

English 39500-02  
Instructor: Christina Katopodis  
Email: [ckatopodis@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:ckatopodis@gradcenter.cuny.edu)

Office: 1238 HW  
Mon 1:30-2:30pm  
and by appointment

### **American Literature: Origins to the Civil War**

M/TH 2:45-4:00pm | Room HN C101

The Puritan settlers came to New England with the conviction that God had sent them on an “errand in the wilderness.” Their encounters with the landscape and the indigenous populations produced an intense and varied religious experience. The diversity of American religious experience expanded through the Enlightenment and American Revolution, leading to 19th Century attempts to balance religious virtue with pragmatic principles. We will examine American religious and political origins through the early settlers’ experiences in the American wilderness, the Puritan and Transcendentalist search for truth in nature, as well as the national desire for self-definition in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American literature before the Civil War. The course will be focused on how environment has shaped American identity, and how environment is used as a literary and philosophical tool: to frame narratives, position pragmatic arguments, catalyze personal and political change, and open possibilities for explorations of gender and sexuality.

#### **Required Text - Subject to Revision & Vote**

*The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (Vol. A, any edition)

#### **Grading Breakdown - Voted on September 6th**

15% Individual Participation 10% / Attendance 5%  
15% Accountability for doing group work  
30% Midterm or Bi-weekly reading responses  
40% Final paper or final project (8-9 pages)

#### **Attendance Policy (5%) - Voted on September 5th**

Attendance will be taken within the first five minutes of class with a note card written response geared toward the day’s reading. If you are late (if you arrive after note cards have been collected), you can raise your hand during class discussion to make a point or ask an intelligent question that demonstrates you’ve done the reading and be redeemed. Excessive lateness (late for 2 or more classes) requires makeup work in the form of a longer response to the readings in your next reading reflection (you must write 500-750 words instead of 250-500 words).

Attendance and punctuality are important to your success in this class. If absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, including announcements made at the beginning of class. You should follow up with the instructor to find out how you can make up the work (most likely by writing your next reading reflection with a minimum of 500-600 words on the readings due the day you missed). You should review the collaborative notes in Google docs from the day you missed and contribute your reading reflection to the class notes (after you write your reading reflection, copy and paste it into the Google doc so the class can benefit from your reflections; do this in addition to turning in your reading reflection directly to the instructor).

### **Course Expectations - Voted on September 6th**

I expect you to come to class having read the assigned texts and with one prepared comment on the text to share with the class: either (1) bring a discussion question to class, (2) select an interesting or important passage from the text to bring to the class's attention, or (3) have a prepared comment or observation about the text ready to share, written down.

You will need a Google account to access the syllabus and engage in collaborative projects for this class. I highly encourage you to use your laptop in class if that helps you with note-taking, etc., and it is especially helpful if we are collaboratively taking notes in the same Google Doc. If you don't have a smartphone or laptop that you can bring to class, please see me in the first week of class to work out another way to participate. Please silence your phone and keep it stowed away from view unless it's an appropriate time to have it out or in case of emergency.

That said, "with great power comes great responsibility." I will not police you. If you decide to live chat with friends or distract yourself during class time, that's on you. In that case, it is not my fault if you miss something, it is not fair for you to ask me to repeat myself, and it is not my problem if you "don't get it" because you weren't paying attention. You're an adult. It's on you to pay attention. To be successful in this class, you need to do more than just show up.

### **Attendance Method - Voted on September 5th**

#### **(1) Submit Your Discussion Questions on an Index Card**

Write your name and a discussion question that you thought about at home on an index card, then pass them up. Great way for everyone to participate at least once in a large class and helps me bring someone who hasn't spoken yet into the conversation.

### **Excused Absences - Last Voted on September 5th**

Every absence is considered unexcused until you engage in class participation. Up to three of your absences can be made excused, and, beyond that, you will need to talk with your instructor about make-up work and she will work with you on a case-by-case basis. Barring extenuating circumstances, upon your fifth absence you will lose the entire 5% of your attendance grade. Note that if you miss four (4) or more class meetings, you will likely fail the course.

To earn an excused absence, write a reading reflection on the readings due the day you missed with a minimum of 500 words, demonstrating that you read and understood the reading. Post your reflection on the collaborative notes Google Doc under the proper date so the class can benefit from your participation. For those completing reading reflections: this extended reflection may be submitted as your next reading reflection. For those writing midterm papers or to earn more than one excused absence, you must write an additional reading reflection.

### **Class Constitution - Last Voted on Aug 30th**

Ground Rules for Lecture vs. Discussion (40/60)

Ground Rules for Discussion: What is participation? Bring in a class discussion question or comment and attentive listening. This is also how instructor will take attendance. There is no limit on many times a person can speak.

### **Academic Integrity - Not Negotiable**

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.” My motto: No replication without representation. If you plagiarize, you will fail the assignment.

### **Statement of Accommodation - Not Negotiable**

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). Please contact me by email or in person outside of class if you require accommodation.

### **~ Schedule of Readings ~** [Subject to Change]

Aug 27: Syllabus & Constitution

Aug 30: Deliberation & Voting

### **First Encounters in the Wilderness**

Sep 3: [No Class]

Sep 5: Las Casas, *The Very Brief Relation of the Devastation of the Indies* [excerpt]  
Smith, *The General History of Virginia* [Chapter 2, *The Third Book*]  
Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* [I, IV, VII, X in *Book One* & XI in *Book Two*]

Sep 6: Rowlandson, *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*  
Mather, “A Notable Exploit: *Dux Foemina Facti*” [excerpt on Hannah Dustan]  
Thoreau, *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* [excerpt on Hannah Dustan]

### **Varieties of “American” Experience**

Sep 13: Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity”  
Bradstreet, “The Flesh and the Spirit,” “To My Dear Children”

Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom"  
**\*Reading Reflection Due\***

Sep 17: Taylor, "Meditation 38" (First Series), "Meditation 26" (Second Series)  
Edwards, "Personal Narrative," "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

Sep 20: Equiano, "Narrative of the Life" [excerpts from Chapters 1 & 3]  
Franklin, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America"  
Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* [III & IX]

Sep 24: Paine, *Common Sense* [excerpt]  
Freneau, "On Mr. Paine's Rights of Man"  
Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America"

### **Guest Lectures**

Sep 27: Special Guest Dr. Kaitlin Mondello on Emily Dickinson

Oct 1: Special Guest Lecture by Austin Bailey on Emerson's "[The American Scholar](#)"

Oct 4: [No Class] **\*\*Reading Reflection Due - 500 words minimum\*\***

### **Encounters (Re)presented, (Re)imagined**

Oct 8: [No Class]

Oct 11: Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*

Oct 15: Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie*

Oct 18: Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* **\*Reading Reflection Due\***

**Oct 19: \*Midterm Due\* / \*Reading Reflection on Hope Leslie Due\***

Oct 22: Zitkala-Sa, "Impressions of an Indian Girl hood," and "The School Days of an Indian Girl"

Oct 25: Zitkala-Sa, "The Widespread Enigma of Blue-Star Woman," and Apess, "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man"

### **Gender and the Environment in the American Renaissance**

Oct 29: Irving, "[The Legend of Sleepy Hollow](#)"

Nov 1: [Ruth Hall](#) by Fanny Fern **\*Reading Reflection Due\***

Nov 5: *Ruth Hall* wrap up; “A Law More Nice Than Just” [the latter to be read in class]

Nov 8: “[The Birthmark](#)” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nov 12: [Nature](#) by Emerson [Nature walk sometime after 11/7 on your own, write reflection on it and any relevant readings that strike you for 11/15]

Nov 15: “[Where I Lived; What I Lived For](#),” and “[Winter Animals](#)” from *Walden* by Thoreau; “[The Beasts](#)” by Whitman [read in class] **\*Reading Reflection Due\***

Nov 19: “[Sounds](#)” and “Brute Neighbors” from *Walden*, “[Vanishing Sounds](#)” by Dimock; “[The Raven](#)” by Poe [in class]

Nov 22: [No class] **(1) First thesis paragraph drafts or outlines with (2) working title and (3) two sources for projects will be due by Thanksgiving (to receive feedback only, no grade).**

### **Slavery and Civil War**

Nov 26:

Nov 29: **\*Reading Reflection Due\***

Dec 3:

Dec 6:

Dec 10:

**Dec 17: [No class] \*Final Paper/Project Due\***

### **Individual Participation (10%) - Subject to Deliberation, Revision & Vote**

I encourage open but *respectful* discussion; thus, derogatory comments, including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc., will not be tolerated in class, on the class blog, using the class hashtag, or on any other platform related to class.

### **Accountability for Doing Work (15%) - Voted on September 6th**

When there's group work, minimum 15 min of class time; two group projects; static groups; peer and self evaluations after group projects.

### **Midterm or Reading Reflections (30%) - Last Voted on Sep 6th**

Bi-weekly reading reflections due on Thursdays by class time (250-500 words) with feedback from instructor and to be evaluated by number of essays turned in and proof that you thought about the material seriously. Lowest quality response is dropped from grade. You can either print yours out and hand it in at the beginning of class or email it to the instructor.

OR

Write a midterm paper of 5-6 pages due October 19th. Writing prompts available upon request. Please let your instructor know if you would like to choose this option by Thursday, Sep 13th.

### **Final Paper or Final Project (40%) - Last Voted on Aug 30th**

Subject to negotiation and revision: Your final paper (8-9 pages) must have a thesis-driven argument about at least one of the texts covered this semester.<sup>1</sup> Please use MLA or Chicago Style format. Your paper must engage with 2-3 secondary scholarly sources. (Why “2-3,” you ask? If one source provides biographical or historical information without literary criticism, you need three.) I recommend you meet with me during office hours in November *before* Thanksgiving to discuss your thesis. Writing prompts available upon request, and individual projects to be determined and agreed upon one month in advance of deadline which will be after the last day of class and announced by instructor. First thesis paragraph drafts and/or outlines and 2 sources for projects will be due before Thanksgiving (to receive feedback only, no grade).

### **Learning Outcomes - Deliberation, Revision & Vote**

Students will (1) read and write critically about a survey of American literature written from a variety of viewpoints, (2) gain an understanding of the historical and sociopolitical context for that literature, and (3) sharpen their critical reading skills to think about how race, gender, and environment inform an author’s standpoint and shape what we consider “American” identity. In addition, this course will be (4) driven by student work and participation with a low reliance on lecturing in an effort to de-colonize the classroom and empower students in a safe space to become better citizens and future leaders. (5) Practice and improve ability to discuss literature (incl. being on task, focusing on key aspects of literary study); to focus on literary analysis as well as sociopolitical context. (6) To understand citation as a political act and sign of respect for oneself and others (and learn to use thoughtfulness of context when citing sources).

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<sup>1</sup>\* If there is an author from the period we didn’t discuss and you would like to write about a text we didn’t cover, you may come to my office hours to discuss your plan. I’m an Americanist, so I will happily make an exception for a well thought-out paper that fits the parameters of the course.