



The Lantern English Co.  
Advanced Literature

### **American Literature III: The Novel and the Stage**

**Course Description:** For centuries, writers have striven for their “great American novel.” In this course, we’ll delve into several of the country’s strongest works of long fiction, exploring novels and stageplays by Wharton, Cather, and other greats. Students will be encouraged to both read and respond critically (while having fun!). *While works are assigned, substitutions may be made if arranged in advance.*

**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. However, this course does not necessarily need to be taken after *American Literature II: Short Fiction & Essays*.

#### **Course Outline:**

**Week One:** Introduction to the Novel – Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

**Week Two:** Wharton Continued

**Week Three:** Introduction to the Stage – Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*;  
and Selected Songs

**Week Four:** Willa Cather, Excerpts from *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

**Week Five:** August Wilson, *Fences*

**Week Six:** Sandra Cisneros, Excerpts from *The House on Mango Street*

**Week Seven:** Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

**Week Eight:** Bradbury Continued

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

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### **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 1-2:**

- Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

- **VALUE:** In *Mirth*, Wharton creates a vivid character study of a Gilded Age socialite. Throughout the novel, students will experience careful plotting, strong yet deeply flawed characters, and an introduction to all the ephemeral glitz of the American Gilded Age.

- **Week 3:**

- Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

- **VALUE:** Not only does Wilder's classic play examine metatheatricity, but it explores, with thoughtful nostalgia, American small town life.

- Song Selections from Musical Theatre

- **VALUE:** To truly understand American theatre, one must realize the impact of

American musical theatre and the lights of Broadway.

- **Week 4:**

- Willa Cather, Excerpts from *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (We will read all of Book 1, “The Vicar Apostolic”: Chapter 1, “The Cruciform Tree”; Chapter 2, “Hidden Water”; Chapter 3, “The Bishop Chez Lui”; Chapter 4, “A Bell and a Miracle”—around 50 pages in my edition)

- **VALUE:** To call Cather’s grasp of description “sublime” is an understatement. She depicts the New Mexican landscape, and her characters, with an unmatched eloquence and empathy.

- **Week 5:**

- August Wilson, *Fences*

- **VALUE:** *Fences* deals with a set of deeply American themes: family, race relations, the African-American experience, city life, and—of course—baseball.

- **Week 6:**

- Sandra Cisneros, Excerpts from *The House on Mango Street* (Short vignettes: “The House on Mango Street,” “My Name,” “Laughter,” “Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark,” “Four Skinny Trees,” “Alicia & I Talking on Edna’s Steps,” “A House of My Own,” “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes”)

- **VALUE:** *Mango Street* shares the coming-of-age of Esperanza Cordero, a Latina girl in Chicago, conveyed through Cisneros’ elegantly simple prose. The story is constructed in vignettes, which makes it all the more valuable in terms of form.

- **Week 7-8:**

- Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

- **VALUE:** In Bradbury’s classic American dystopia, books are outlawed and must be burnt. The novel is a thoughtful, engaging contemplation of the value of literature and the freedom to read.

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.**

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, 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 highly recommend that students have access to a hard copy of the works (a printed out PDF works well, too!).