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Teaching Portfolio

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## Teaching Philosophy

The most animated class conversations I have ever facilitated have started with a simple question: “What is American literature?” Last winter, when I posed this question to my class of first-year writing students (none of them English majors), it did not take long for a consensus to emerge. There was virtually no debate about the twenty or so titles and authors that I collected on the chalkboard—a fact that more than one student found suspicious and unnerving. With students from all over the United States (and a few from around the world), with high school English class backgrounds that they self-described as anywhere from “extremely rigorous” to “a total joke,” how did they *all* seem to know the same answers to my question? What secret cabal of English teachers had ensured that most of them had read *The Great Gatsby*? More to the point, why did the two students who had *not* read Fitzgerald in high school feel ashamed to admit it? The seemingly invisible and inevitable institutionalization of “American literature” proved all the more disturbing once students started noticing patterns and gaps on our list. Besides Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison, the class was hard-pressed to name another person of color who counted as “American literature.” Students had similar problems generating the names of any woman writer besides Emily Dickinson or Harper Lee, or anything considered “literature” written after 1960. For a group of students who had perhaps never been asked where “American literature” came from or what its history might be, my class suddenly had a lot of questions as they started to consider how their particular experiences with “American literature” might fit into larger, more complicated, and ongoing stories about culture, education, and literacy.

In their enthusiastic responses to the question of “American literature,” my students have shown that they are ready to speak back to stagnant, ahistorical, restrictive, and distanced understandings of “Literature.” They are ready to use reading and writing to ask vital, pressing questions about culture, identity, and representation. And they are ready to contribute an assortment of literacy experiences to our classrooms. With my students’ interests and energies in mind, I design my literature and composition courses to give students a structured and inclusive space in which to ask questions, express confusion, recognize difference, and reflect on the meanings and uses of literacy. Instead of treating “literature” as a restrictive space of sacralization and expertise, I help students understand how the basic methods of literary study—reading and writing—are powerful meaning-making tools, complex in their mechanics, broad in their applicability, and formative in how students themselves have come to value, project, and understand their identities, communities, politics, and desires.

My teaching experience has ranged from leading discussion sections in large lecture courses, designing my own small composition courses, and most recently, developing a survey course on the American novel that focuses on complicating notions of “the classic.” No matter the topic of the course, a central goal of my teaching is to help students develop an awareness of their own assumptions about and expectations for reading and writing. From the beginning of each class, I make it clear to all of my students that they each come into the classroom as readers and writers that have been shaped by a variety of people, processes, and institutions. A written literacy narrative assignment at the beginning of the semester provides a more formal space for students to share a piece of their histories as readers and writers, but I also encourage the same type of reflection through more informal writing spaces. I have used an online course site to set up an open forum in which students share interesting items from their everyday reading. As students post everything from BuzzFeed quizzes about the TV show *Scandal* to *New Yorker* articles on police violence, they model different types of reading for each other while also challenging themselves to read and respond to a piece of writing that they may not have otherwise read. I highlight interesting discussions that I see in the forum throughout the course of the semester, and students learn to understand their colleagues

and themselves as much more than just another anonymous face sitting around a seminar table. These reflective and informal assignments prime students for the more “literary” business of the class by preparing them to understand literature as one of many important modes of reading and writing that comprise their textual worlds.

Acknowledging the diversity of reading practices that my students bring to class has enabled me to better teach one very specific type of reading, close reading. As with the concept of “literature,” students arrive in my classes with a wide range of ideas about what “close reading” is, from metaphors of a “treasure hunt” or a search for “hidden meaning” to a catalogue of literary devices that serves as a checklist for their reading. Faced with this variety, I have designed assignments that help students understand close reading as a method for generating questions and claims about texts. In a classroom activity I use at the beginning of the term, I ask students to read a very short poem such as Kay Ryan’s “Sharks’ Teeth.” With the poem projected on a screen in the front of the classroom, I have every student share one thing he or she has noticed while I collect their annotations. While the first students point out more obvious features such as alliteration or enjambment, the rest of the class is forced to be more descriptive about their readings, noting how the alliteration works with the poem’s imagery or rhythm, or how the enjambment forces the reader to focus on a particular word. As their observations grow from a laundry list of devices to a description of the text’s effects, our collective reading coalesces around particular concerns or questions that were not apparent when we first read the poem. This exercise uses class time to model the part of close reading that we assume students can do on their own—the actual reading—and I have found that students really appreciate this acknowledgement of how different close reading is from other types of reading they do. In subsequent essays, I can see that my students feel authorized to move away from simplistic lists of devices and toward more nuanced, compelling descriptions of their encounters with texts, descriptions that foreground the student’s own interests and questions. By reframing close reading as a method for developing questions rather than finding answers, I provide a model for students eager to learn how to grapple with the inevitable confusion that comes along with complex thinking. I ask students to consider close reading as a strategy for responding to both literary and non-literary texts, further equipping them for the varied texts and interpretive contexts they encounter beyond my classroom.

Ultimately, my pedagogy is grounded in the belief that a literature classroom, like reading itself, is uniquely positioned to help students map and negotiate the intellectual and affective territory in between comfort and discomfort, pleasure and struggle, familiarity and alienation, confidence in one’s knowledge of the world and total, despairing confusion. The questions of “American literature” and literary history more broadly are never purely academic in my teaching, but instead provide a rich context in which students can practice these types of negotiations. The students who come through my classrooms are all readers and writers, but they are by no means the same in how they use reading and writing to mediate the different vectors of belonging and exclusion that structure their lives. By eschewing a one-reading-fits-all philosophy of literature and by encouraging conscious reflection and exploration, I make my classroom a space in which students can take stock of themselves and of each other as textual beings, shaped by the values, skills, priorities, and desires they bring to their reading and writing practices. United by an understanding that reading and writing are endlessly plastic media, my students and I work together to explore the ways in which encounters through texts can help us understand who we have been, who we are, and who we want to become.

*Sample syllabus for a survey course (teaching Winter 2017)*

## **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:**

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852)

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925)

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)

Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973)

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1976)

[Critical readings to be determined]

**Assignments and Assessments:**

- Daily quotation/reflection card: write a quotation from the day's reading on the front of a 3x5" index card and a response on the back
  - In-class close reading exercise: timed (45 minutes) in-class reading response essay
  - Textual analysis essay (4-5pp): close reading of one book on the syllabus
  - Classics in context essay (9-10pp): researching the reception history or afterlife of a "classic"
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*Sample syllabus for a survey course***20<sup>th</sup>-century American Literature**

This course will examine how a diverse group of American authors reacted to and reflected the major cultural and historical developments of the twentieth century. Through readings that span novels, short stories, poems, and essays of cultural criticism, students will be introduced to the major literary historical movements of the period, including realism, naturalism, modernism, the Harlem Renaissance, the New Journalism, and post-modernism. How have artists used different literary forms to reckon with the foreign and domestic upheavals of the twentieth century? How has literature helped reify, represent, and rewrite who and what counts as "American"?

In addition to reading and writing about American literature, students will have a unique opportunity to reflect on the fundamental challenge of representing such a wide range of times, experiences, places, and people under the single banner of "American Literature." Over the second half of the term, students will work in groups to develop their own syllabus for a "20<sup>th</sup>-century American Literature" survey course, selecting overarching themes, goals, readings, and assignments. By actively engaging with the survey course's logics of selection and exclusion, students stand to gain a new appreciation for the stakes of constructing a national literature.

**Course Learning Goals:**

- identify and describe the major formal, generic, and literary historical developments of American literature over the course of the twentieth century
- gain fluency in discussing the relationship between artistic works and larger cultural and political contexts
- develop and articulate argumentative readings of literary and critical texts
- reflect on the challenges of distilling "American literature" into a limited list of authors and works

**Readings:**

Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)

Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918)  
Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)  
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)  
Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)  
Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)  
Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994)

Selections from the Heath Anthology of American Literature, Volumes D and E, or a course pack including short stories and shorter selections from novels such as: Gertrude Stein, “Melanctha” from *Three Lives*, Sherwood Anderson, “Hands” from *Winesburg, Ohio*; F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Berenice Bobs Her Hair”; selections from James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*; William Faulkner, “Barn Burning”; Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find” and “The Displaced Person”; Vladimir Nabokov, “Signs and Symbols”; J.D. Salinger, “For Esme—with Love and Squalor”; James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”; John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse”; Octavia Butler, “Bloodchild”; Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”; Leslie Marmon Silko, “Yellow Woman”; Jhumpa Lahiri, “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”

Poetry by James Weldon Johnson, William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Robert Frost, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Frank O’Hara, John Berryman, Kay Ryan, Rita Dove

Essays by W.E.B. DuBois, H.L. Mencken, John Dos Passos, Zora Neale Hurston, John Updike, Susan Sontag, Audre Lorde

### **Assignments and Assessments:**

- Response papers (3 @ 1-2pp each): at least one based on a literary text, one based on a critical text
- Close reading argument (4-6pp): generate a compelling question and claim about a text that is supported with textual evidence
- Syllabus project: working in small groups, develop a syllabus for a “20<sup>th</sup>-century American Literature” course that includes readings, assignments, and a reflective framing essay (5-6pp) that explains the rationale of your syllabus and the challenges you faced in creating it; students will present their syllabi to each other in the last week of class

*Sample syllabus for a topic course*

**“Golden Multitudes”: American Best-sellers**

On its surface, the term “best-seller” seems simple enough: a best-seller is a book that sells—a lot. Over the course of American literary history, however, best-sellers have done more than line the pockets of their publishers, and the term has grown to be more than marker of mere commercial success. For example, Horatio Alger’s best-selling boys’ books, most notably *Ragged Dick* (1868), gave the country an idiom—“rags-to-riches”—through which to imagine an idealized American economic subjectivity. Pearl S. Buck’s *The Good Earth* (1931) offered American readers an empathetic vision of cross-cultural exchange with pre-Communist China during the height of interwar isolationism. Barack Obama, a then-unknown senator from Illinois, used his best-selling *Dreams From My Father* (2004) to cannily lay the groundwork for his historic election as President in 2008. And, if legend is to be trusted, Abraham Lincoln himself remarked that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 best-seller *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* did nothing short of launch the Civil War.

This class will consider the history of the American best-seller from the early days of the republic to the modern era, as we follow in the footsteps of millions of readers by diving into books that took the nation by storm. As we read the most popular books of bygone eras (some of which remain popular—or at least well-known—today), we will consider what these books’ popularity might tell us about their particular moments in history. What types of authors, subjects, distribution channels, and reading conditions make for a best-seller? How else can we gauge reader response to books in the past beyond sales and circulation statistics? With the help of essays on cultural and literary criticism, we will also consider how the rubric of a “best-seller” might help us complicate common distinctions between art and commerce, between high and mass culture, among “literature” and other genres of fiction and non-fiction, and among different modes of reading (for education, for difficulty, for pleasure, for immersion, for escape, etc.). Along these lines, we will ask how best-sellers—often relegated to the margins of “serious” literary study—might test the limits of traditional tools for literary study, including close reading. How and why should we take read seriously books that were meant to be read for fun? Finally, as we read “best-sellers” from over 200 years of American literary history, we will reflect on the transhistorical meaning and value of this particular literary category. How have changes in the material lives of books—production technologies, circulation networks, ways of writing, finding, buying, and reading books—changed the meaning of the term “best-seller”? What bigger historical claims remain to be made about the work of “best-sellers” in American literary and cultural history?

**Course Learning Goals:**

- describe the types of cultural work the label “best-seller” has been asked to do over the long course of American literary history

- describe different forms of literary popularity related to “best-seller” status
- recognize and question the types of assumptions that attach to “best-sellers” and their authors
- develop and articulate argumentative readings of literary and critical texts
- use close reading and historical research methods to identify and analyze how literary works respond to social, cultural, and political themes

### **Readings:**

Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (1794)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852)

Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick* (1868)

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906)

Edith Wharton, *Age of Innocence* (1920)

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1929)

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936)

Lillian Smith, *Strange Fruit* (1944)

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior* (1975)

Barack Obama, *Dreams From My Father* (2004)

Critical readings from Adorno and Horkheimer, Churchwell and Smith, Davidson, Franzen, Hutner, Levine, Mott, Radway and others

### **Assignments and Assessments:**

- Close reading argument (4-6pp): generate a compelling question and claim about a text that is supported with textual evidence
- Historical reception report (2-3pp): locate and analyze historical sources that offer evidence of a literary text’s reception
- Vernacular criticism report (2-3pp): find and respond to an informal, non-professional critical response to a text
- Final essay (10-12pp): generate and pursue a research question on a text or author discussed in class

*Sample syllabus for a topic course*

**American Modernism, 1910-1930**

This class will consider how the aesthetic and political projects of “modernism” found expression in American literary works from the first decades of the twentieth century. Some of the novels, poems, and short stories we will read are examples of the formal daring and difficulty commonly associated with modernist art. Others wear their modernism in less familiar ways, in the subject matter they engage or in the audiences they aimed to reach. As we rethink how to use the term “modernism” to describe this moment in literary history, we will discuss how the literary productions of this period engage with the realities, fears, dreams, and debates of an increasingly modernizing United States: cosmopolitanism and urban life; mass cultural popularity, notoriety, and celebrity; traditional and transgressive forms of raced, classed, and gendered embodiment; definitions of region and nation based on belonging and exclusion. As we consider the formal and thematic dimensions of American modernism, we will also attend to the material conditions of print culture in this period, focusing especially on the rise of paperback publishing and the development of “little magazines” and other literary periodicals.

**Course Learning Goals:**

- understand how different definitions of “modernism” are used to describe American literary production from the early twentieth century
- use close reading and historical research methods to identify and analyze how literary works respond to social, cultural, and political themes
- develop and articulate argumentative readings of literary and critical texts
- generate a guiding question and locate sources for an original research paper

**Readings:**

Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (1909)

Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)

Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)

Anita Loos, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925)

John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925)

Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)

Short fiction by Ernest Hemingway, Djuna Barnes, Edna Ferber, Willa Cather, and Dorothy Parker

Poetry by Pound, H.D., Eliot, Moore, Locke, Hughes, McCay, Zukofsky, and Reznikoff.

Critical readings from Adorno and Horkheimer, Benjamin, Bornstein, Felski, Huysen, Rainey, Levenson, Mao and Walkowitz, Miller, North, and others

**Assignments and Assessments:**

- Daily quotation/reflection card: write a quotation from the day's reading on the front of a 3x5" index card and a response on the back
  - In-class close reading exercise: timed (45 minutes) in-class reading response essay
  - Textual analysis essay (4-5pp): close reading of one book on the syllabus
  - Research paper (8-10pp): related to one of the texts or authors on the syllabus, due at the end of the term
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*Sample syllabus for a single-author course***William Faulkner**

Arguably few American authors loom larger in the cultural imagination than William Faulkner. Though his literary career started with an obscure book of poetry in 1924 and took a detour through Hollywood in the 1940s, he has, since receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949, held a place of privilege on college syllabi of American literature, providing the type of dense, difficult prose that seems to thrill literature professors and stymie their unsuspecting students. And yet, as academic as Faulkner's works seem to have become, they remain deeply felt, human stories that "tell about the South," tracing the fateful encounters of men, women, and families with a complicated—sometimes even disastrous—past. In this course, students will read a selection of Faulkner's work, ranging from novels, short stories, lectures, and addresses, as we consider why and how his works have exerted such a compelling hold on the American literary imagination. Alongside Faulkner, we will also read essays that will allow us to trace the contours of Faulkner's literary reputation: from contemporary reception of his early works to the New Criticism's coronation of Faulkner as the quintessential American Modernist to more recent reassessments and re-appropriations of his works.

**Course Learning Goals:**

- identify, describe, and respond to the major themes of William Faulkner's novels and stories
- recognize how different arbiters of taste and literary culture have produced Faulkner's reputation as an American author
- develop and articulate argumentative readings of literary and critical texts
- analyze Faulkner's work in conversation with other contemporaneous or later cultural productions

**Readings:**

*Soldier's Pay* (1926)

*The Sound and the Fury* (1929)

*As I Lay Dying* (1930)

*Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)  
*The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee Jerusalem]* (1939)  
*Go Down, Moses* (1942)  
*To Have and Have Not* (Film/Screenplay, 1944)  
*The Reivers* (1962)  
Collected Stories  
Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (1950)  
Lectures at University of Virginia (1957-1958): <http://faulkner.lib.virginia.edu/>

Contextual and critical readings from H.L. Mencken, W.J. Cash, Malcolm Cowley, Cleanth Brooks, Thadious Davis, and others, plus materials from Oprah's Book Club's "Summer of Faulkner"

### **Assignments and Assessments:**

- Daily quotation/reflection card: write a quotation from the day's reading on the front of a 3x5" index card and a response on the back
- In-class close reading exercise: timed (45 minutes) in-class reading response essay
- Textual analysis essay (4-5pp): close reading of one book on the syllabus
- Research paper (8-10pp): related to one of the texts or to an adaptation or reimagining of one of Faulkner's works

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*Sample syllabus for a course on methods*

### **Book History for Literary Studies**

In his 1982 essay, "What is the History of Books?", Robert Darnton offers an origin story for the nascent field of "book history." As scholars in disparate fields pursued questions about textual communication, they found themselves in "a no-man's-land located at the intersection of a half-dozen fields of study." There, "they decided to constitute a field of their own and to invite in historians, literary scholars, sociologists, librarians, and anyone else who wanted to understand the book as a force in history." Thirty years after Darnton's seminal essay, the field of book history remains a lively interdisciplinary crossroads, and literary scholars continue to find the methods and lenses of book historical research invaluable in answering our own discipline's questions about the social and material meanings of texts. This course introduces students to this interdisciplinary conversation, asking specifically how literary scholars can engage with book history methods and questions to frame literary historical projects. In the first half of class, we will examine the roots of book history by reading some of its founding texts. These early works show the field's development out of bibliography, editorial theory, textuality and materiality studies, sociology, and cultural history, giving students a sense of the range of inquiry made possible by book-historical approaches. In the second part of class, we will turn to recent works

that show how “the history of the book” has been taken up, challenged, broadened, and enriched by work specific to literary studies. These works engage with different aspects of “print culture” (broadly conceived) in different historical moments and national contexts, but share book history’s fundamental interest in the historically specific conditions of textual production, distribution, and consumption. As students consider how the methods and concerns of book history might enable approaches to their own objects of literary study, we will also consider how literary scholars are uniquely positioned to contribute to book history’s ongoing and evolving interdisciplinary conversation.

### **Course Learning Goals:**

- identify, describe, and respond to the major questions informing the field of book history
- develop a sense of the historical development of the field of book history
- gain fluency in and a sense of the stakes of the vocabulary of book historical study, including terms such as *print culture*, *materiality*, *textuality*, *book*, *text*, *paratext*, *publication*
- complete a research project that uses book history methods and questions

### **Readings:**

Darnton, “What is the History of Books?” (1982)

Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (1983)

De Grazia and Stallybrass, “Materiality of the Shakespearean Text” (1993)

Chartier, *The Order of Books* (1994)

Johns, *The Nature of the Book* (1998)

McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1999)

McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (2007)

Cohen, *The Networked Wilderness* (2009)

Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (2012)

Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms* (2012)

Rabinowitz, *American Pulp* (2014)

Selections from *History of the Book in America*, *Early African American Print Culture*, and *Book History*

This course will also draw examples from the library’s special collections.

### **Assignments and assessments:**

- leading class discussion with a partner once in the term
- Position papers (3 @ 500 words each): due throughout the term and shared with the whole class online
- Libro-descriptive essay (2-3pp): describe a book of any kind to practice deploying the vocabulary of book construction and design

- Research paper (15pp): on any topic, using book historical methods, due at the end of the term
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*Sample syllabus for a course on methods*

**Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Readers and Reading**

Part of what makes research about readers and reading so challenging and rewarding is that so many different disciplines have made reading an object of study and a vector of meaning. This class offers an introduction to the methods and historiography of the history of reading and readers through a variety of disciplinary approaches from the late nineteenth century through today. All of the approaches in this class will grapple with a persistent divide in the study of readers and reading: those who look for reading in a text's form and effects (usually literary critics) and those who look for readers as they practice in the real world (usually social scientists). Of course, the most interesting work on readers and reading happens in the overlap of these two starkly artificial positions, and as we read the work of psychologists, sociologists, educators, librarians, literary critics, rhetoricians, ethnographers, and neurologists, we will map the various claims made and struggles waged in this rich and contested territory. Some of the key schools of thought on reading that we will explore are New Critical literary theory, reader-response theory, history of the book approaches to reading (including editorial and textual scholarship), sociological and anthropological methods for the study of reading, scholarship on literacy as a developmental and sociocultural phenomenon, and cognitive models of reading. Ultimately, this course takes up the following central questions and considers how they have been asked and answered over the last 100 years: Who are readers? What practices (textual, social, economic, or otherwise) count as reading? Where do we find the reading we study? How do we hold reading steady enough to make it an object of analysis? What do different disciplinary assumptions about readers and reading tell us about our shared endeavor to understand this ubiquitous and important practice?

**Course Learning Goals:**

- identify, describe, and respond to the major debates and reactions that have shaped the study of readers and reading over the last century
- identify foundational assumptions about reading in different disciplinary research methods
- consider how developments in the study of readers and reading in the disciplines have overlapped with the development of the American research university
- complete a research project that engages with the methods and assumptions of a different disciplinary approach to reading
- reflect on students' own allegiances, blind spots, and biases in researching questions about readers and reading

**Readings:**

Rosenblatt, "Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading" (1969)  
Fish, "Literature in the Reader" (1970)  
McKenzie, "The Sociology of a Text" (1984)  
Radway, "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies" (1984)  
Darnon, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading" (1986)  
Brandt, "Sponsors of Literacy" (1998)  
Cunningham and Stanovich, "What Reading Does for the Mind" (1998)  
Warner, "Uncritical Reading" (2004)  
Price, "Reading: the State of the Discipline" (2004)  
Marcus and Best, "Surface Reading: An Introduction" (2009)

Selections from:

Huey, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* (1908)  
Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown* (1929)  
Richards, *Practical Criticism* (1929)  
Brooks and Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (1938)  
Waples, Berelson, and Bradshaw, *What Reading Does to People* (1940)  
Mass Observation, *Study of Books & the Public* (1942)  
Hoggart, *Uses of Literacy* (1957)  
De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)  
Iser, *The Act of Reading* (1987)  
Bourdieu, *Distinction* (1987)

**Assignments and assessments:**

- leading class discussion with a partner once in the term
- Position papers (3 @ 500 words each): due throughout the term and shared with the whole class online
- Reader interview (3-4pp): interview a reader about his or her reading history, reading practices, tastes in texts, or questions about reading, then write a brief critical response
- Research paper (15pp): either drawing from original research with readers or analyzing a disciplinary discourse on reading, due at the end of the term

*Sample syllabus for an intro to the major literature course*

**All in the Family**

With its straight lines and simple logic, a family tree seems to be a paragon of sense and order, but we all know that even the strongest-looking trees can be rife with strange graftings, rotten limbs, and bad apples. This truth about family trees—that past traumas, deep secrets, shifting allegiances, and irrational pride constantly belie the tree’s connected facade—makes family a rich point of departure for any consideration of what it means to be a human being.

This course will pursue family and all of its attendant functions and dysfunctions through American novels and short stories of the twentieth and twenty-first century. In novels by William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, Gayl Jones, and Ben Fountain, and in short stories by Flannery O’Connor, Tillie Olsen, Jamaica Kincaid, Jonathan Franzen, and Junot Diaz, we will consider how “family” as a biological, social, and figurative construct helps to create and complicate ideas of modern identity.

**Course Learning Goals:**

- closely read literary texts and pose questions about them
- develop and articulate readings of texts through clear, persuasive prose
- gain fluency in literary critical terms for describing different types of narration (*first-person, third-person, omniscient, close, limited, retrospective, focalization, point of view*)
- identify and describe common strategies for narrating time in fiction (*present tense, historical events, flashbacks, fragmentation*)
- account for and reflect on different figurations of family in fiction and the effects of these family formations on a story’s form and effect

**Readings:**

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930)

Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (1946)

Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (1975)

Ben Fountain, *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* (2012)

Short stories by Flannery O’Connor, Tillie Olsen, Jamaica Kincaid, Junot Diaz, Jonathan Franzen

**Assignments and assessments:**

- Daily quotation/reflection card: write a quotation from the day’s reading on the front of a 3x5” index card and a response on the back
- First Pass papers (3 @ 500 words each): in-depth close reading of a single passage, designed to serve as a pre-write for a longer essay, shared with the whole class online

- Close-reading argument (4-6pp): building from one “first pass” essay, expand a close reading of a single passage to make a claim about the larger work
  - Reading two sources (7-8pp): building from one “first pass essay,” use close reading of one text to generate a question that sets another text in conversation with the first
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*Sample syllabus for a composition course (taught in Winter 2016):*

### **Academic Writing and Literature: Unreliable Narratives**

In this class, we will read poems, short stories, and a short novel that feature distinctive—potentially deceptive—narrative points of view. From encounters with untrustworthy first-person narrators to multiply-voiced stories with ambiguous turns, we will consider how and why authors choose to build stories around unreliable or complex points of view. These explorations of the inner workings of story-telling will lead us to consider how fictional approaches to audience, authority, and authenticity can apply to your own expository writing.

Through class discussion, formal essays assignments, shorter writing exercises, and peer review activities, we will focus on both the mechanics of argumentative writing (developing a strong thesis, supporting your claims with evidence, evaluating and incorporating outside sources, identifying your audience, producing clear and concise prose) and the mechanics of the writing process itself (brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, revising, responding to others, receiving feedback). By the end of the semester, you will be equipped with a suite of strategies for negotiating your relationship to a variety of audiences, strategies that will help you throughout your college career and beyond.

### **Course Learning Goals:<sup>1</sup>**

- produce complex, analytic, well-supported arguments that matter in academic contexts.
- read, summarize, analyze, and synthesize complex texts purposefully in order to generate and support writing.
- analyze the genres and rhetorical strategies that writers use to address particular audiences for various purposes and in various contexts.
- develop flexible strategies for revising, editing, and proofreading writing of varying lengths.
- develop strategies for self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflection on the process of writing.

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<sup>1</sup> From the University of Michigan’s English Department Writing Program goals for composition courses

**Readings:**

Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929)

Course pack:

David Dunning, “We Are All Confident Idiots”

Kay Ryan, “Sharks’ Teeth”

Janet E. Gardner, “The Role of Good Reading”

Meg Sweeney, “The Art of Close Reading”

Kay Ryan poems: “Living with Stripes,” “Surfaces,” “Thin,” “Repetition”

Frank Cioffi, “The Thesis”

“Motivating Moves” [worksheet on developing stakes in arguments]

Edgar Allen Poe, “The Story of William Wilson”

Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny”

Joseph C. Schopp, “‘Vast Forms That Move Fantastically’: Poe, Freud, and the Uncanny”

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Beverly A. Hume, “Managing Madness in Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wall-paper’”

Sheridan Baker, “Writing Good Sentences”

Gerald Graff, et al., “I Say”

Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”

Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

Shauna Greene Benjamin, “The Space that Race Creates: An Interstitial Analysis of Toni Morrison’s ‘Recitatif’”

John K. Young, “Teaching Texts Materially: The Ends of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*”

Lori Harrison-Kahan, “‘Structure Would *Equal* Meaning’: Blues and Jazz Aesthetics in the Fiction of Nella Larsen”

Cheryl A. Wall, “Passing for What? Aspects of Identity in Nella Larsen’s Novels”

Kate Chopin, “Desiree’s Baby”

Sheridan Baker, “Correcting Wordy Sentences”

Gerald Graff, et al., “They Say”

Mark Gaipa, “Breaking into the Conversation: How Students Can Acquire Authority for Their Writing”

Common Core State Standards Initiative. “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy”

The Hechinger Report, “The Common Core English Standards: Content and Controversy”

Katharine Beals, “The Common Core is Tough on Kids With Special Needs”

Mark Bauerlein, “Why We All Have a Stake in the Common Core Standards”

Sara Mosle, “What Should Children Read?”

Diane Ravitch, “Good Riddance to Common Core Testing”

Sample student close reading and comparative essays

**Assignments and Assessments:**

- Formal Essays 70%
  1. Reading as argument 1 (2-3pp/700-900 words) 10%
  2. Reading as argument 2 (4-5pp/1300-1600 words) 15%
  3. Reading two sources (7-8pp/2200-2600 words) 20%
  4. Reading in the world (6-7pp/1900-2200 words) 25%
- Peer Review workshops and comments 15%
- Weekly Writing, Attendance, and Participation 15%

## Student Feedback on Teaching

In my eight semesters of teaching both literature and composition courses at Michigan, my students have consistently recognized my interest in the material I teach, my enthusiasm for student ideas, my patience in working with students on a one-on-one basis, and my commitment to fostering a classroom environment that encourages open, thoughtful, and compassionate discussion. Even as I have gained a reputation for setting high standards, I have also been praised for providing students many different forms of support to help them meet those expectations. Students have commented that I am “always willing to explore new ideas,” which leads to “enthusiastic and exciting” discussions. Students also value the “real, practical, and interactive ways” we engage with the course material, including what one student referred to as “hands-on activities” that allow students to build and practice reading and writing skills. Furthermore, students routinely mention how helpful my office hours are, as well as the time and care I put into grading and responding to written work. By prioritizing student ideas and contributions in a way that makes discussions “open” and “comfortable,” I am able to help students “take risks with [their] writing” and develop skills that transfer “beyond English classes.”

Receiving feedback from my students has also helped me identify opportunities for improvement in my teaching. Some of my students, especially earlier in my teaching career, asked for more structure in class discussions. I have since made it a point to signal to students in as many ways as possible the goals of each given class. My syllabus includes a list of topics for each class day’s discussion, and I begin every class meeting by writing one guiding question and two or three concrete learning objectives on the corner of the board. Providing these elements of structure still allows for what one student characterized as “natural discussions,” while reminding both me and my students of the business of the day. Along similar lines, students have also asked for more clarity in written assignments, and while I have resisted making my assignments too prescriptive, I have found other ways to communicate my expectations to students. To scaffold formal essays, I have developed worksheets on generating a close reading, motivating a question, situating yourself in a conversation, comparing texts, and structuring an argument. These worksheets make explicit the different types of conceptual moves that go into setting up an effective essay and guide students through that process without doing the thinking for them. I have also adjusted how I give written feedback on student writing. Rather than summarize my comments in a long closing note, I now include a table-based rubric that provides targeted feedback on argument, structure, evidence and analysis, and mechanics. Not only is this feedback easier for students to digest, but it gives them a clearer sense of where they can improve on future assignments.

Below are representative comments from student evaluations that convey a range of responses to my teaching. Along with enrollment figures and response rates for each class, I have also included the average numerical response to the question, “Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher” (answered on a 1-5 scale). I have organized the feedback in reverse chronological order, with my six first year writing courses (English 124 and 125) appearing before the two lecture courses for which I was a discussion section leader. I am happy to provide full reports upon request.

**Winter 2016**

**English 124 – Academic Writing & Literature (instructor of record)**

Enrollment: 17 students, 1 section; 15 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.96/5 (university median: 4.67)*

“Really great instruction; Kathrynne is accommodating in many ways, from making extra office hours to extending deadlines. Looked forward to going to class each day, I felt like I needed to be adequately prepared for discussion, but also expected to leave class with a new view or an increased understanding of whatever assigned text we had read each day.”

“Kathrynne Bevilacqua is an excellent English teacher, her rapier wit and broadsword-like bluntness are both appreciated.”

“Fantastic quality. I thoroughly appreciated Ms. B and her instruction within this course. I always found her teaching presence direct and obvious what she was attempting to teach us during each session. I would definitely recommend her as a mentor to anybody interested in taking an English course.”

“I really enjoyed all of the discussion because it made me think about our coursework in new ways and built a fun sense of community within the classroom. The essay work was incredibly helpful and I feel like my academic writing has improved greatly.”

**Fall 2015**

**English 124 – Academic Writing & Literature (instructor of record)**

Enrollment: 18 students, 1 section; 17 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.00/5 (university median: 4.67)*

“Kathrynne was a great teacher who kept her students focused and engaged in what she was teaching. She was very helpful outside of class as well.”

“I thought overall the course was good. I thought Kathrynne pushed us to be better writers, which is what you want from an English teacher. I feel as though some of the grading was quite subjective in the class which made it very difficult throughout the semester.”

“The majority of the class was just discussion and for the most part it flowed nicely, plus office hours were always very helpful.”

“This class is challenging and has a lot of work. However, peer workshops are very helpful.”

***Winter 2014***

**English 124 – Academic Writing & Literature (instructor of record)**

Enrollment: 18 students, 1 section; 10 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.88/5 (university median: 4.58)*

“I loved the discussions we had in class. Although many times it was not on topic, I felt safe to speak in class!”

“SHE WAS LITERALLY THE BEST!!! I liked the fact that she valued our opinions and didn't make us feel like students. If anything, I would ask for her to make the essay prompts a bit more clear.”

“The most valuable aspect of this class was the openness everyone got to experience during discussions. Because of how open the class atmosphere was, we were all able to actively participate in conversations with each other and also with the instructor. Without having the fear of being judged by other students and the authoritative figure, we were open and enthusiastic to share our thoughts about various topics. In the end, I personally got to appreciate how much I was able to get to know a lot of people in my class and to discuss with others freely and creatively.”

“I feel like if we wrote like Faulkner we would fail the class. But I did understand that the instructor was trying to show us how important literature was, and to introduce us to some harder text that we may not have seen.”

***Fall 2013***

**English 124 – Academic Writing & Literature (instructor of record)**

Enrollment: 18 students, 1 section; 15 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.25/5 (university median: 4.63)*

“Kathryne is a great teacher who clearly enjoys what she does. Works outside of class to make class experience better.”

“Overall the instruction was good. Some assignments were confusing and required a good amount of explanation. But in class the discussion of texts and paper workshops were very helpful in showing me what my writing should look like.”

“Kathryne made class interesting and made an effort to wake people up in the morning without being obnoxious about it like some other GSIs are. The instruction was great.”

“I think Kathryne was very good at explaining the texts. She was always available at her office hours which I really appreciated.”

***Winter 2013***

**English 125 – Writing & Academic Inquiry (instructor of record)**

Enrollment: 17 students, 1 section; 17 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.65/5 (university median: 4.61)*

“Kathryne was awesome. She made sure that we were learning and writing well while also making sure that we bonded as a class and felt comfortable. I actually really look forward coming to this class every Tuesday and Thursday.”

“Really helped me take risks with my writing and learn how to revise efficiently.”

“Overall, I liked the structure of this course. At times the discussions and instruction seemed a little random, but I think this produced better conversation. I think the informality of the course allowed the students to freely express their thoughts on the topics we discussed.”

“I think we might have been held to too high of standards at times.”

***Fall 2012***

**English 125 – Writing & Academic Inquiry (instructor of record)**

Enrollment: 16 students, 1 section; 14 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.36/5 (university median: 4.61)*

“I really thought Kathryne cared about how we did in this course. I thought my writing really improved, and learned a lot about writing expectations in college.”

“I like that we covered many general writing topics that can be used beyond English classes.”

“She really took the time to grade my papers, offering valid criticism which helped me as a writer.”

“I liked how she was able to improvise.”

“Kathryne could be slightly more prepared for class, since there were a few days when she did not have many plans and we did not progress as quickly as a class. Overall, though, she was an excellent teacher and set high standards for us as students, which overall made us better writers.”

***Winter 2012***

**English 368 – Jacobean Shakespeare (discussion section leader)**

Enrollment: 37 students, 2 sections; 18 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.38/5 and 4.58/5 (university median: 4.60)*

“Kathryne was awesome. She was great at running discussions, she was clever, had a great sense of humor and was, more than anything else, insightful. I wouldn't hesitate to take another course where she is my GSI.”

“The classroom was made into a very comfortable environment and I felt encouraged to voice my ideas. Office hours help was very beneficial. Kathryne was very accessible, related to students and had a good sense of humor.”

“Discussion was always enthusiastic and exciting. Kathryne was always willing to explore new ideas and share her own with the class, and provided interesting supplementary materials. Definitely my favorite GSI this semester.”

***Fall 2011***

**English 313 – Children's Literature (discussion section leader)**

Enrollment: 48 students, 2 sections; 30 students completed evaluations

*Overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher: 4.14/5 and 4.56/5 (university median: 4.59)*

“She was interested in the material and always upbeat in discussion and tried to get people to participate. I went to her office hours multiple times and thought she was very helpful in writing my papers.”

“She offered real, practical, and interactive ways to break down and understand the complicated and many themes brought up in lecture. I enjoyed that her sense of humor and understanding of students' needs made Kathryne very approachable to students and students' questions.”

“Kathryne was an excellent GSI--she made class fun and interesting, and the group work in class was very helpful, as was meeting during office hours to discuss topics for the paper. The written feedback on the graded papers was also incredibly helpful and helped show what we could work on in future papers.”

“She divided up discussion sections well between small group work and large group work, answered students' questions, held extra office hours, and gave a lot of feedback on papers. It was also cool how she arranged the class to sit in a circle even though the room had built-in tables in rows--I really think this circle setting encouraged more people to talk.”

“Led good discussions that were interesting. However, very tough grader but was willing to meet outside of class to help students”