

COURSE GOALS & RATIONALE

Although this course is not a comprehensive “survey” of American poetry, it nevertheless aims to introduce students to poetry of several different eras and movements in U.S. literary history: from colonial and “new national,” to Romantic, Modernist, and contemporary poetry. Along the way, you'll pick up some in-depth knowledge of a selection of key poets and poems. We'll pay special attention to shifting ideas and assumptions about the purposes, functions, and aesthetics of poetry: what different reasons for writing and reading poems have motivated American poets and readers? What place did, does, and should poetry have in American society and culture?

Nervous about poetry? Not to worry: while your prior completion of ENG 301 will certainly come in handy, we'll spend ample time in class (re)learning and practicing basic techniques for productively approaching the reading and interpretation of poems.

Class will be discussion-based, with minimal lecture and an ongoing expectation that students *a/ways* come to class well prepared to discuss current reading and interpretive thinking.

Those of you who are taking this course to fulfill the English major requirement in American literature before 1900 will be expected to complete all topic-optional course assignments on poems / poets of the 19th century or earlier. This means, more specifically, that your two Interpretive Essays and your Poet Discussion & Essay (see below) must be completed on pre-1900 poets.

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Log (35%). Following the further instructions on the assignment sheet, students will keep an ongoing written record of their reading, analysis, and interpretation of the poems assigned for the course. You will use the “Assignments” link on the SCSU Vista course site to complete this assignment, posting your work *at least* once a week, no later than 3pm each Wednesday.

Interpretive Essays (35%). Twice during the semester, you will write a brief (4-5 pages), thesis-based essay in interpretation of a poem you originally wrote about in your Reading Log, developing and formalizing an interpretive idea originally explored there. (Students may, with permission of and consultation with the instructor, write one of these essays about a poem not originally treated in the Reading Log.) The first of these essays will be due before midterm; the second essay will be due at the final exam session. If you choose to do so, you may also submit at the final exam session a revised version of your first essay for reevaluation.

Poet Discussion & Headnote Essay (20%). Once during the semester, on a date to be assigned by lottery, each student will lead a 15-minute class discussion of a single poem by an American poet of your choice not already included in the syllabus. The presenter should provide a 1-2-page print handout of key ideas, information, and/or questions to aid discussion. A brief (2-3 pages) essay introducing the poet and poem, describing the poem's literary value, and suggesting productive ways of approaching its interpretation will be due one week after your presentation. Your essay, along with other materials if you wish, will be added to a course wiki on American poets & poems.

Ad Hoc Individual and Group Assignments, Preparation, & Participation (10%). Full preparation for every class meeting is expected, including completion of all assigned readings, your reading log, and any ad hoc assignments due for the day. All class members are expected to participate actively: listening attentively, contributing regularly to discussion, and taking substantive notes. Unannounced spot checks, quizzes, and in-class writing may happen at any time, and the results will constitute part of my holistic assessment of this portion of your course grade.

REQUIRED BOOKS

The following books have been ordered for SCSU's bookstore. The main anthology for the course is available *only* at SCSU's bookstore, but the other titles are readily available elsewhere, as well. (Online sources like Amazon, Tower, and Alibris often have deals on used copies—but *make sure* to get the *new 7th edition of the MLA Handbook* if you're buying that title; it includes substantive changes from its predecessor.) ISBNs are provided for easy searching of online book sources. Do purchase course books rather than borrowing them; they're not that expensive, and you'll need to be able to write in them to fully do your job as an active reader.

- *Anthology of American Poetry*—ENG 366 (Pearson Custom Publishing 9780558282004)
- *Elizabeth Bishop, Geography III* (FSG Classics 9780374530655)
- Other readings for the semester will be made available as PDF, Word, or HTML documents for you to print from the course Vista site or the world-wide web.

All English majors should also own a copy of the following:

- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed., Ed. Joseph Gibaldi (MLA 9781603290241)

COURSE OUTLINE & READING CALENDAR

This calendar gives the general outline of readings for the course. Details regarding specific reading and other assignments will be posted to the calendar on the SCSU Vista site as the semester proceeds. Plan on checking that calendar frequently to keep your work up to date.

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| Week 1 | Course Introduction & Crash Course in Reading Poetry We'll use the "Reading Log" rubric to collectively walk through a few poems, developing and practicing strategies for effective reading, analysis, and interpretation of poems. |
| Weeks 2-4 | Earlier American Poetry A broad variety of poems and poets from the colonial era through the mid-nineteenth century, selected with an eye toward the question of poetry's evolving uses and purposes. |
| Weeks 5-6 | Two Game-Changing Poets: Whitman and Dickinson A more concentrated study of some key poems by the two nineteenth-century poets who have been most influential on poets of the twentieth century and beyond. |
| Weeks 7-11 | Modernism(s) A number of approaches to understanding the early-twentieth-century artistic movement that continues to be a primary determinant of American poets' practices. Poets include Eliot, H.D., William Carlos Williams, Frost, and Langston Hughes. |
| Weeks 12-13 | <i>Geography III</i> , by Elizabeth Bishop What difference does it make to read poems in their original context, as published in book form by the poet? |
| Weeks 14-15 | After Modernism . . . Poems from the 1950s on into the new century: Plath, Rich, Hicok, Dove, Ashbery, Berryman. |

COURSE POLICIES

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| Website & Email | You are responsible for all information posted to the course website and SCSU Vista. You are also responsible for checking your Southern email address regularly for course-related communications. |
| Plagiarism | Pay particularly close attention to the plagiarism policy posted on the course website. |
| Attendance | Attendance is required. Per English Department policy, students who miss the equivalent of three weeks of class (3 classes on a once-weekly schedule, 6 classes on a twice-weekly schedule, or 9 classes on a thrice-weekly schedule) will automatically fail the course, no matter what the reason for your absences. Since this policy makes no distinction between "excused" and "unexcused" absences, no documentation of the reasons for your absence is necessary. |
| Lateness to Class | Lateness will be recorded as an absence, so plan to arrive BEFORE the scheduled start time. |
| Absences | If you miss class, it is your responsibility to catch up on missed work BEFORE returning to class for the next meeting. Check with one or (preferably) more than one of your classmates for class notes, new assignments, etc. DO NOT rely on the instructor to catch you up on missed course content. |
| Late Assignments | A late assignment will be penalized by a grade step (eg. C+ to C) for each day it is late. "Late" is defined as any time after the class meeting on any given assignment's due date. However, extensions are freely granted in most instances provided you communicate with me BEFORE the due date. (Extensions are not applicable to the Reading Log.) |
| Cell Phones, Etc | All cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off before class begins. Laptop computers are permissible only for use directly related to the class work of the moment. |
| Completion of Coursework | All assignments must be completed and submitted in order for you to receive course credit. |
| Disability | If you are a student with a disability, you will need to make an appointment with the Disability Resource Center in order to receive accommodations in this class. Please speak to me right away about your situation and/or other information, such as emergency medical information or arrangements in case the building must be evacuated. |
| Writing Expectations | <p>To study literature is to write about literature. If you cannot communicate your ideas fully and clearly in written form, readers will have no way of knowing what those ideas are—no matter how amazing and astute they promise to be. In other words, content and form are not separable qualities; if a reader can't understand what you're saying, he or she can only assume that you <i>don't</i> in fact know what you're saying. Therefore, plan on devoting ample time and effort to drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading <i>all</i> your writing for this course—no "one-offs," please. Plan, as well, on consulting other readers—me, your classmates, and/or the Writing Center—about your writing <i>before</i> submission.</p> <p>You are responsible for both the intellectual content of your written work and for its "clean," professional presentation. I expect all writing to be edited and proofread for grammatical and mechanical correctness and clarity, according to standard, "edited" English usage. All formal writing for the course must be typed and double-spaced. Formal essays (as opposed to informal in-class or online writing) must follow MLA formatting and documentation rules, including a Works Cited page.</p> <p>Familiarize yourself with, and, as applicable, make routine use of, the following resources posted on the course website:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay Notations • Essay Protocols • Grading Guide • MLA Essay Format • Peer Review Guide • Research Guide |