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Office Hours: 11.00am-12pm Monday/  
1.30pm-2.30pm Thursday/ 11.00am-12pm Friday

## ENGLISH 210: INTERPRETING LITERATURE

Literature is a difficult word, as Raymond Williams has written, 'in part because its conventional contemporary meaning appears, at first sight, so simple.' This semester is of course about 'literature' – and in the weeks ahead we will consider a range of ideas that challenge the simplicity of that term – but it is also about texts: how we respond to them, how we create meaning from them, and what processes we should employ in relation to them. Many of our semester readings may seem, at first glance, bewildering. You might feel you have no real skill as a literary 'interpreter'. But this is a course designed to debunk the idea that literary texts are accessible only to a select few. We will look at writing through an array of approaches and strategies, and these will be designed to equip you with the confidence and ability to explore 'literature' in a variety of literary forms. You should think of the weeks ahead both as a chance to consider imaginative language more closely and as an encounter with some fascinating writing in British and American English. At the end of the semester, you will not only have experienced a variety of provocative and enjoyable texts, but also you will have developed a critical vocabulary for talking about literary writing. More importantly, perhaps, I hope you will have built relationships with at least a few of these works that will inspire you to return to them in the future.

The primary goals of this course are as follows:

1. To introduce you to various literary forms – fiction, poetry and drama – and to learn how to **analyze** and to **critically evaluate** elements within those texts
2. To enable you to develop your interpretation of literary texts in **written form**

During the semester, we will focus on writing from the genres of poetry, drama, and prose fiction. We will also work with film as one primary medium engaged in "interpreting literature." As participants on a 'writing intensive' course, you will also receive instruction on composition: planning to write arguments; summarizing and the use of critical sources; and the incorporation of revision into the writing process. You will also receive extended feedback on writing exercises. If you feel that your college prose is in need of particular improvement, this is a great opportunity to address those issues outside the confines of a writing seminar.

**This class is open to first-year and sophomore students only.**

### Required Textbooks:

Booth, Alison, John Paul Hunter and Kelly J. Mays, eds. The Norton Introduction to Literature. Ninth Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

### Recommended Textbooks:

Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Sixth Edition. Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

Edwards, Philip, ed. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (The New Cambridge Shakespeare) by William Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

### Course Format

The class meets three times a week in a seminar and discussion format. Sometimes this will be preceded by a short lecture introducing a topic or proposing a new idea. You will be expected to complete all readings assigned for the class and prepare for discussion. Often I will supply you with particular questions or tasks to guide you in your preparation. This will mean finding responses in advance to particular questions so you are able to talk about them when called upon. Participation in discussion is a vital part of this course and your overall semester grade will reflect that. With each reading you should expect to comment or pose questions about it, as well as challenge or test the ideas within it. By participating in class discussion, your analytic skills and interpretative strategies will be strengthened and your experience of a particular text will be enriched. This may seem like a daunting task, but if you are nervous about speaking up in class, look on this as a personal challenge. I would like everyone to set themselves the task of saying something in each class.

At several points in the term there might be either group work assigned that requires you to meet outside class, or an additional meeting scheduled for a screening of a dramatic text. You are responsible for organizing yourself to complete the work and to attend any meetings outside regular class. Missing a film screening will count as an absence.

### Course Requirements

#### Formal Essays

You will complete three formal writing assignments (of four-six pages). These will be handed in approximately every five weeks throughout the semester. All assignments must be typed in 12pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced with margins of one inch. Full format details can be found in the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (sixth edition) in the library or by emailing me. Although I assume this will mean there are approximately 300 words on each page, every paper must include **a word count, your name, my name and a title to be decided upon by you**. Every paper must be proofread for grammatical and spelling errors. Your grade will reflect the appropriate penalties if errors are not corrected.

There will be one additional assignment in the first three weeks of the semester. This will be worth 10% of your grade. It will also be on prose fiction.

#### Critical Vocabulary Tasks

In weeks where there is no formal writing assignment due, students will research and write paragraph-long definitions of literary terms through short pieces of literary analysis. These pieces of work should be typed up in 12pt and submitted as if part of a formal essay. I will check books and handlists of literary terms to make sure that the definitions have been written by you. If you draw on material from any of the literary handbooks, it is your responsibility to make sure it is properly cited. Each time a critical vocabulary task is due, you should submit it in a designated folder along with all previously submitted critical vocabulary tasks.

#### Final exam

Dependent upon the progress of the class, there may be a final in-class assignment that will ask you to demonstrate your understanding of the course concepts. It will discuss a variety of the works which we have read in class.

#### Participation and Discussion

I will expect each person I call on during class time to be prepared and willing to speak. If at any point a student is not able to participate in an adequate manner or is unprepared for the class, they will be counted as absent for that session.

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|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| • Essay 1 (Fiction) Critical Sources | 4-6 pages | 20% |
| • Essay 2 (Poetry) Close Reading     | 4-6 pages | 20% |
| • Essay 3 (Drama) Film & Text        | 4-6 pages | 20% |
| • Writing assignment                 | 3-4 pages | 10% |
| • Critical Vocabulary Tasks          |           | 15% |
| • Participation & Discussion         |           | 15% |

**PLEASE NOTE: You will not receive a passing grade unless you submit all written assignments.**

#### **Attendance Policy:**

You are expected to be present in class, fully awake, prepared and ready to contribute to course activities. Failure to meet the terms of that definition may result in a student being marked absent. You may miss three classes in the term without penalty (for illness, sickness, religious holidays or other absences). Further absences will result in your final grade for the entire course being lowered a third of a point (i.e. From B+ to B, from B- to C+). More than six absences will result in failure of the course.

#### **Honor Code:**

Please make sure you are absolutely clear about the terms of the honor code. All written work must be your own. Under no circumstances will any form of intellectual dishonesty be tolerated. You should be aware that the consequences are severe. If you are ever unsure whether you might be violating the code, please contact me or another professor to find out.

#### **Disabilities**

If you have a disability, please contact me in advance of the class to discuss any additional requirements you may have, such as large print handouts or extra time in assessments.

#### **Email and WebCT**

If materials are to be made available to you on WebCT, I will send an email advising you of that fact. Please check your email each day for notices about the course.

#### **Grading Scale**

Essays and the final grade are calculated on a scale from A-F, including pluses and minuses in between. You will have an opportunity to ask questions about criteria in detail before each assignment. A grade of 'A' indicates excellent and outstanding work; 'B' is a good grade and, in the case of B+, a very good grade; 'C' is a passing grade; 'D' indicates poor or shoddy work; 'F' is a failing grade and both 'D' and 'F' indicate work that is unacceptable.