

Literature Core -- Fall 2021



ENGL1080.01 Comedy

M W F 11

What determines a happy ending? Which characters can't we help but root for? And, most importantly, what makes us laugh? This course will take up these questions by following the long history of comedy from ancient theater to modern film. We will explore the full range of possibilities for comedy as a genre including satire, romantic comedy, and surreal comedy. Potential authors include Oscar Wilde, Jane Austen, Aristophanes, George Bernard Shaw, and Lewis Carroll.

Daniel Dougherty

ENGL1080.02 Modernity and Its Critics

T TH 9

This section of lit core will focus on the problems of modern life as these problems have been addressed in works of literature, philosophy, and political theory. We will be interested in such topics as the collapse of traditional forms of authority, the accelerated pace of urban experience, the violence of (world) war, the birth of new technologies, and the real or imagined proximity of revolution. Texts to be studied may include works by Marx, Foucault, Rhys, Kafka, Beckett, and others.

Robert Lehman

ENGL1080.03 Pleasure Reading

T TH 12

This section of Literature Core will explore the concept of "pleasure reading" by thinking critically about what makes reading enjoyable. We will consider qualities of the text and qualities of the reading experience in order to explore the enjoyment available in scholarly "mastery" of a text. In addition to using class readings as a way to examine literary form, we will consider questions of intersectionality, history, and culture. Texts may include works by Jane Austen, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Lydia Millet, films, and essays.

Lauren Wilwerding

ENGL1080.04 An I in Team: First Person Literature M W F 1

The first-person perspective provides a particular weight to our writing; “I” encompasses confession, testimonial, revelation, and witness. This course will center around the first person in English literature. We will consider the impact of the “I” in poetry, creative nonfiction, and prose, and its generic framing in autobiography and lyric. In doing so, we will also explore the concepts of identity, community, and the division between private and public, both in literature and our own lives. Authors may include Mary Shelley, Maya Angelou, Octavia E. Butler, Ocean Vuong, and Alison Bechdel.

Theodore Lehre

ENGL1080.05 The Lyric Impulse: Poetry and Memoir M W F 12

In this course we will examine two literary genres: poetry and memoir, as well as some contemporary musical artists, to understand the lyric impulse— what makes a person want to express his or her life on the page (or in the recording studio). The motives are not always clear, possibly not even relevant, but examining these texts for an understanding of the artistic, psychological, and even spiritual dimensions of the work will help us see the relevance and endurance of these forms, as well as their social and possible political implications. We’ll read the work of a variety of American poets, both living and dead; books by poets Allen Ginsberg, Edward Hirsch and Claudia Rankine; and memoirs by Tobias Wolff, Lucy Grealy, and Harriet Jacobs, with additional memoir by St. Augustine and American writer Ta-Nehisi Coates. Musical artists include Bruce Springsteen, Taylor Swift, Joni Mitchell, Kendrick Lamar, and The Clash.

Sue Roberts

ENGL1080.07 Haunted Houses T TH 10:30

This course traces the formal development of one of fiction’s most compelling settings: the home. Shelter and prison, dream and nightmare, the home will be our focus of inquiry as we read a range of significant novels and films closely and attentively. Along the way, we will ask how genres and forms define themselves over time, responding to literature that comes before, and mapping out possible artistic and political futures. Texts will likely include Horace Walpole’s Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”; Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*; Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home*; Tana French’s detective novel *Broken Harbor*; and the recent films “Get Out” and “Parasite.”

Maia McAleavey

ENGL1080.09 Topic: TBD M W F 11

In Literature Core, students explore the principal motives which prompt people to read literature: to assemble and assess the shape and values of one's own culture, to discover alternative ways of looking at the world, to gain insight into issues of permanent human importance as well as issues of contemporary urgency, and to enjoy the linguistic and formal satisfactions of literary art. Literature Core will strive to develop the student's capacity to read and write with clarity and engagement, to allow for that dialogue

between the past and present we call history, and to provide an introduction to literary genres.

The Department

ENGL1080.10 What Money Can Buy

T TH 12

Can money buy happiness, love, or popularity? Do super-rich people have more fun? Are they healthier? Can money be addictive? Is money the root of evil or is it the lack of it that corrupts? What does it mean to belong to the leisure class? What do “values” have to do with the value of something? In this section, we shall hone our critical thinking skills by analyzing classic as well as popular novels and films that deal with the super rich, conspicuous consumption, and its consequences to society at large. Texts may include *The Great Gatsby*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, etc

Kalpana Seshadri

ENGL1080.11 Speculative Futures

M W F 9

What are the futures we have imagined for ourselves and others through story? Given the current social, ecological, and political environment what new futures might need to be imagined? Using speculative fiction, film, and more immediate sources such as journalism and campus events, this course will ask you to examine the types of futures we imagine for ourselves and whether those futures align with our current practices. Course texts will include Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven*, and select films.

Rachel Ernst

ENGL1080.12 Rule Breakers

T TH 9

We will be looking at literature that deals with the act of breaking the rules and the social and moral consequences that result from rule breaking. And we will be looking at this in various literary forms. We begin with some key questions: Why and how, do societies create rules? Who enforces the rules and how are they enforced? Why do people decide to break rules? What are the social consequences of breaking rules? What are the individual consequences for the rule breaker?

Bonnie Rudner

ENGL1080.13 Topic: TBD

M W F 10

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The Department

ENGL1080.14 Literature of Plagues and Pandemic M W F 10

In this course, we will read literature across place and time to see what insights literature can offer our current situation. We will begin with Boccaccio's 14th century *The Decameron* in which young people told each other stories to escape reality and pass the time during an outbreak of the plague. We will conclude with the *New York Times*' 2020 Decameron Project, in which contemporary writers were enlisted to see what fiction can do for readers of today. In between, we will consider how literature about plagues and pandemics help us create order and meaning out of uncertainty, and how reading about sickness and death can help us appreciate what it means to be human. Texts include: *The Plague*, *The Last Man*, *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider* and *Angels in America*, as well as selected short stories and poems.

Treseanne Ainsworth

ENGL1080.15 Love and Other Difficulties T TH 10:30

In the classical era and up to the Renaissance, love was considered an appropriate topic for study, even academic study. The assumption was that just because we all have feelings that does not mean we know how to love, or to love well, and that therefore we need to study it, discuss it, practice it, in order to become better at it. This class will study various theories and practices of love via readings in Plato, Goethe, Eugene O'Neill and others, in order to learn how it's done.

Tom Kaplan-Maxfield

ENGL 1080.16 Metamorphosis: Story-telling as an Attempt to Manage Change MWF 10

This course explores literature drawn from differing cultures and varying times: essays, short stories and a novel, poems and plays and memoirs. Change will be our theme, matters of justice and injustice prime objects of our attention. Writers likely to join our endeavors include Li Po and Euripides; Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, and Louise Erdrich; Elizabeth Bishop, Fredrick Douglass, and possibly even Will Shakespeare. And we'll attend to the technology of writing as a mode of metamorphosis, the means that writers use to transform mental experience into palpable shapes that can be shared with others.

Dayton Haskin

ENGL1080.17 Crossing Borders M W F 11

Literature Core: "Crossing Borders" is a college level introductory course in literature. We study literary texts of different genres—short stories, novels, graphic narratives, and films that deal with experiences of border crossing. In this course we will take "borders" to mean not only spatial or geopolitical boundaries (e.g. between towns, states, countries, continents), but also boundaries based on social and cultural categories (gender, social class, ethnicity, race, etc.). We will study the ways texts represent these borders and the people who inhabit and negotiate these borders. How do literature and films depict the way borders and border crossing shape people's understanding of themselves and the world? How do these texts creatively represent how people transgress and transform these borders?

Alex Puente

ENGL1080.19 Literature of the Fantastic**T TH 3**

This course will examine literature that explores themes of “the fantastic.” We’ll consider that term rather generally, and use it to frame our discussions of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and other novels, plays, poems and short stories. Ultimately, this exploration will lead us to questions about why writers use invented or skewed realities to explore political, social, cultural or theological issues, and whether these texts’ fantastic nature might even allow writers to reach “truths” that are otherwise unattainable.

*Chris Boucher***ENGL1080.20 The Problem of the Other in the Self****T TH 3**

Drawing from a variety of forms and traditions, this course investigates the self as a construction of culture: of history, biology, language, and cosmos. Beginning with Daniel Defoe’s 1719 *Robinson Crusoe* and two 20th century novels that deconstruct it (Coetzee’s *Foe* and Tournier’s *Friday, or the Other Island*), we will then explore self-representation in Dostoevsky’s groundbreaking *Notes from Underground* and Kerouac’s beat novel *The Subterraneans*; in a Modernist play by Pirandello and two theologically-inspired essays by Simone Weil; in Nabokov’s wildly inventive *Invitation to a Beheading* and in three volcanic short stories by Flannery O’Connor. The overall goals of the course include improving our ability to analyze and write about literature as well as to think about and discuss the selves we are and are not.

*Thomas Epstein***ENGL1080.21 Self and Society****T TH 1:30**

This is a basic close-reading of literature course. Certain themes, alienation, for instance, or the role of women in society will occasionally be stressed, and examined from a number of related cultural vantage points--political, moral, religious, intellectual, economic. Within this framework, narrative strategies, points of view, the said and the unsaid, characterization, all those literary concerns you ran across in high school, will once again be trotted out for your inspection. Toward this end, we will be emphasizing the connection between literature and society; matters of aesthetics will not be ignored. Readings may include *Madame Bovary*, *All the King's Men*, *Where I'm Calling From* (Raymond Carver) and *Affliction*. There are quizzes, hourly exams and two 7 page essays.

George O’Har

Literature Core Sections that Satisfy the Cultural Diversity Requirement

ENGL1184.01 Literature, Testimony, Justice

M W F 12

This section of Literature Core explores how literary texts bear witness to historical events and address social issues in order to engage with questions of difference and justice. Through the study of poetry, fiction, drama, and autobiography, we will examine how writers have used a variety of literary genres and forms to expose inequality and injustice; to call for justice, solidarity, and inclusion; and to transform experiences of trauma, displacement, difference, and oppression into art. Part of this course is devoted to considering how Black American writers, from Frederick Douglass to Toni Morrison, have used literature to testify to the history of slavery and its legacies in the United States. We will also read literary works that address Indigenous history, class and gender inequality, LGBTQ rights, illness and dis/ability, and religious persecution.

Lori Harrison-Kahan

ENGL1184.02 Literature, Testimony, Justice

M W F 10

This section of Literature Core explores how literary texts bear witness to historical events and address social issues in order to engage with questions of difference and justice. Through the study of poetry, fiction, drama, and autobiography, we will examine how writers have used a variety of literary genres and forms to expose inequality and injustice; to call for justice, solidarity, and inclusion; and to transform experiences of trauma, displacement, difference, and oppression into art. Part of this course is devoted to considering how Black American writers, from Frederick Douglass to Toni Morrison, have used literature to testify to the history of slavery and its legacies in the United States. We will also read literary works that address Indigenous history, class and gender inequality, LGBTQ rights, illness and dis/ability, and religious persecution.

Lori Harrison-Kahan

ENGL1185 The Danger of the Single Story: Reading Identity, Migration & Culture

T TH 12

We will read fiction and nonfiction by writers who have emigrated to the US as children or young adults, along with texts that explore the refugee experience and probe the relationship between language and identity. We will encounter recurrent themes around diaspora, exile, choice, national and transnational identities, as well as what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls “the danger of the single story.” Students will perform literary analysis through informal and formal assignments, including annotations and Canvas posts, close reading papers, a midterm, and a final exam. Authors Yang Huang and Dina Nayeri will be guest speakers in the class.

Elizabeth Graver

Enduring Questions & Complex Problems Courses in English



The following classes fulfill the Literature Core. The partner course fulfills an additional Core Requirement as indicated. Freshmen only.

Enduring Questions

ENGL1701 **Truth-Telling in Literature**

T TH 10:30

Reflection session: **W 6-8pm**

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with HIST1701 Truth-Telling in History

This course investigates how experience and imagination combine to produce compelling stories. We will question automatic distinctions between fact and fiction, examining written work instead on a spectrum of truth: from first-hand accounts and historical records to confessional poetry, historical fiction, and literary reportage, to parallel novels and even fantasy. Do literary techniques reveal or obscure truth? Can the imagination ever produce truth? We will consider the challenges of reliable and unreliable narration, cross-cultural translation, and embedded commentary in experimental poetry and metafiction. Authors include Tim O'Brien, Amitav Ghosh, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Plato, Emily Dickinson, Italo Calvino, and others.

Allison Adair

ENGL1714 **Reading the Fate of Man, the Face of God, and the Malevolence of the Whale in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick***

M W 12

Reflection session: **W 6-8pm**

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with HIST1704 The Worlds of *Moby-Dick*: What Historical Forces Shape a Book's "Greatness"?

Moby Dick (1851), arguably the greatest American novel, raises questions fundamental to human existence: What is fate? freedom? the meaning of life? the world? Can we know it? This course examines how characters, narrative voice, genre, and plotting create an almost biblical text; how depictions of whaling become parables; how historical references reflect contemporary politics; and how fiction can bring us to reflect on our own lives. Like Queequeg's tattoos, it presents a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth . . . whose mysteries not even [he] himself could read while its value resides in simply raising the questions.

Michael Martin

ENGL1728 **The Value of Work: Significance through Literature**

M W F 11

Reflection session: **W 6 - 8**

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with PHIL1721 The Value of Work: A Philosophical Examination

"What role and significance does work have in flourishing lives and good societies?"

This course pair offers Boston College students the opportunity to reflect on the significance and meaning of the human activity of work as an activity that is likely to occupy a large portion of their lives. Around the globe, politicians promise "good jobs," and scholars discuss automation and "the future of work." But what is a good job? What form of value is most central to work as a part of a good life financial reward? social purpose? personal fulfillment? How do individuals and communities understand and achieve justice and meaning at work?

Aeron Hunt

ENGL1729 **The Role of Literature in Understanding the Complex Meaning of Justice**

T Th 12

Reflection session: **W 6 - 8**

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with UNAS1719 The Rule of Law and the Complex Meaning of Justice

How do societies define justice, and what role do lawyers, authors, and dramatists play in illuminating the many complex issues underlying this concept?

What can literature tell us about the complex interactions between individuals and the law? What are the

links between values, ethics, religious beliefs, and the law. How do various authors grapple with the complex interplay of these elements? In what ways can literary texts serve as an argument for justice or a polemic against injustice? In this course we will read a range of fiction and nonfiction narratives that examine the meanings of justice and the role of individuals within a legal system. We will work to understand why societies enact laws and whose interests those laws serve. We will also examine the role of lawyers, judges, and litigants and the complex dilemmas they face in both upholding laws and pursuing justice. In the context of the United States, we will specifically examine texts that address the intersection of race, justice, and the legal system. Major Course texts include: *Beloved* (Toni Morrison), *The Nickel Boys* (Colson Whitehead), *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee), *A Civil Action* (Jonathan Harr), *Just Mercy* (Bryan Stevenson). Students will further develop their close reading and analysis skills, but also understand that literature is tied to and influenced by the historical and social contexts in which it is both created and read. This broader understanding of literature will encourage students to consider the cultural work that literary texts can do in the pursuit of justice.

Marla DeRosa

ENGL1730 Microbes and Us: Exploring Nature and the Human in the Environmental Humanities

T Th 12

Reflection session: **W 6 - 8**

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with BIOL1710 Microbes and Us: Exploring Nature and the Human from a Microbiology Perspective

How does pairing the study of the natural sciences with the humanities help us discover the nature of human life?

How do scientific understandings of basic life forms enlighten our understanding of the human? How do humanistic understandings shape our comprehension of the natural world? This course explores these questions by drawing parallels between the human behaviors and those of the minutest of living forms--microbes. Pairing microbiology with literary, philosophical, and critical readings allows humanistic and scientific disciplines to converse: what does each mean by life? What does it mean to be social? How are humans both alike and different from other creatures? We will ask how other life forms explain our existence and how an expanded scientific understanding results in new definitions of the human.

Elizabeth Wallace

ENGL1731.01 Encountering Inequalities: Disparity and Protest Art

M W F 9

Reflection session: **W 6 - 8**

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with HIST1726 Encountering Inequalities: The Historical Politics of Inequality

How are inequalities normalized, and how might their normalcy be challenged?

How did we arrive at our current racial and socioeconomic inequality, and how can we understand this moment in a historical context? How are inequalities normalized, and how might their normalcy be challenged? These paired courses will familiarize students with how power and resistance relate to race, ethnicity, and class. Students will learn to recognize the types and origins of inequalities, as well as their political impacts on U.S. democracy and democracies around the world. Our discussions will focus on the myriad ways civil society and traditional liberal thought create unequal systems and how marginalized communities resist those unequal systems.

John Brooks

ENGL1731.02 Encountering Inequalities: Disparity and Protest Art

M W F 1

Reflection session:

W 6 - 8

This is an Enduring Questions course open to freshmen only. Must be taken with HIST1726 Encountering Inequalities: The Historical Politics of Inequality

How are inequalities normalized, and how might their normalcy be challenged?

How did we arrive at our current racial and socioeconomic inequality, and how can we understand this moment in a historical context? How are inequalities normalized, and how might their normalcy be challenged? These paired courses will familiarize students with how power and resistance relate to race, ethnicity, and class. Students will learn to recognize the types and origins of inequalities, as well as their political impacts on U.S. democracy and democracies around the world. Our discussions will focus on the myriad ways civil society and traditional liberal thought create unequal systems and how marginalized communities resist those unequal systems.

John Brooks

Complex Problems

ENGL1733 Crisis and Storytelling in the Age of Climate Change

T Th 1:30

Lab: **M 1:30 or W 1:30 or F 10 or F 1**

Reflection session: **T 6 - 7:30**

This is a Complex Problems course and is open to Freshman only.

The realities of a changing climate, including intensified extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and strengthening heat waves and droughts, are already being felt by frontline communities around the world. This course focuses both on hearing stories about climate change as told by climate writers, scientists, and members of frontline communities, and telling these stories ourselves. We will examine storytelling as it works across mediums and genres from literature to scientific data visualizations, and

consider what it means to write an essay, produce a graph, create a podcast, or make a film. Students in the course will read, watch, and analyze examples of climate storytelling, broadly defined, and produce their own personal essays, infographics, podcasts, and/or films. Some questions well foreground throughout the semester are: How do we communicate the science and the human impacts of the climate crisis? Whose ways of knowing and lived experiences do we privilege? How can the stories we tell move society towards just climate solutions?

Min Song