

38573-01 Gender in the American Renaissance

In this course we'll explore gender and identity in a selection of Nineteenth-Century American novels, essays, and poetry. This course aims to question the stability of gender at its intersections with sex, race, and class in both urban and rural spaces, examining where gender and identity are stretched, tested, and redefined in literature. Although we cannot cover all representations of gender in the American Renaissance, we will begin by asking what was at stake for authors and their narrators to claim "I"/eye/aye, and thereby not only locate but also assert their identities, citizenship, and humanity through literature. We will examine definitions of "woman" in a period known for the Cult of "True" Womanhood, "The Angel in the House," and "The Woman Question" but where we also find a frontier for female heroines. Many of the readings and the direction of the discussion will be determined by you, the students. Requirements include a final paper, oral presentation, and active participation in class discussions.

Course Expectations

Come to class prepared to discuss the readings, ready with at least two things every day: one passage for discussion and one question for the class. When you read, underline key terms and phrases, look up words you don't know, and write questions in the margins. Do your best to make connections between the primary and secondary readings. How does one inform the other? Reflect on the readings and be ready to support and respond to other students in the class. Some of these texts may be triggering, so be respectful. I do not tolerate racist, homophobic, transphobic, or sexist remarks in my classes. Let's keep this a safe learning environment for all.

Required Texts

We will add to this list together as a class in the first week. Those that you need to purchase and read in full are below. I recommend you find them wherever they are cheapest.

Fern, Fanny. *Ruth Hall*.

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria. *Hope Leslie*.

Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

Child, Lydia Maria, *Hobomok*.

Grades (Approximated)

Participation 20%

This grade depends on your attendance and engagement. If I can tell you haven't done the reading, or you don't come prepared with a question or passage for discussion, etc. then that may bring down your grade. If you miss more than 4 classes, you are likely to fail the course.

Oral Presentation 20%

On a day of your choice, you will choose a reading for the class (you can choose one from my suggestions or petition to the class to change the text to something else) and give an oral presentation (no more than 10 minutes) to the class about the author and text. Your presentation

should spark class discussion (I recommend having 3 discussion questions ready to go). You may do this (and present on) either a primary or secondary text. The choice is yours.

Short Reading Reflection Papers 30%

Write a 500-word reflection on one of the readings to submit to your instructor via email on Fridays marked on the syllabus. You can always ask for an extension but there is no guarantee one will be granted. Late (without an extension) reflections will still earn 50% credit and are worthwhile to hand in --anything is better than a zero! These reflections should demonstrate that you have read the assigned reading, and have advanced your critical thinking about the reading (include quotations to give examples and provide some close analysis of the reading). This assignment is meant to help you further your thinking in feminist, gender, queer, and race theory by applying a theory to your analysis of the text. **I am looking for: (1) at least one instance of close reading/interpretation of the passage, (2) a development of your initial thoughts in class discussion** (not a regurgitation of class discussion and definitely NOT a summary of the text), and **(3) it would be an added bonus if you could make connections between the primary text and another reading in the class.** Personal reflections are welcome as long as criteria #1 is met.

Final Paper 30%

Develop a thesis about one or two of the texts we read in class and write a research paper of 10-12 pages about it. Consult with me about your thesis one month before the end of semester. You can use either MLA or Chicago Style. You must include a Works Cited page with at least two scholarly sources (these are sources from journals such as *American Literature*, *ESQ*, *Feminist Studies*, *Signs*, *J19*, *PMLA*, etc.) **I am looking for: (1) a developed thesis, (2) a blueprint of the argument that lays out your topics of discussion, (3) specific examples to support your claims, (4) organized paragraphs with strong topic sentences and transitions, and (5) in-text citations with page numbers that follow direct quotations (or footnotes with page numbers).**

Dyad Activities

Many of our classes will begin with a 10-minute dyad activity, where 1 person talks for 2 minutes (uninterrupted), and the other person listens for 2 minutes, then switch. **Rules:** each person has equal time to speak without interruptions, and there is an understanding of complete confidentiality. In the group reflection that follows, you can share for yourself or ask permission from your partner to share their story. In the group reflection, we'll talk about the topic, meta reflect on the activity itself and any challenges/takeaways.

Schedule of Readings (Subject to Change)

Aug 28 - Syllabus, Emily Dickinson's "I'm wife--I've finished that"

Aug 31 - Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*

Sep 4 - No class, Labor Day

Sep 7 - Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall*

Sep 11 - Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*

Sep 14 - No class

Sep 18 - Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*

Sep 19 - Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*

Sep 22 - *Reflection due*

Sep 25 - Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* + John Milton's *Paradise Lost*
Book 4 (Student Presentation)

Sep 28 - Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* + John Milton's *Paradise Lost*
Book 9 (Student Presentation)

Oct 2 - Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*

Oct 5 - Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*

Oct 6 - *Reflection due*

Oct 9 - No class

Oct 12 - In class debate

Oct 16 - Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (Student Presentation)

Oct 19 - Audre Lorde's "Poetry is not a Luxury," Phillis Wheatley's "On Being Brought from
Africa to America," & Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "The Slave Mother" (Student
Presentation)

Oct 20 - *Reflection due*

Oct 23 - *Their Eyes Were Watching God* - Zora Neale Hurston (Student Presentation)

Oct 26 - *Their Eyes Were Watching God* - Zora Neale Hurston

Oct 30 - bell hooks' *ain't i a woman*, chapter 1 [about the antebellum period] [In class
listening/reading: Sojourner Truth's "ain't i a woman" speech]

Nov 2 - bell hooks' *ain't i a woman*, chapter 2 [about Reformation and black womanhood] +
June Jordan's "Poem About My Rights"

Nov 3 - *Reflection due*

Nov 6 - Sarah Grimke's "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes" [Letters V, VI, VIII] & Audre
Lorde's "The Master's Tools," and "Coal"

Nov 9 - No class

Nov 13 - Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*

Nov 16 - Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (Student Presentation)

Nov 17 - *Reflection due*

Nov 20 - Dickinson, "A narrow fellow in the grass," "Nature and God -- I neither knew"

[In-class argument analysis: Lorde, hooks, Gay]

Nov 23 - No class

Nov 27 - LEMONADE (Student Presentation)

Nov 30 - LEMONADE + bell hooks' critique

Dec 4 - Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Dec 7 - Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (Student Presentation)

Dec 8 - *Reflection due*

Dec 11 - Roxane Gay's *NYT* article [In-class writing workshop]

Dec 17 - Final paper due

Academic Integrity

Any instance of plagiarism (intentional or accidental)* will result in an immediate failure ("F") on the assignment. The college officially states: Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

Statement of Accommodation

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of Access ABILITY located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212- 772- 4857)/TTY (212- 650- 3230).