



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, 1770s-1900 - Phillis Wheatley, 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)

Value: As the first published African-American female poet, and as an enslaved woman, Wheatley has 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, 1770s-1900

Reading: Phillis Wheatley, “A Hymn to the Evening” (Available online)

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!).