the key goals of this essay.

Final Essay - 6 pages, double-spaced (150 pts.)

In the final essay, you will respond to a prompt that will ask you to consider one of the larger themes of the course (truth, representation, stories, etc.) in light of the insights you have gained from reading either Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, or both. While the previous prompt essay asks you to examine a particular theme in order to gain deeper insight into a text, this essay asks you to use a text to gain deeper insight into a particular theme.

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:

- 15% - Participation
- 15% - In-Class Writing Quizzes
- 30% - Discussion Questions
- 40% - Essays
 - 10% - Close Reading
 - 15% - Prompt Essay
 - 15% - Final Essay

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).**

Week 1 - Reading for Truth(s): Analyzing the Short Story

Mon. 7/1 - Introductions

Tues. 7/2 - “I Used to Live Here Once” (Rhys), “Bullet in the Brain” (Wolff)
(available on class site - print and bring to class)

Wed. 7/3 - "The Yellow Wallpaper," "Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper" (Gilman)
(available on class site - print and bring to class)

In-class close reading exercise

Thurs. 7/4 - No class. Happy 4th!

Fri. 7/5 - "The Veldt" (Bradbury), "The Lottery" (Jackson)

(available on class site - print and bring to class)

Discussion Questions due (all groups)

Week 2 - Poetic Justice: Telling the Emmett Till Story

Mon. 7/8 - Writing Workshop: choose a passage to close read and bring to class.

Tues. 7/9 - *The Un told Story of Emmett Till* (available on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bviiYSJtkOk>)

Look Magazine article "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi" (Hule)

(available here: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf_look_confession.html)

Wed. 7/10 - *A Wreath for Emmett Till* (Nelson)

Thurs. 7/11 - "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Bums Bacon," "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till" (Brooks)

Fri. 7/12 - Close Reading due

In-class examinations of excerpts from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Ladies Home Journal*

Week 3 - Truth and Madness

Mon. 7/15 - *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 1-5)

Tues. 7/16 - *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 6-10), Group 1 Discussion Questions due

Wed. 7/17 - *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 11-15), Group 2 Discussion Questions due

Thurs. 7/18 - *The Bell Jar* (Ch. 16-20), Group 3 Discussion Questions due

Fri. 7/19 - Writing Workshop: *The Bluest Eye* (foreword), "Diction" from *Writing With Style* (Trimble) (available on class site - print and bring copy to class)

In-class examinations of *Dick and Jane* primers

Week 4 - Truth and the "Master Narrative"

Mon. 7/22 - *The Bluest Eye* (1-58)

Tues. 7/23 - *The Bluest Eye* (61-110)

Wed. IHA - *The Bluest Eye* (111-163)

Thurs. 7/25 - *The Bluest Eye* (164-206)

Fri. 7/26 - **Prompt essay due**

Week 5 - Capturing the Truth Part 1: Photographs

Mon. 7/29 - *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 1-3), **Group 1 Discussion Questions due**

Tues. 7/30 - *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 4-6), **Group 2 Discussion Questions due**

Wed. 7/31 - *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Ch. 7-9), **Group 3 Discussion Questions due**

Thurs. 8/1 - Writing Workshop: "Readability" from *Writing with Style* (Trimble)
(available on class site - print and bring a copy to class)

Fri. 8/2 - *The Things They Carried* ("The Things They Carried" to "Friends")

Week 6 - Capturing the Truth Part 2: Telling 'True' War Stories

Mon. 8/5 - *The Things They Carried* ("How to Tell a True War Story" to "Ambush")

Tues. 8/6 - *The Things They Carried* ("Style" to "Field Trip")

Wed. 8/7 - *The Things They Carried* ("The Ghost Soldiers" to "The Lives of the Dead")

Thurs. 8/8 - Writing Workshop

Fri. 8/9 - **Final paper due** (email to me by midnight)

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 **2 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 5 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>