

## Text and Context

Professor: Jason Richards  
 Office and Mailbox: 311 Palmer  
 Office Hours: 8:30-11:30am R (and by appointment)  
 Office Phone: 843-3517  
 Email: richardsj@rhodes.edu (see email policy)

Course: ENGL 285 Sections 1 & 2  
 Semester: Spring 2015  
 Time: 12-12:50 & 1-1:50pm MWF  
 Room: 211 Palmer

### Course Description

This course emphasizes the close reading of literary texts in relation to their cultural contexts. In order to expose students to a variety of texts/contexts, our readings will cover a wide range of American literature and literary genres. We'll begin by analyzing how Edgar Allan Poe's short stories as well as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* record the horrors of historical haunting, antebellum racial anxieties, and aristocratic decline. Then we'll consider how the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson reflects the gendering of the new national body. Next we'll read Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, which exposes the brutalities of northern indentured servitude, and Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, an icy meditation on primitive life and environmental determinism. We'll then turn to Edith Wharton's *Summer*, a gripping tale of female isolation and paternalism, and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, a devastating critique of the American Dream. We'll also read some stories by John Cheever about the pathologies of postwar suburbia as well as Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*, a tale of depravity and violence in rural Tennessee. After that, we'll jump into Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*, a fast-paced portrait of decadence in 1980s New York. A few other texts will be sprinkled in along the way. Note: This course assists prospective majors and minors in acquiring the necessary tools for middle- and upper-division classes in English.

### Required Texts

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Penguin)  
 Harriet Wilson, *Our Nig* (Penguin)  
 Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (Dover)  
 Edith Wharton, *Summer* (Signet)  
 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (Penguin)  
 Cormac McCarthy, *Child of God* (Random House)  
 Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (Random House)  
*Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* (Penguin)

### Grading

Participation/Professionalism	15%
Short Paper 1 (4-5 pages)	25%
Short Paper 2 (4-5 pages)	25%
Research Paper (8-10 pages)	35%

**A** = 100-94; **A-** = 93-90; **B+** = 89-87; **B** = 86-84; **B-** = 83-80; **C+** = 79-77; **C** = 76-74;  
**C-** = 73-70; **D+** = 69-67; **D** = 66-64; **D-** = 63-60; **F** < 60

**Participation/Professionalism:** While I will often begin class with a lecture, this course relies heavily on discussion. You are expected to have all the readings done for the day they are assigned and come prepared to discuss them, and you must always bring the text(s) we are discussing to class. Participation will be evaluated in terms of quantity and quality. Part of your participation grade includes quizzes, which are **unannounced** and given at the beginning of class. **If you are late or absent on a quiz day, you cannot make up the quiz. If you miss or perform poorly on a quiz, you can compensate for it by participating more in class.** Quizzes must be done on paper with clean edges. Finally, a lack of professionalism (e.g., not following course policies, rude behavior, and so on) will negatively affect this portion of your grade.

**Email Policy:** **The best way to address questions about our class is by meeting in person.** I am always happy to talk with you during my office hours, by appointment, or after class. That said, I am available by email for **simple and succinct** queries. I typically respond to email once a day between 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. If you do need to email, here are some rules to follow:

- Email is not the place to discuss grade concerns or negotiate any kind of special request
- Email is not the place to seek feedback on your writing or ideas; that must be done in person
- Do not email at the last minute (e.g., the night before an assignment is due) asking for help
- Do not email if you plan to visit during office hours; I'll be there, unless otherwise stated
- Do not email about your absences, unless you are missing two or more classes in a row

**Appointments:** If you cannot meet with me during my office hours or after class, we can set up an appointment at a time that is mutually convenient. If you need to make an appointment, please plan to do so **at least 24 hours in advance.**

**Electronic Devices:** No laptops, cell phones, etc. allowed. **Texting is expressly forbidden.**

**Attendance:** While I expect you to attend every class, you are allowed three absences during the semester. After three absences, every additional absence will lower your final grade by one percentage point (e.g., 80% becomes 79%, and so on). If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course. **Note: If you do miss class, please don't contact me to ask what you missed. Instead, you should exchange contact information with other classmates and ask them what we covered in class.**

**Tardiness:** Please do not come late to class. Tardiness disrupts the flow of class and distracts other students. If you have a scheduling conflict, you are advised to drop the class. Tardiness will lower your participation/professionalism grade.

**Papers:** You will write two short papers and one research paper for this course. You will receive a handout for each paper.

**Mode of Submission:** Papers are due at the beginning of class. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins on the top and bottom and **1.25-inch margins on the sides.** Please use printer ink that produces a copy dark enough to be easily legible. Place your name, instructor's name, course number, and date in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number should appear in the upper right-hand

corner of all pages. Do not include a title page. Place your title above the text on page one and double space above and beneath it. Your title should not be underlined. Be sure to staple your paper. You may lose points for not following these guidelines. **Note: I do not accept papers by email.**

**Submission of All Work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual Honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult me.

**Disability Issues:** Students with documented disabilities should meet with me at the beginning of the semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Please contact the office of Student Disability Services for more information. In all cases, it is your responsibility to provide me with an official letter from SDS.

## Schedule (subject to change)

### Week 1

Jan 14: Introduction

Jan 16: Poe, "The Black Cat" (handout)

### Week 2

Jan 19: No Class: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Jan 21: Poe, "Ms. Found in a Bottle" (handout)

Jan 23: Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (handout)

### Week 3

Jan 26: Poe, "Hop-Frog" (handout)

Jan 28: Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*, Preface & Chapters 1-2 (pages 1-41)

Jan 30: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 3-5 (pages 42-85)

### Week 4

Feb 2: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 6-10 (pages 86-158)

Feb 4: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 11-16 (pages 159-252)

Feb 6: *The House of the Seven Gables*, Chapters 17-21 (pages 253-319)

### Week 5

Feb 9: Wilson, *Our Nig*, Preface and Chapters 1-3 (pages 1-22)

Feb 11: *Our Nig*, Chapters 4-8 (pages 23-50)

Feb 13: *Our Nig*, Chapters 9-12 (pages 51-72)

### Week 6

Feb 16: Dickinson, Poems (handout)

Feb 18: Whitman, Poems (handout)

Feb 20: **Paper 1 Due**; Presentations

### Week 7

Feb 23: London, *The Call of the Wild*, Chapters 1-4 (pages 1-31)

Feb 25: *The Call of the Wild*, Chapters 5-7 (pages 31-62)

Feb 27: Wharton, *Summer*, Chapters 1-5 (pages 1-42)

### Week 8

Mar 2: *Summer*, Chapters 6-10 (pages 43-101)

Mar 4: *Summer*, Chapters 11-15 (pages 102-57)

Mar 6: *Summer*, Chapters 16-18 (pages 158-94)

### Week 9

Mar 9: **Spring Recess**

Mar 11: **Spring Recess**

Mar 13: **Spring Recess**

### Week 10

Mar 16: Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, Act 1 (pages 1-51)

Mar 18: *Death of a Salesman*, Act 2 & Requiem (pages 52-112)

Mar 20: Cheever, "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill" (handout)

### Week 11

Mar 23: Cheever, "The Swimmer" (handout)

Mar 25: Plath, Poems (handout)

Mar 27: Sexton, Poems (handout)

**Week 12**

Mar 30: Hayden, Poems (handout)

Apr 1: **Paper 2 Due**; Presentations

Apr 3: **Easter Recess**

**Week 13**

Apr 6: McCarthy, *Child of God*, Chapters 1-17 (pages 1-49)

Apr 8: *Child of God*, Chapters 18-26 (pages 50-92)

Apr 10: *Child of God*, Chapters 27-38 (pages 93-135)

**Week 14**

Apr 13: *Child of God*, Chapters 39-52 (pages 136-97)

Apr 15: Lorde, Poems (handout)

Apr 17: Harjo, Poems (handout)

**Week 15**

Apr 20: McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 1-2 (pages 1-35)

Apr 22: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 3-5 (pages 36-79)

Apr 24: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 6-8 (pages 80-127)

**Week 16**

Apr 27: *Bright Lights, Big City*, Chapters 9-12 (pages 128-82)

Apr 29: No Class: Optional Conferences from 8:30-11:30am

May 1: **Research Paper Due by Noon (leave in my office mailbox: 311 Palmer)**