



American Literature III – Syllabus

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 stage plays by Wharton, Cather, and other greats. Students will be encouraged to both read and respond critically (while having 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. 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: John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

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.

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 & Two: 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 Three: Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

Value: Not only does Wilder's classic play examine metatheatricality, but it explores, with thoughtful nostalgia, American small town life.

Listening: Song Selections from Musical Theater

Value: To truly understand American theater, one must realize the impact of American musical theater and the lights of Broadway.

Week Four: 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 Five: 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 Six: John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

Value: Throughout Steinbeck's canon, he empathizes with the manual laborers, the World War II soldiers, the migrant workers, and all the downtrodden or forgotten people occupying a landscape's margins. *The Pearl* highlights important themes such as family, perseverance, and the preservation of what is good.

Week Seven & Eight: 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!).