



American Literature II – Syllabus

Course Description: If you only have a few pages to share your voice, you make each word count. American history is filled with writers of remarkable talent, and countless have turned their pens to brilliant short fiction and essays. In this course, we will explore the great American poets, essayists, and short story writers. Students will be encouraged to read and respond critically—and have fun!

Prerequisite: *Intro to American Literature* or equivalent experience. This course will dwell less on American history than *Intro to American Literature*, instead focusing on individual texts, but will provide contextual reminders of important facts.

Course Outline:

Week One: American Foundations—Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley, & Alexander Hamilton

Week Two: American Poetry, 1800s—Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, & Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Week Three: American Poetry, 1900-1950—Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, & Langston Hughes

Week Four: American Poetry, 1950-present—Maya Angelou, Julia Alvarez, Mary Oliver, & Trevino L. Brings Plenty

Week Five: American Essays—Henry David Thoreau

Week Six: American Essays II—E.B. White

Week Seven: American Western & Southern Short Fiction—Bret Harte & Mark Twain

Week Eight: American Northeastern Short Fiction—Ernest Hemingway & James Thurber

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Advanced Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.

Required Texts:

The student should have access to the following works. We have also provided brief explanations of why particular texts/authors were selected for the course. Selections cover as wide a geographical and cultural background as possible, while still including the essential works of the American literary canon.

Note on content: While we always strive to pick clean and uplifting works, some highly valuable texts result from cultural backgrounds that involve some negative or challenging content. Therefore, we recommend that a parent or guardian at least briefly review works and reach out if they would like to substitute a work that matches their family values.

If you have any trouble finding a work, please let me know promptly so that I can help!

Week One: American Foundations

Reading: Anne Bradstreet, “Epitaph” from “In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth” (PDF provided)

Value: Bradstreet is one of the first “American” poets, and therefore, one of the first American female poets! She is also valuable when considering the nature of “American” writing, as she lived in America at its foundations, but she hailed from England and clearly thought deeply on English considerations.

Reading: Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (Available online) & “A Hymn to the Evening” (Available online)

Value: As the first published African-American female poet, and as an enslaved woman, Wheatley provides a unique perspective on 18th century America—and her poetry is simply beautiful.

Reading: Alexander Hamilton, Excerpt from “The Farmer Refuted” (PDF provided)

Value: Besides his current musical theater fame, Hamilton is recognized as one of the greatest Revolutionary writers. Not only is this essay a valuable look at the concerns and culture of Revolutionary America, but it captures a sparkling—and sarcastic—style, as well as a strong vocabulary.

Week Two: American Poetry, 1800s

Reading: Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, “To the Pine Tree” (Available online)

Value: Considered the first Native American literary writer and the first known Indigenous poet, Schoolcraft's impact on the development of Native American literature is often compared to that of early American writer Anne Bradstreet.

Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Concord Hymn" (Available online)

Value: Leader of the Transcendentalists, Emerson had a profound impact on American literary culture.

Reading: Walt Whitman, Sections 1-2 of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (Available online)

Value: Whitman is a notable name in American literature, particularly due to his uniquely free-flowing and creative style, as well as his cerebral, imaginative concepts.

Reading: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Bridge" (Available online)

Value: Although Longfellow is famous for "Paul Revere's Ride," his works spanned a range of topics. In "The Bridge," he contemplates the passing of time.

Week Three: American Poetry, 1900-1950

Reading: Wallace Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry" (Available online)

Value: Besides his role as a valuable American poet, Stevens' contemplation of modern poetry is an excellent introduction to the contemporary styles we'll see in these remaining weeks.

Reading: T.S. Eliot, "The Boston Evening Transcript" (Available online)

Value: T.S. Eliot is an important name in literary tradition—his masterworks include *The Wasteland* and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"—due to his striking style, stunning imagination, and discussion of the everyday in anything but ordinary terms.

Reading: Langston Hughes, "Dust Bowl," "Let America Be America Again" (Available online)

Value: A leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes' poetry has a stunning musicality, and his writing refuses to back down from challenging topics.

Week Four: American Poetry, 1950-present

Reading: Maya Angelou, "Awaking in New York," "Caged Bird" (Available online)

Value: For her cultural impact alone, Angelou is worth exploring. Her poetry speaks to the essence of human nature and experience.

Reading: Julia Alvarez, “Heroics” (Available online)

Value: Although English wasn’t Alvarez’s first language, her study of the language impacted her keen diction. Her poems also capture everyday experiences with reverence.

Reading: Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day” (Available online)

Value: Oliver’s talent with words captures nature in a way few other modern poets do, and she had a true impact on contemporary poetry.

Reading: Trevino L. Brings Plenty, “Will” (Available online)

Value: With unique poetic structure and form, Brings Plenty is a valuable demonstration of modern poetry’s many styles.

Week Five: American Essays

Reading: Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience” (Available online or in a collection)

Value: Famous for *Walden*, Thoreau was a pivotal novelist in 19th century America. “Civil Disobedience” stands alone, unlike many segments of *Walden*, and continues a common American debate: What is a good government, and what is its role?

Week Six: American Essays II

Reading: E.B. White, “Poetry” (1939), “Will Strunk” (1957) (PDF provided)

Value: Not only does White capture important American thoughts and challenges, but his writing is a masterpiece, and serves as an excellent reference for growing writers. Besides, his thoughts on poetry are a fitting end to our poetry weeks, and “Strunk” captures several essential writing tips!

Week Seven: American Western & Southern Short Fiction

Reading: Bret Harte, “A Yellow Dog” (Available online or in a collection)

Value: Thanks to his wide variety of careers in California (including miner!), Harte’s stories offer a vivid, albeit somewhat-romanticized image of the Gold Rush.

Reading: Mark Twain, “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (Available online or in a collection)

Value: Twain is, perhaps, our most iconic American writer. While he’s famous for Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, his short stories have a classic charm.

Week Eight: American Northeastern Short Fiction

Reading: Ernest Hemingway, “Cat in the Rain” (Available online or in a collection)

Value: One of the greats in 20th-century literature, Hemingway’s writing captures the lifestyle and disillusionment of his era.

Reading: James Thurber, “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” (Available online or in a collection)

Value: Thurber’s style is excellent, especially as he weaves a creative tale of a daydreamer in “Mitty.” His unique use of narrative voice—as he explores multiple settings in one story—is a valuable touchstone.

There is no required edition; the student must simply cite the edition used. **Please make sure that your copy of the text is not abridged.** Other works will be provided in PDF format to the students, although students are more than welcome to find their own print copies!

If possible, we recommend that students interact with the text (highlighting and marginal notes), but students are *not* required to own copies of the works—texts from the library are perfectly all right! If you would like to own a particular text, inexpensive copies can be found online and at used bookstores.

As students tend to experience stronger reading comprehension when not reading on a screen, we would also highly recommend that students have access to a hard copy of the works (a printed out PDF works well, too!).



American Literature II

Lesson Two: American Poetry, 1800s

SAMPLE LESSON

Now that we have set the stage, it is time to begin our topical studies. We will spend a bit more time with poetry, as the shorter style will give us a snapshot of a wide variety of authors, cultures, and styles.

JANE JOHNSTON SCHOOLCRAFT (1800-1842) –

Considered “the first Native American literary writer, the first known Indian female writer, the first known Indian poet, the first known poet to write poems in a Native American language, and the first known American Indian to write out traditional Indian stories,” (1) Jane Johnston Schoolcraft was born on January 31, 1800 in what is now Michigan. Her grandfather was a prominent Ojibwe war chief. Her mother had married John Johnston, a Scots-Irish man who had come to North America to become a fur trader. Schoolcraft’s Ojibwe name was Bamewawagezhikaquay, meaning “Woman of the Sound the Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky.” Schoolcraft’s father and mother ensured that all eight of their children were educated in English and written literature as well as the Ojibwe language and culture.

In 1823, Jane married Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, an explorer, writer, and United States Indian agent. Together, the couple had four children: a son born in 1824 who died shortly before his third birthday from croup; a stillborn daughter in 1825; a second daughter in 1827; and a second son in 1829. Henry Schoolcraft traveled extensively for his work, and the couple wrote many letters to each other. In their letters, both Henry and Jane often crafted poems, evidence of their literature-led lives.

Jane wrote poetry both in English and Ojibwe, wrote down traditional Ojibwe stories, and translated many Ojibwe songs into English. Jane’s work helped Henry compile material about Native Americans, especially the Ojibwe people, which later formed the basis of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). Although Jane did not publish any of her poems—around fifty, mostly focusing on her private life—Henry did include some of his wife’s work in a handwritten magazine, produced in 1826 and 1827. *The Literary Voyage* was formally published in 1962, and eventually—some three decades later—it would begin to attract interest in Jane and her writing. When Robert Dale Parker published *The Sound the*

Stars Make Rushing Through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft in 2007, releasing an extensive collection of Jane's writings, mostly previously unpublished poems, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft entered the spotlight as a major figure in multicultural and American literary history. Schoolcraft's impact on the development of Native American literature is often compared to that of early American writer Anne Bradstreet.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882) –

Have you ever met someone with so much *academic* intellect that they can't entirely collect their ideas for us less-experienced laypeople? That was my Latin professor to a T. He was extraordinarily kind, but he seemed confused when we hadn't read all the German philosophers—or when we didn't understand the science behind golf. Explanations would follow, of course, but he would jump between ideas without the stepping-stones we needed to understand.

This may be the experience you have with Emerson. He was academically intellectual, and it certainly comes across in his writing. His words are full of big, inspiring ideas... and some confusing, challenging, and abstract passages. (I've done my best to pick a good introductory text for us.) A Boston native, he studied at Harvard, explored Europe after the tragic death of his first wife, befriended literary greats Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Taylor Coleridge... and that was just his first thirty years. (2)

While Emerson's first career was in the ministry—his father was a Unitarian clergyman—his wife's death brought on a wave of doubt. After leaving the church, Emerson sought a revelation of God's presence, which he eventually found in the philosophy of **Transcendentalism**. (3)

ASIDE: TRANSCENDENTALISM

The Transcendentalists criticized society's inclination towards conformity, pushing people to find their own individualized relationship or connection to the universe. For Emerson and Thoreau, another member of the movement, that connection was found in nature. As the American Civil War brewed, the Transcendentalists were also strongly opposed to slavery. (4)

Even during his lifetime, Emerson was known as one of America's great thinkers.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807-1882) –

Now, let's turn to America's celebrity poet: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. If you look up Longfellow's portrait, he looks more than a little like Santa Claus, but visualize him as a wildly-talented pop musician—someone who makes a popular art form bloom in America and beyond.

He started school at age three, published his first poem at thirteen, passed the entrance exams for Bowdoin College the same year, and enrolled there for his sophomore year. In school, he was elected to the prestigious "Peucinian Society"—which was, apparently, more impressive than the society his classmate Nathaniel Hawthorne had joined. (5)

While Longfellow's father hoped he'd take a legal track, he chose to study literature and modern languages, eventually receiving a professorship in the latter subject.

WALT WHITMAN (1819-1893) –

Not everyone had Longfellow's pop star status, though. Next, let's meet a poet who worked and waited—and waited, and waited—for his now-pervasive celebrity status. I love his story, and it's an important introduction to his style, so brace for a longer bio.

Whitman's family were working-class New Yorkers, moving frequently between Brooklyn houses—Walt Sr. dabbled in real estate speculation, building new homes and selling them off (hopefully) for a profit. Young Whitman studied in the new public schools, but he seemed to have learned most from his trips to museums, libraries, and lectures. (6)

Whitman's first attempts at literature were less than dazzling. Throughout a handful of careers—schoolteacher, printer, journalist—he attempted short stories and poems, even publishing a few, but didn't earn critical success. In 1855, when he finally had enough poems for a collection, he attempted to find publication... and, when no one jumped at the opportunity, took initiative. The first edition was printed out of Whitman's own money, supported by his sale of a house (like father, like son). Our friend Emerson was thrilled with the debut, but few others took note. A second and third edition, each one including new poems and revisions, were also unsuccessful. (7)

During the Civil War, Whitman sought out wounded soldiers—including his brother—to encourage and uplift, treating Confederate and Union victims equally. Struck by the horrors of war, he published *Drum-Taps* in 1865, meditating on his shifting feelings towards the turmoil in free verse.

ASIDE: THE CIVIL WAR

The American Civil War (1861-65) grew from increasing tensions surrounding the horrific enslavement of African people in America. While people had been speaking out against slavery for years—the first Abolition Society, founded in 1775, included Ben Franklin among other important figures—the crisis was exacerbated by debates over newly-added states and territories. (Would these new states be “slave” or “free”?) As time passed, more people in the free North began to rally against slavery, and more in the South grew concerned about how eliminating the practice would affect their economy.

When firmly anti-slavery candidate Abraham Lincoln won the presidency, seven Southern states seceded from the nation and formed the Confederate States of America. The ensuing conflict was the bloodiest that America had ever experienced, broke down the country’s political and economic structures, and scarred thousands upon thousands of families. However, the war finally delegitimized the enslavement of African people and their children in America. (8, 9, 10)

Finally, his *seventh* printing of *Leaves of Grass* (1881) was a financial success, and Whitman was able to support himself with his writing. Sadly, he would pass away in the following year, but those final days were full of travel, writing, and friendship with literary icons such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Bram Stoker. (11)

Assignment 2A: Read the following works.

- **Jane Johnston Schoolcraft**, “To the Pine Tree” (Available online)
Value: Considered the first Native American literary writer and the first known Indigenous poet, Schoolcraft’s impact on the development of Native American literature is often compared to that of early American writer Anne Bradstreet.
- **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, “Concord Hymn” (Available online)
Value: Leader of the Transcendentalists, Emerson had a profound impact on American literary culture.
- **Walt Whitman**, Sections 1-2 of “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (Available online)
Value: Whitman is a notable name in American literature, particularly due to his uniquely free-flowing and creative style, as well as his cerebral, imaginative concepts.

- **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**, “The Bridge” (Available online)

Value: Although Longfellow is famous for “Paul Revere’s Ride,” his works spanned a range of topics. In “The Bridge,” he contemplates the passing of time. *Note: If desired, students may substitute “Paul Revere’s Ride.” As it is frequently read and taught, it was not selected in case of repeating prior experience.*

After you have completed the readings, use complete sentences to answer the following questions.

1. Compare “A Hymn to the Evening” to “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (read last week). Are there themes or stylistic elements that seem to be a part of Wheatley’s written voice?
2. Compare and contrast the four poems read this week. Are there similar literary devices, themes, etc?
3. Like last week, look for the inner workings of the four poems you just read. What literary devices do you see? How do the rhyme and meter reflect the themes/plot of the poem? What is the “sound” of each poem when read aloud? etc.

Assignment 2B: Choose *one* poem and complete the attached close reading sheet. The reflection questions at the end of the sheet should be familiar from *Intro to American Literature*, but we are taking the process a bit further for this class.

You can submit a PDF of your close reading sheet or submit photos/a scan of your hand-completed sheet. If you have any questions, please feel free to email!

You will need:

- A printed copy of your close reading sheet (can be done digitally if necessary, but it’s simpler on paper)
- Two colors of pens (or a pen and a pencil that are clearly different)
- Time and a safe space to read poetry aloud

Complete these steps to perform your close reading:

- Read the poem once. Using your first color of pen, write up the poem with anything that comes to mind. (I’ll be looking for active engagement with the text.) That can mean:
 - Underlining!
 - Doodling questions!
 - Doodling thoughts!

- Just doodling!
 - Arrows!
 - Circling!
 - Etc!
- Read the poem again. Using your second color of pen, write up the poem as you did before. Again, I'll be looking for active engagement with the text.
 - Then, move to each section of the close reading sheet (e.g. "sound," "repetition") and answer the assigned prompts.
 - Be sure that your answers are clear, legible, and thoughtful!

Submit your close-reading.

Sources –

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5. "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow." *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/henry-wadsworth-longfellow.
6. Folsom, Ed and Kennet M. Price. "Walt Whitman." *Life & Letters*, The Walt Whitman Archive, whitmanarchive.org/biography/walt_whitman/index.html.
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9. "About the War." *Ken Burns America*, PBS, 2015, www.pbs.org/kenburns/civil-war/war/war-overview.
10. "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society." *The Pennsylvania Abolition Society*, www.paabolition.org.
11. "About Whitman." *WaltWhitman.org*, The Walt Whitman Birthplace, www.waltwhitman.org/about/about-whitman.