

The Figure of the Citizen
(English 151-03)
Rhodes College, Department of English
Professor Newstok

Spring 2008
MWF 10:00am-10:50am
Barrett 020

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Palmer 310
Office hours: Tu 9:30-1:30, or by appointment (please *email*)

*“there is no notion more central to politics than citizenship,
and none more variable in history, or contested in theory”*

—Judith Shklar

Course description

What is a citizen? How is the notion of citizenship formed and informed by **rhetorical persuasion**? This section of the **writing** course explores the ‘figure’ of the citizen, often placed in opposition to a range of non-citizens (women, slaves, immigrants, aliens, strangers, enemies, friends). While we will examine selected excerpts from classical and contemporary political theories addressing citizenship, we will be concentrating on the ways in which citizens get *figured* in texts. To this end, readings might include the play *Antigone*, Pericles’ funeral oration, More’s *Utopia*, and poetry by Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, W. H. Auden, and Seamus Heaney. Less conventionally ‘literary’ texts will also be drawn from genres such as legal documents, letters, government exams, and journalism. We’ll touch upon debates surrounding the figure of the citizen in classical Greece, Renaissance England, and the United States; research projects will involve work at the National Civil Rights Museum.

In common with other 151 classes, the course has three broad aims: to enable you to *read critically*, to encourage you to *think independently*, and to help you *produce accurate and compelling prose* in support of a **thesis**. Course requirements will include three essays, one longer research paper, and brief writing (and revising) assignments for every class session.

Required texts

For ease of reference, the following editions are **required**; they are inexpensive and available at the Rhodes Bookstore:

- *The Burial at Thebes*, Seamus Heaney (FSG 2004)
- *Utopia*, trans. Clarence Miller (Yale 2001)
- *How to Write*, Alastair Fowler (Oxford 2006)
- *A Guide to Effective Paper Writing*, Rebecca Finlayson (Rhodes 2007)

Additional course materials will be distributed throughout the semester.

You will often be encouraged to refer to the *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a multi-volume historical dictionary of the language. Although it is now also available online (<http://dictionary.oed.com/>), it’s still valuable to consult the hard copy in the Rhodes Library.

Schedule—subject to revision, per class interest and instructor’s direction

Have the texts read **before** our discussions each session. Ideally, you will read them once over the weekend, and then **re-read** them during the week—good reading always entails **re-reading**. Read aloud; read slowly; take notes. You should plan on **at least four hours** of preparation for every hour of class—even more earlier in the term. Bring the **assigned reading** to each class.

Introduction

Jan. 7 *syllabus; OED; citizenship quiz*

Classical Athens: Civic Duty and Civil Disobedience

Jan. 14 *Antigone*

[Jan. 21—MLK Day—no class]

Jan. 23 *Antigone, continued*

Jan. 25 *** MACBETH SYMPOSIUM—BLOUNT AUDITORIUM ***

Jan. 28 *Pericles’ “Funeral Oration;” Archilochos*

Feb. 4 *Plato & Aristotle*

Feb. 8—Paper #1 due

The Renaissance: Cosmopolitanism and the State

Feb. 11 *Utopia*

Feb. 18 *Utopia, continued*

Feb. 25 *Machiavelli, Hobbes & other theorists of politics*

Feb. 29—Paper #2 due

[March 3-7—Spring Recess—no class]

The United States: Stages of Emancipation

Mar. 10 *American constitutional documents*

Mar. 17 *Slavery and abolition*

[March 21—Easter Recess—no class]

Mar. 24 *Martin Luther King, Jr.—speeches and letters*

Mar. 31 *National Civil Rights Museum—research*

April 4—Paper #3 due

Lyric Poetry: “The Republic of Conscience”

Apr. 7 *Whitman and Dickinson*

Apr. 14 *Auden and Heaney*

Retrospect

Apr. 21 *Contemporary debates about citizenship*

April 25—Paper #4 due

May 2—Final portfolio due

Requirements

Engagement (30%) is mandatory, broadly conceived to include active **participation** (*listening* and *responding* to your peers as well as the professor), consistent **preparation** of course readings, **enthusiasm** for assignments, **collaboration** with your peers, and **respect** for the course. Successful students are those who re-read thoroughly in advance of discussion, arrive on time to class, and participate thoughtfully every day of the semester. If you miss a class for any reason, your ‘re-admission ticket’ to the following class will be a short (300-word) typed essay on the single most interesting thing from your reading for the prior class. If *for whatever reason* (including medical and personal emergencies, extracurricular events) you miss **more than five classes** (that is, two full weeks of the semester!), you cannot pass the course.

Portfolio (70%) involves **all of your writing** throughout the semester. Keep all of your preliminary essays, drafts, and revisions in a **folder**, which will provide the basis for most of your grade at the end of the semester. Your individual papers (but not drafts or other exercises) will be graded throughout the term in order to give you a rough idea of your progress in the course.

Preparation: Expect to prepare **4 hours** outside of class for every hour inside class. Have the assignments read **before** our discussions each week; ideally, you will read assignments once (and poems *multiple* times) over the weekend, and then re-read them during the week; good reading always entails **re-reading**. If it becomes clear that not all of the class is keeping up with the reading, quizzes will be given.

Drafts: Writing drafts will invariably improve your final papers. Take advantage of the **Rhodes College Writing Center** in Barret Library. We will also schedule regular **draft conferences** to discuss work-in-progress.

Essays: These are due **in class** on the day assigned. The first essay is a *close reading* of one scene from *Antigone*; this assignment is limited in length (**1000 words**) and scope (a single scene) to encourage concentrated observation. The essay on *Utopia* requires a *comparative analysis* of More’s text and Sophocles’ play (**1500 words**). The longer research project (**2000 words**) will examine the *rhetoric of citizenship* in American civil rights discourse. Many Rhodes courses assign open topics, which require much more initiative and imagination than simply choosing from a list of suggested themes; the final paper (**1000 words**) expects that you propose and develop *your own thesis* based on multiple texts from the course (including our final poems).

Deadlines: Deadlines are firm; I do not accept late work or grant extensions. Late work causes problems for both students and teachers, and frequently results in inferior writing and evaluation. **Expect to submit writing for this course every time you attend class.**

Email: Essays may not be submitted via email; I need copies placed in my mailbox instead. I am happy to receive occasional queries by email regarding your writing, but I may not be able to reply immediately—and it's generally preferable to discuss writing in person. I'm flexible and glad to meet with you outside of my normal office hours.

Grading: 'C' (70–79%) represents *satisfactory* work; a 'B' (80–86%) represents *good* work; a 'B+' (87–89%) represents *very good* work; an 'A-' (90–93%) represents *excellent* work; and the infrequent 'A' (94% and above) represents *extraordinary* achievement. This holds true for your overall engagement, your short essays, your critical surveys, and your final projects.

Policies: As always, please observe Rhodes guidelines regarding the **Honor Code**; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and an Honor Code violation (including plagiarism) will be grounds for **failure in the course**. Respect the integrity of the course: please turn off **cell phones** and **remove hats** before entering the classroom. **Eating in class** and **leaving to go to the bathroom** are both disruptive to our conversations; please plan accordingly so that you won't have to do either. Treat email exchanges with one another and with the professor as formally composed correspondence.

Format: Please follow these simple guidelines to make grading papers more uniform:

- put your last name on each page in the top right corner, followed by the page number
- use Times Roman 12-point font
- single-space the text of your essay (to save paper)
- staple all pages together
- margins should be an inch on top, bottom, and sides
- put the following information, single-spaced, in the top left corner:

Your Name
ENG-151: The Figure of the Citizen
Professor Newstok
Month Day, Year

- your title follows this heading, centered on the next line

Daily writing—guidelines

These are brief (around 250 words) compositions designed to familiarize you with a number of different *kinds* of approaches to analyzing texts—from examining very minute details to considering larger issues across multiple texts. As the semester progresses, you will be able to incorporate the ‘tools’ from earlier essays into your increasingly nuanced compositions. They are also intended to give you some expertise on a particular topic for discussion that week, and serve as preparation for our meetings; it is often only through writing that we come to recognize what we have to say. Hard copies (not email attachments) are due in class.

There will be **daily** short compositions throughout the term, which entails a considerable amount of writing. However, the writing will be in short and regular assignments (there is no longer mid-term essay), and the habit should prove useful for you—you’ll have a record of your thoughts from throughout the term; you’ll become accustomed to engaging with texts on a very particular level; you’ll always be prepared for discussion. **No late work**—the daily compositions prepare your thoughts in advance of each day’s discussion.

Suggestions from a former student:

How to Write Short Essays For Professor Newstok –

or,

“How to Write Thoroughly Yet Specifically About a Text in a Very Small Space”

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1. “What does he mean by ‘focus on the text’???”

He means *Use the Text*. You don’t have to quote entire passages – just a few pertinent lines. Words are always open to interpretation, so if you are going to have a fabulous interpretation of the text you just read, you need to show whomever is going to read your paper what it was that inspired your thinking. (Citations, yes!)

2. “Why can’t I have a stinking intro paragraph?”

You don’t have much space. So instead of writing about what you are *going* to write about – just write it.

3. “What does he mean ‘focus on specific words’???”

Here’s a special hint: lift an author’s word (from the lines you are already using), and use it in your own text, perhaps in a slightly different way. Know what it means and how it is used in the lines you are discussing. It seems very trivial and difficult, but it’s really not that hard. All you have to do is pay attention and respect and enjoy the language you are using.

4. “I can’t think of a good topic!”

Don’t stress too much about this. You’re not going to have some complex “thesis” that you are going to “prove.” You do, however, want to say something interesting about the passages you are talking about. While you are reading, write notes in the margins about what interests you or catches your attention or just doesn’t make any sense. The best topics are the ones that interest you already, but sometimes you forget what you were thinking after you finish reading and wipe the sweat off your brow. This way, if you have passages underlined and notes in the margins, you’ve got your work cut out for you – you have your own personal interest designated AND the appropriate lines to talk about – what could be better? Then you write about what you were already thinking – in an intelligent and informed way – and you’re all set!