

English 362.001
Winter 2017
MW 11:30am-1pm
2306 Mason Hall

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Office Hours: M 2-4pm
or by appointment

The American Novel: Classics and Controversies

In his 1986 essay “Why Read the Classics?”, Italo Calvino writes of this ubiquitous literary designation, “The classics are books that exert a peculiar influence, both when they refuse to be eradicated from the mind and when they conceal themselves in the folds of memory, camouflaging themselves as the collective or individual unconscious.” In other words, classics are books that not only stick around, but also end up dominating—or even structuring—our cultural conversations.

This course will consider the cultural work that “classics” have done in an American literary context, where this label has been applied to novels that capture a moment, challenge the past, or call for a reimagined future. By diving into these novels, their historical contexts, and the circumstances of their publication, circulation, and reception, we will consider how some novels seem so deeply moored in the debates of their times, while others seem to transcend particularities and attain the status of “classic.” Throughout, we will explore the role of different bodies of cultural authority—ranging from publishers, readers, critics, prize committees, book clubs, and literature class syllabi—that shape our sense of American literary history and, indeed, of what counts as “American literature.” We will also reflect more generally on the novel genre as a literary form that American authors have repeatedly used to observe, to remember, to protest, and to argue for change.

Course Learning Goals:

- explain some of the ways in which the cultural category “classics” has emerged and evolved over the past 150 years of American literary history
- develop and articulate close readings of texts through clear, persuasive prose
- identify and analyze how authors have used the novel to respond to social, cultural, and political themes
- recognize and reflect on institutional frames around “American literature” that shape students’ own reading practices and assumptions about literature

Readings:

All books are available at campus bookstores. Please make every effort to get the editions listed below.

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) [Scribner 2004, ISBN: 9780743273565]
- Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925) [Penguin Classics 1998, ISBN: 9780141180694]
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) [Norton Critical Edition 2010, ISBN: 9780393933994]
- Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940) [Harper Perennial 1998, ISBN: 9780060837563]

- Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1976) [Vintage 1989, ISBN: 9780679721888]
- William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) [Vintage 1990, ISBN: 9780679732242]
- Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973) [Vintage 2004, ISBN: 9781400033430]

Additional secondary readings will be available on Canvas and should be printed out and brought to class.

Course Assignments

Course Requirements:

Attendance	5%
Participation	10%
Daily quotation/reflection card	15%
Close Reading Exercise (in class)	10%
Textual Analysis Essay (4-5pp)	25%
Classics in Context Essay (9-10pp)	35%

Attendance (5%):

The attendance component of your final grade will be based solely on whether or not you show up prepared for class. **As long as you are in class, on time, with the right book in hand, you will receive full credit (10/10) for attendance.** I will take attendance at the beginning of each class period at 11:40am. If you are tardy, or if you do not have the text we are discussing with you in class, you will receive half credit (5/10) for the day. If you have your cell phone out, you will receive zero credit for the day. Every three tardies or class periods in which you do not have the right materials will count as an unexcused absence.

Absences:

- You may miss two class periods without penalty. For each unexcused absence beyond the first two, you will receive an attendance score of zero for the day.
- More than five unexcused classes will likely result in failure of the course, regardless of the work completed.
- I will excuse absences due to family emergencies, medical emergencies, or required attendance at university-sponsored events. However, you must bring a note from a doctor or health professional, a signed letter from a University team or program, or documentation of a family emergency.
- For any absence, whether excused or unexcused, I will expect you to submit a **one-page, single-spaced response to the day's reading** within one week of the missed class. For excused absences and your first two unexcused absences, you'll receive full attendance credit for turning in a response paper (10/10); for unexcused absences beyond the first two, you'll receive partial attendance credit (7/10). It is your responsibility to follow up on this work; I will not remind you when you need to make up work. You can email these responses directly to me.

Participation (10%):

In-class participation can take many forms, both generative and disruptive:

Generative participation	Disruptive participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering comments and observations about specific passages or moments in a text • responding to your classmates’ comments • asking questions about the text or about other comments that have been raised • listening respectfully and alertly • generally being engaged and engaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dominating discussion by speaking too much • dismissing counterarguments or resistance to your point of view • conducting side conversations while others are speaking • looking bored or disdainful • generally being a jerk

My general philosophy is that participation grades should not be merely transactional (handing out points for every comment offered in class) or punitive (punishing those who do not speak), but rather should offer a holistic sense of how you have contributed to the small community of our classroom. Thus, at the end of the term, I will grade your overall participation according to this holistic rubric: provided that you have behaved more in accordance with the “generative” column than the “dismissive” column, you’ll receive full or close-to-full credit.

A note to shy or quiet students about “participation”:

I completely understand that not everyone feels the same level of comfort contributing vocally in a class of 30 students, which is why I have built in and weighted more heavily other forms of “participation” into this course’s grading rubric (e.g., coming to class, being prepared, generating written comments). That said, I am happy to meet one-on-one to talk about strategies for joining in on larger class discussions, as I think that learning to navigate such conversation is one of the most useful skills you can develop in a seminar-style class.

Daily Quotation/Reflection Card (15%):

For every day of class, I will ask you to bring in prepared comments written out on a 3x5” index card. On one side of the card, you will copy out a quotation from that day’s reading that you found particularly interesting, challenging, confusing, or remarkable. On the other side of the card, you will explain (in complete sentences) why you zeroed in on your selected quotation. The purpose of this daily exercise is to give you a small, low-stakes space in which to start to process the day’s reading before you arrive in class. The cards will also, in effect, constitute another type of “participation grade.”

I will collect these cards at 11:40am as a way of taking attendance, so please prepare them ahead of time and **be sure to put your name on your cards!** I will also read over your cards and mark them on the following scale:

Check-plus (5/5)	A full-card’s-worth of writing that shows probing interest and reflection about your selected quotation
Check (4/5)	A half-card’s-worth of writing that shows some thinking about your selected quotation
Check-minus (3/5)	Minimal or cursory engagement with your selected quotation

You'll be able to collect your index cards from me and discuss any ideas that may arise from them in my office during office hours. I will also keep a free stash of blank index cards in my office, so please come by to pick up cards whenever you need them.

Close Reading Exercises (February 8, 10%):

Once during the term, I will ask you to complete a 40-minute in-class close reading exercise. I will select a short passage from one of the novels that we will have read, and you will read and respond to it by noting both its salient formal features as well as the ways in which it reflects, responds to, or complicates larger patterns or themes in the work as a whole.

You'll note that I am not calling this exercise a "midterm" (though it essentially functions as such). I am purposefully using the term "exercise" because the purpose is not to test you on content, but rather to evaluate how you deploy one of the core competencies of literary study: closely reading and writing on a literary text. If the note cards give you a small space in which to practice one of the first steps of this process (i.e., noticing interesting features of a text), and the essays give you a longer space in which to develop argumentative claims, then this exercise represents a middle space in which you can practice using close reading to generate questions about a text.

Textual Analysis Essay (February 24, 25%):

This shorter essay (4-5pp) will ask you to respond to one of the first three novels on our syllabus (no outside research will be required). We will discuss possible topics and approaches to this essay in class.

Classics in Context Essay (April 24, 35%):

This longer essay (9-10pp) will ask you to consider, through some small amount of original research, either the reception or afterlife of a "classic" American novel. Some of you may be more interested in the immediate historical circumstances of a text's reception: how was a particular novel first produced, marketed, shunned, praised, or debated by its fans and detractors? Some of you may be more interested in how a text has lived on past its own time: how have other authors or artists adapted or rewritten a novel, or how has a novel ended up enshrined in (or maybe banned from?) high school or college syllabi? This essay will give you leeway to develop a research question that is interesting and compelling to *you*, then will give you space to answer that question through a mix of close reading and secondary research.

Late Work:

Essays: Both essays are due by 5pm to Canvas (uploaded in .doc or .docx format). Please take note of the due dates now, and if you anticipate any difficulties in meeting deadlines, contact me within the first week of the course. Late papers will be penalized two points per twenty-four-hour period they are late. Papers more than a week late will likely receive a failing grade.

Daily index cards: Because the daily index card exercise is designed to prepare you for specific class periods, I will not accept late cards.

Course Policies

Reading:

One of the pleasures of taking a literature course on novels is getting to immerse yourself in long, fictional works that conjure up characters and worlds. However, this pleasure has a downside: reading novels takes *time*—something that can often feel in short supply. This course is no exception: all of the novels have their pleasures, but some of them are quite long, and others are quite dense. That said, I expect you to do all of the reading for this course: in fact, I consider the biggest portion of your responsibility for this course to be simply getting through the assigned readings so that we can discuss each novel in finer detail during our class meetings.

On the reading schedule below, I have tried to signal approximately how many pages of reading are due for each class meeting, but please note that 80 pages of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will feel significantly different from 80 pages of *The Sound and the Fury*. As you approach the novels on our syllabus, it might be helpful to consider how many different ways there are to read a piece of fiction: skimming along the surface, getting lost in the plot, feeling for the characters, stalling on the same sentence two or three times, or even skipping to the end. All of these modes of reading are valid in this course—please don't feel compelled to “close read” all the time! We will spend time in class talking through how to think about budgeting your readerly attentions, as well as how the texts themselves might be setting expectations for our reading practices. Ultimately, one of the main skills that I hope you will develop in this course is knowing how and when to shift among different modes of attentive reading based on the text and context in front of you.

Additionally, I expect that everyone read from paper versions of the novels and articles for this course, rather than electronic versions. On a practical level, using paper versions of books ensures that everyone reads from the same text (the editions listed at the top of this syllabus) and can bring a copy of the text into class for discussion. On a cognitive level, a growing body of research into reading comprehension across different media suggests that we retain key details better when reading from print, even if we prefer to read digitally (see the “Research on Reading and Technology” folder on Canvas for interesting articles on this topic). Given how close reading hinges on key details, this benefit of print far outweighs the presumed conveniences of the digital. Finally, on a philosophical level, I consider this course and its readings a welcomed departure from our usual routines of reading, which are overwhelmingly married to screens of various sizes. Just as novel reading affords certain pleasures related to imaginative immersion and sustained attention, reading from print affords our eyes and minds a break from the backlit world we increasingly inhabit.

If you have any questions or concerns about the reading policies for this course, please set up a time to come speak to me within the first two weeks of the semester. After that, I will assume that everyone is on board with this policy.

Plagiarism:

The University of Michigan is built around intellectual and academic integrity, and plagiarism (stealing/borrowing/not citing the work and/or ideas of another person and presenting them as your own) is not treated lightly. If you are caught plagiarizing—regardless of whether it's a few lines or an entire paper—you will automatically fail the assignment and, under most

circumstances, will also fail the course, regardless of how much work you've completed in the class. In addition, the case will be forwarded to the Dean of Student Affairs for disciplinary action and permanent notation in your academic record. If you ever have any questions about what might count as plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask! For more information, also see: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/plagNote.asp>

Course Communications:

We will use **Canvas** as our primary course management system. I will post notes and handouts on Canvas, as well as secondary readings. You will submit your two essays on Canvas as well.

In addition to Canvas, your @umich email accounts will be my primary point of contact with you, so please be sure to check this account regularly. I am also most easily reached via email (bevilacq@umich.edu) and invite you to send me any questions or concerns that may arise during the term. I make every effort to respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them.

Office Hours:

I will hold office hours on Monday afternoons from 2-4pm, during which you are invited to drop in to discuss any matters relating to our course. I am also happy to arrange meetings by appointment. Whether you are enjoying a text and want to talk more about it, or are struggling with a reading or writing assignment and want to discuss strategies for negotiating this difficulty, or are just looking to check in about how the course is going, please stop by!

Starting after winter break, I will hold additional office hours to help you get started on the second essay for the course. I ask that everyone schedule at least one appointment to talk about the second essay.

In-Class Technology Use:

Cell Phones: I have a zero tolerance policy on cellphones. Please silence your cell phones and other electronic devices before class begins and keep them out of sight during class. If I see that you have your cell phone out at all during class, you will receive a zero in participation for the day.

Laptops, Tablets, and Other Electronic Devices: I ask that students do not use laptops or tablets in class. All of the readings should be brought to class in paper format (as explained above), and any notes you need to take should likewise be taken on paper (there is absolutely no need to take verbatim notes of our course meetings, and, in fact, this mode of notetaking may not really be worthwhile in any class). Laptops and tablets are distractions to everyone in a discussion-based course such as this one.

As with the reading policy, if you have specific concerns about this technology policy, please schedule a time to speak with me within the first two weeks of class. After that, I will assume that everyone is on board with this policy.

Accessibility and Accommodations:

I am committed to making this course as accessible as possible for all students. If there are ever circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as

possible (within the first two weeks of the semester) so that we can work together to develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. In some cases, you may wish to consult with the university's Services for Students with Disabilities:

<http://ssd.umich.edu/>

Mental Health Resources:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) is a free and confidential service for students who are looking for emotional and psychological support for anything from the daily rigors of college life to life-changing events like parental divorce, break-ups, grief over loss, etc. For more information: <http://www.umich.edu/~caps/>

Sweetland Writing Center:

If you would like additional feedback or assistance with your writing, the Sweetland Writing Center is a fabulous resource. Staff members and peer tutors from the Center can work with you as you draft and revise your assignments. For more information: www.lsa.umich.edu/swc

Religious Observances:

If a class session or due date conflicts with your religious holidays, please notify me ahead of time so that we can make alternative arrangements. In most cases, I will ask you to turn in your assignment ahead of your scheduled absence, but your absence will not affect your grade.

Class and Reading Schedule

NOTE: readings marked [C] are available in the “Files” section of Canvas. Readings on Uncle Tom’s Cabin are included in the back of the Norton Critical Edition [NCE], and “How Bigger Was Born” is included in the back of the Harper Perennial edition of Native Son [NS].

Jan 4 (W)	Smith, “Value/Evaluation” [Google Books, C] Calvino, “Why Read the Classics?” [C]
Jan 9 (M)	Schulz, “Why I Despise <i>The Great Gatsby</i> ” [C] <i>The Great Gatsby</i> , Ch 1-4 (80pp)
Jan 11 (W)	<i>GG</i> , Ch 5-9 (100pp)
Jan 16 (M)	NO CLASS: MLK Day (but start reading <i>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</i>)
Jan 18 (W)	<i>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</i> , all (120pp) Hammill, “The Intellectuals, the Masses and <i>Gentlemen Prefer Blondes</i> ” [C]
Jan 23 (M)	<i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i> , Ch 1-10 (90pp)
Jan 25 (W)	<i>UTC</i> , Ch 11-18 (90pp)
Jan 30 (M)	<i>UTC</i> , Ch 19-28 (90pp)
Feb 1 (W)	<i>UTC</i> , Ch 29-37 (50pp)
Feb 6 (M)	<i>UTC</i> , Ch 38-45 (50pp) Stowe, “Appeal to the Women of the Free States” (NCE 459-461) [C]
Feb 8 (W)	Tompkins, “Sentimental Power: <i>UTC</i> and the Politics of Literary History” (NCE 539-561) [C] Cantave, “Who Gets to Create the Lasting Images? The Problem of Black Representation in <i>UTC</i> ” (NCE 582-594) [C] In-class close reading exercise
Feb 13 (M)	Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” “Many Thousands Gone” [C] <i>Native Son</i> , “Fear” (90pp) (there aren’t good chapter breaks in this section, so try to get through about half of it for Monday and half for Wednesday)
Feb 15 (W)	<i>Native Son</i> , “Fear”
Feb 20 (M)	<i>NS</i> , “Flight” (120pp) (there aren’t good chapter breaks in this section, so try to get through about half of it for Monday and half for Wednesday)
Feb 22 (W)	<i>NS</i> , “Flight”

Feb 24 (F)	Close reading essay due
Feb 27 (M) Mar 1 (W)	NO CLASS: Winter Break (but finish reading <i>Native Son</i>)
Mar 6 (M)	<i>NS</i> , “Fate” (160pp) Wright, “How Bigger Was Born” (<i>NS</i> 431-462) [C]
Mar 8 (W)	<i>Woman Warrior</i> , “No Name Woman,” “White Tigers” (55pp)
Mar 13 (M)	<i>WW</i> , “Shaman,” “At the Western Palace” (120pp)
Mar 15 (W)	<i>WW</i> , “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe” (40pp)
Mar 20 (M)	Kingston, “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers” [C] Chin, “The Most Popular Book in China” [C] Wong, “Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour?” [C]
Mar 22 (W)	<i>The Sound and the Fury</i> , “April Seventh, 1928” (75pp) Scott, “On William Faulkner’s <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> ” [C]
Mar 27 (M)	<i>SF</i> , “June Second, 1910” (100pp)
Mar 29 (W)	<i>SF</i> , “April Sixth, 1928” (80pp) Essay 2 proposal due
Apr 3 (M)	<i>SF</i> , “April Eighth, 1928” (60pp)
Apr 5 (W)	Faulkner, Nobel Lecture [C] Morrison, Nobel Lecture [C] Morrison, “black matters” [C]
Apr 10 (M)	<i>Sula</i> , Part 1 (80pp)
Apr 12 (W)	<i>Sula</i> , Part 2 (90pp)
Apr 17 (M)	Workshop for final essays
Apr 24 (M)	Final essay due

Close Reading Exercise**11:40am, Wednesday, Feb. 8**

Select one of the following passages from either *The Great Gatsby*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Take some time to read and re-read the passage, then compose a written response that identifies salient formal features of the text, considers the effects of those textual features, and connects the features and effects of this passage to other parts of the book. Ultimately your response should answer the following question: how and why is this passage important to our understanding of the novel as a whole?

You may use your copy of the text to look up and cite other moments that connect to this passage. You may not have any other notes out during this exercise.

No blue books needed.

Advice for this exercise:

- Do spend at least ten minutes reading, re-reading, taking notes, and brainstorming before you begin to write.
- Do structure your written response in paragraphs, including a very short introduction that offers a sense of how your response will unfold.
- Do write descriptively about the passage's features and effects (i.e., "show your work" and your thinking).
- Do cite other specific moments in the text that amplify or complicate your sense of the passage's effects and importance.
- Do end with a brief conclusion that ventures an answer (or even additional questions) on the issue of how this passage is important to our understanding of the novel as a whole.
- Avoid listing or cataloging every interesting feature of the passage. Instead, focus on those details that best support the connection you hope to make to other parts of the text.
- Avoid making generalized comments about the passage (i.e., "this passage reminds me of another character" or "this passage touches on Christian themes"). Instead, be specific about the details you are noticing and the connections you are making.

Evaluation:

I will use the following rubric to evaluate your written response:

<p>Focus ___ / 5 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your response has a specific, focused angle onto the passage - your conclusion suggests a specific significance of your angled reading of the passage to the novel as a whole <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your response simply lists or catalogs everything without a sense of direction or purpose - your response is too general and not specific to the passage in question
<p>Textual Analysis ___ / 25 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your response offers detailed, descriptive exploration of the passage’s formal features - you “show your work” by unpacking any specific citations you include - you connect formal features to specific effects - the specific effects you describe add up in some way to support a focused reading of the passage and novel <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your response is a list or catalog - you talk about the passage in general terms (e.g., plot, character, setting) without pointing to specific formal features - no sense of how your selected features add to a central focus
<p>Connections to the larger text ___ / 15 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you use your specific reading of the passage to move into a consideration of other parts of the text - you cite specific moments from elsewhere in the text and unpack them <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - connections seem trivial or obvious (i.e., no explanation of why you are making specific connections) - you allude to general themes, but not specific passages - you allude to others characters or settings in general terms without citing specific passages
<p>Mechanics and handwriting ___ / 5 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your response is organized into logical paragraphs - your prose is reasonably free of errors - your handwriting is reasonably legible <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no sense of organization - run-on or incomplete sentences - quotations not cited correctly - I can’t read your handwriting!

Textual Analysis Essay
Length: 4-5pp/1300-1600 words

In-class thesis/outline workshop: Monday, Feb. 20
Final due date: Friday, Feb. 24, by 5pm

Select a short passage (no more than half a page long) from one of the first three novels on our syllabus (*The Great Gatsby*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). Offer a close textual analysis of this passage that focuses on its particular textual features and effects, then show how your passage might help the reader notice, complicate, or reimagine other areas of the text. Your essay's central claim should capture the specific relationship between your chosen passage, its salient textual features and effects, and your understanding of the text as a whole.

Advice for this essay:

- **Choosing a passage:** An effective starting passage will not necessarily be full of flowery figurative language or obvious symbolism. Think instead of starting with a passage that seems to be *doing* something unusual. The trick here is to think beyond “diction and syntax” and to look instead for *moments of friction* in the text. Are there places where the narrator asserts himself or herself in the text in a surprising way? Are there are moments where the linguistic content and structure of the passage slow down or confuse your reading? Are there tonal shifts, thematic shifts, or shifts of point of view that seem abrupt or disorienting? Start with a question, not an answer.
- **“Close reading”:** In keeping with the idea of showing how a passage *works* (rather than what a passage contains), try to think descriptively about *how* your selected passage achieves its particular effects on the reader. Your passage may have curious sentence structures or surprising images, *but simply cataloguing these features does not make an argument!* You'll have to take the extra step of explaining *the effects* of these textual features: how does the way the text has been constructed affect the experience of reading it? Claiming that the text results in certain effects through specific textual strategies is the quickest way to generate a claim that is both debatable and supportable.
- **Connecting to other parts of the text:** The fundamental question at this point in the process is: *how does reading your particular passage in your particular way affect our understanding of the rest of the novel?* Does your explication of this particular passage help you recognize similar features and effects in other parts of the text that you may have missed before? Does this passage stand out as an outlier that sets other parts of the text into new relief? How does the particular pathway through the text that you're offering contribute to a particular understanding of the novel?
- **Scope of claims:** Because this essay relies solely on textual evidence, you will necessarily be limited in the types of claims you can make. For example, without more contextual evidence from historical sources, you cannot make claims about Anita Loos's cultural position as a female author in the 1920s, or about *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* role in starting the Civil War. However, you *can* make claims about how *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* portrays reading and writing, or about how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* uses discussions of violence. These are claims about how the text transmits ideas to the reader, which is a good starting point for this type of essay. That said, if you do want to start to connect your reading of the text to larger themes or concepts outside of the novel, save these gestures for your essay's conclusion, where you can use them to leave your reader wanting more.

Format: 1” margins, 12-point font, double-spaced, .doc or .docx. Please follow MLA guidelines for in-line parenthetical citations and block-quoting (if necessary).

Due dates: We will workshop thesis statements and outlines in class on **Monday, Feb. 20**. Final essays are due by 5pm on **Friday, Feb. 24** on Canvas.

Evaluation: I will use the following rubric to evaluate your essay:

<p>Argument (20 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay has a clear, compelling, debatable thesis statement (i.e., your thesis makes your reader go, “huh, I hadn’t thought of that before, but I will need to be convinced”) - your argument relies on nuance, complexity, and moments of friction in the text - your argument is specific and supportable with evidence from the text <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - thesis cannot be supported solely with evidence from the text (i.e., reaches too far beyond the text to make historical claims) - thesis is simplistic or obvious (i.e., your reader thinks, “well duh”) - thesis has vague, abstract words (e.g., “society,” “culture,” “history,” “gender”)
<p>Structure (20 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay is organized into paragraphs - the structure builds logically toward your central claim - transitions between paragraphs signal the development of your argument - each paragraph has one (and only one!) topic - you provide your reader with a “roadmap” and “signposts” throughout <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of a sense of logical order - paragraphs simply follow the plot of the novel, rather than the arc of your argument - lack of transitions, clear topic sentences, and other “signpost” elements - overly long paragraphs that try to do too much - overly short paragraphs that lack adequate evidence and analysis
<p>Evidence and Analysis (50 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay’s claims are supported by evidence from the text - textual evidence is artfully incorporated into your own prose - textual evidence is fully “unpacked” - textual evidence is properly cited - all evidence builds to support your central claim <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - too much plot summary, not enough analysis - too many quotations, not enough explanation - quotations are not effectively integrated into your own prose - individual pieces of evidence are not connected back to your central claim
<p>Mechanics (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay has a title that orients your reader to your work - your essay is properly formatted - your essay is free of typos - your prose demonstrates some sense of individual voice and style <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a title that is generic, cryptic, or missing - typos to the point of distraction for the reader - awkward prose, usually diagnosed by looking for overly long sentences, wordy phrasings, too much passive voice, or a thesaurus-dependent diction that works against you to obscure your meaning

Classics in Context Essay
Length: 9-10pp/3000-3400 words

Proposal due: Wednesday, Mar. 29, by 11:30am
Workshop draft: Friday, April 14, by 5pm
In-class workshop: Monday, April 17
Final due date: Monday, April 24, by 5pm

Taking one of the texts on our syllabus as a starting point, generate a research question that considers some aspect of the material, institutional, or cultural life (or afterlife) of the text. Your question might stem from one of the “angles” listed below, or it might emerge from some other issue that has piqued your interest this semester. Use your research question to build up a group of source materials, then write an essay that presents your findings and ventures an argumentative answer to your guiding question.

Possible angles:

- **Re-writings and Adaptations:** All the books on our syllabus have been adapted into different forms, most notably films and plays, but also other works of fiction. To name just two examples, Sara Benincasa’s *Great* (2014) turns *Gatsby* into a young adult novel with two female leads, while Percival Everett’s *Erasure* (2001) reimagines *Native Son* as an exploitatively sentimental tale of inner city life. Your essay might analyze how one of the texts on our syllabus has been re-imagined, re-written, or re-formatted by another artist.
- **Value/evaluation:** All the books on our syllabus have valued and evaluated by different groups of people and institutions through different means and for different ends. The results of these evaluative projects are varied: some texts have won prestigious literary awards, some have been banned from schools and libraries—some have managed both! Your essay might analyze one aspect of how a text on our syllabus has been evaluated by a specific group, institution, or community.
- **Reception and response:** All the books on our syllabus have unique reception histories that speak to the multifarious ways in which readers have interpreted and used these “classic” books. Your essay might consider how a community of readers—critics, reviewers, scholars, teachers, book clubs, “ordinary” readers, etc.—have read and responded to one of these texts.
- **Paratexts:** All the books on our syllabus exist in their own constellations of “paratexts”: book covers, blurbs, introductions, author’s notes, critical editions, etc. Your essay might analyze how the paratextual apparatus around one of our texts has contributed to its meaning and reputation.
- **Pedagogy:** All the books on our syllabus (to greater and lesser extent) are taught in high school and university literature classrooms. As such, they are also the subjects of guides and lesson plans designed to help teachers frame these works for students. Your essay might analyze some of the pedagogical materials surrounding one our texts.

Sample guiding research questions:

- How have films of *The Great Gatsby* rendered the novel’s treatment of Nick as narrator?
- How have different scholars dealt with the problematic racial politics of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*?
- How does a novel like *Erasure* re-write and respond to the form and themes of *Native Son*?
- How did early reviews and interviews shape Maxine Hong Kingston’s image as author and the subsequent reception and reputation of *The Woman Warrior*?

Advice for this essay:

- **Pick something fun.** The purpose of this essay is to give you an opportunity to pursue a question that matters to *you*, so pick a text and topic that will genuinely hold your attention!
- **Start with a question.** If you start your paper with an answer, you may find it hard to proceed. Focus instead on starting with a question that can then guide how you conduct your research and writing.
- **Manage the scope of your research by being specific.** Your initial research question may feel hopelessly large, so try to find ways to limit your question so that it can be answered in 9 to 10 pages. For example, instead of writing on *every* review of a novel, limit yourself to two or three that offer differing views on the same issue or trace a change in attitudes toward the text over time.
- **Be wary of the compare/contrast trap.** If you choose to write on an adaptation or re-imagining of one of our texts, be careful not to fall into the rut of a compare/contrast paper. Rather than pointing out similarities and differences between two versions of the same story, consider instead the effects of these changes. For example, a significant change in a film version of a book may make you reconsider your reading of the book itself.
- **I am here to help!** Please do not hesitate to ask for help at any step of the process: generating a question, narrowing your question so that it is more specific, locating appropriate sources, reading or analyzing sources that are unfamiliar or new, structuring your essay, developing a claim, etc.

Format: 1" margins, 12-point font, double-spaced, .doc or .docx. Please follow MLA guidelines for in-line parenthetical citations and block-quoting (if necessary). Be sure to include a Works Cited page.

Due dates:

- **Proposal:** Submit a 300-word proposal to Canvas by 11:30am (before class) on **Wednesday, March 29**. Your proposal should include your guiding research question, a brief description of how you came to this question, and a sketch of some of the sources you will use (or will look for) to answer your question.
- **Workshop draft:** We will use our last class meeting (Monday, April 17) to workshop drafts of your essays in class. Please have a draft ready to share with a small group by 5pm on **Friday, April 14**.
- **Final due date:** Turn in an electronic version of your essay to Canvas by 5pm on **Monday, April 24**.

Research help:

UM Library collections: <http://mirlyn.lib.umich.edu>

For scholarly essays on literature and literary history:

MLA International Bibliography: <http://search.proquest.com/mlaib/accountid=14667>

start here for any search for scholarly work on a literary text or topic

JSTOR: <http://jstor.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu>

Project MUSE: <http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy.lib.umich.edu/>

For book reviews:

Book Review Index Plus: <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=BRIP&u=umuser&authCount=1>

start here, especially for more recent books

Lexis Nexis: <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>

ProQuest News & Current Events: <http://search.proquest.com/news/index?accountid=14667>

American Periodicals: <http://search.proquest.com/americanperiodicals/accountid=14667>

specifically for periodicals up to 1940

*For even more help, see these **UM Library reference guides:***

News Sources: <http://guides.lib.umich.edu/news>

Reception History: <http://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?g=283018&p=1885733>

For specific books:

Collected resources for Uncle Tom's Cabin: <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sitemap.html>

Faulkner at Virginia: <http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/>

Evaluation: I will use the following rubric to evaluate your essay:

<p>Guiding Question (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay has a clear guiding question to which you offer a potential answer - your question leads to specific sources and analytical methods - your question is compelled by a clear <i>motive</i> (i.e. you articulate a clear reason for posing your question) <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - essay lacks a clearly articulated guiding question - essay lacks a sense of motive or why the question matters
<p>Argument (15 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay has a compelling, debatable thesis statement that responds to your question (i.e., your thesis makes your reader go, “huh, I hadn’t thought of that before, but I will need to be convinced”) - your argument relies on nuance, complexity, and moments of friction in the sources you use - your argument is specific and supportable with evidence from the sources you use <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - thesis does not answer your guiding question - thesis is obvious, simplistic, or vague
<p>Structure (15 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay is organized into paragraphs - the structure builds logically toward your central claim - transitions between paragraphs signal the development of your argument - each paragraph has one (and only one!) topic - you provide your reader with a “roadmap” and “signposts” throughout <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of a sense of logical order - paragraphs simply follow the plot of the novel, rather than the arc of your argument - lack of transitions, clear topic sentences, and other “signpost” elements - overly long paragraphs that try to do too much - overly short paragraphs that lack adequate evidence and analysis
<p>Evidence and Analysis (50 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay’s claims are supported by evidence from appropriate sources - evidence is presented in an appropriate balance of summary, paraphrase, and quotation - all evidence is fully “unpacked” - all evidence builds to support your central claim <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - imbalance among summary, paraphrase, and quotation - evidence is presented without sufficient analysis - individual pieces of evidence are not connected back to your central claim
<p>Mechanics (10 points)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - your essay has a title that orients your reader to your work - your essay is properly formatted - your sources are properly cited and included in a Works Cited section - your essay is free of typos - your prose demonstrates some sense of individual voice and style <p><i>Common problem areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - title is generic, cryptic, or missing - issues with citation - typos to the point of distraction for the reader - awkward prose, usually diagnosed by looking for overly long sentences, wordy phrasings, too much passive voice, or a thesaurus-dependent diction that works against you to obscure your meaning