

Cedar Crest College

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**CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE**  
**ENG 326 (3 credits) Spring 2010**

Every literary movement has its roots  
in a past which it at once perpetuates,  
repudiates, and transforms.

Alicia Suskin Ostriker  
*Stealing the Language*

A story like a vice, future reader, innocent reader. . . . You who feign  
suspense or harbor closet wishes for redemption, salvation--or at the  
very least a little flourish of transcendence . . . All right then, take my  
hand. *There, there now.* Let the rhetorical celebration begin!

Carole Maso  
*Defiance*

**Texts:**

*The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, vol. E, 7th ed.

Heller, *Catch-22*

Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

DeLillo, *White Noise* (Specific edition: Ed. by Mark Osteen. Viking. 0-14-027498-7)

Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

Lahiri, *The Namesake*

**Other Necessities:**

--A style manual: if you do not have an up-to-date one, you may purchase a copy of  
Hacker's *Pocket Style Manual*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., with 2009 MLA update, at the bookstore, or you  
may wish to have your own copy of *The MLA Handbook*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed.

--Computer paper

--I strongly recommend that you use one section of your notebook as a reading journal  
for this class; while I will not collect it or grade it, you will find it to be a helpful source  
for reviewing for discussions, tests, papers, and student teaching.

**Course Description:** This course will trace the development of North American  
literature in the period following World War II (1945-present). This course is an elective  
for the English major and minor; it fulfills the categories of American Studies and Self-  
Design (old curriculum) and Humanities (new curriculum).

Format: Lecture/Seminar discussion

Prerequisites: Successful completion of ENG 100: Basic Composition (a grade of "C" or higher). Literary Analysis is required for English majors and recommended for students in other majors; completion of survey (ENG 220) is also strongly recommended.

**Course Objectives** (These are in accordance with the objectives of the Humanities Dept.):

- At the completion of the course, students will have an overview of the development of American literature since 1945.
- Students will have knowledge of works of American literature and their historical and cultural contexts.
- Students will be able to apply critical standards in analyzing a work of literature.
- Students will be able to write effective literary essays.
- Students will be able to devise approaches for their own teaching of a similar course on the high school level.
- Students will have gained an appreciation of literature; students will also have gained an appreciation of the connections among literary works and among disciplines.

**Course Outcomes:**

- Students will demonstrate their knowledge of American literary works.
- Students will demonstrate how individual works fit into larger literary, historical, and cultural contexts.
- Students will demonstrate close reading and analytical /critical thinking skills with oral practice in the seminar portion of the class and with writing.
- Students will demonstrate competency in basic writing skills.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic literary terms and research/citation methods.

**Course Requirements:**

Your presence and your participation will determine the success of this class.

**1) Attendance** is required. You are allowed two (2) absences (these include medical and sports excuses, so plan your cuts carefully). More than two absences will affect your final grade; seven absences will result in a grade of **F**. Excessive lateness and early departures will count as absences.

**2)** All class members are expected to participate in discussions. Students may be asked to lead discussions of chapters of novels or to complete small research tasks to supplement readings of primary texts.

**3)** All reading and writing assignments must be completed by the dates specified. Be prepared for occasional quizzes and in-class discovery writing exercises.

**4)** Two essay exams. The second (final) exam will be a take-home test.

**5)** Analytical paper (7 pages minimum, not including "Works Cited" page--you will have a choice of topics). **Please note: There will be a penalty for late work: late submission of the analytical paper will result in the loss of a letter grade for the assignment (thus, a paper that would have merited a "B" will receive a grade of "C"). Even if you are absent from class on the due date, your paper is still due.** See below for additional information on exams.

**Extra-credit option:** response paper (1-2 pages) on Robert Gibb's reading.

### **Assessment/Grading:**

Relationship of assignments and requirements to outcomes:

--Students will demonstrate their knowledge of course content by their completion of two essay exams and an analytical paper and by their meaningful participation in class discussions.

--Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in close reading and critical analysis through class discussions and written assignments.

--Students will demonstrate the ability to write clearly and effectively in essay exams and the paper.

**Final Grade:** Two essay exams: 25% each; analytical paper, 30%; class grade (attendance, quizzes, preparation for class, meaningful participation in discussions), 20%

### **Additional Student Responsibilities:**

--**Make-up Policies:** If you miss a class, you are still responsible for the material covered. Quizzes will be made-up by the following class. The only excuse honored for missing an exam will be a note signed by medical personnel; you will have a maximum of seven days to make up Exam #1, and two days for Exam #2.

--The Cedar Crest **Honor Code** and the **Classroom Protocol Code**, as stated in the Customs book, will be in effect at all times.

--**Plagiarism**, which is the appropriation of and uncredited use of another's work, is a serious offense.

A reminder of the statement on plagiarism distributed to all students in WRI 100: It is dishonest to present oral or written work that is not entirely the student's own. Students must follow the requirements of the instructor regarding when and how much collaboration with other students is permitted. Any language taken from another source, whether individual words or entire paragraphs, must be placed in quotation marks and attributed to the source, following the citation format specified. Paraphrased material from an outside source must also be attributed. In addition, if the student is indebted to another source for a specific perspective or line of argument--regardless of whether the student has directly quoted the source or not--that debt must be acknowledged.

It does not matter if the work is by an established author, a term-paper writer who sold his work to a plagiarism site for \$5.00, your best friend, or a blogger whose writing you find appealing. **Plagiarism** is theft; it is unethical. It is a waste of your time, integrity, and money and a waste of your classmates' and my time and energy. An act of intentional plagiarism or cheating will result in a grade of **F** for the course.

--**College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Learning Center.

--**Cell Phone Etiquette:** Because of the emergency notification system, phones should be put on vibrate. They should also be put out of sight. If a cell phone rings during class, please hand it to me to answer. I will explain that you are in class and unavailable. Please refrain from checking your phone/texting during lectures, discussions, and films. Those tiny lights are distracting (and you may miss the most important sentence of the semester).

--Before you leave class on the first day, make sure that you have the phone numbers/e-mail addresses of two of your classmates.

## SYLLABUS

*There are only connections.*

Don DeLillo, *Underworld*

All assignments must be completed by the dates specified. Note: If changes seem to be appropriate, we'll revise the syllabus accordingly. Readings in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* are designated by an N before page numbers. Remember to read the introduction to each writer. Bring your books to class and be prepared to participate in discussions.

Tues., Jan. 19

Introduction to the course

Thurs., Jan. 21

"American Literature Since 1945," N 2083-96 (skim Timeline); " N Welty, 2146-57; Ellison, excerpts from *Invisible Man*, N 2297-2314; and Updike, "Separating," 2711-20

Tues., Jan. 26

"Postmodern Manifestos" and Sukenick, "Innovative Fiction," N 2485-88  
Heller, *Catch-22*, Chapters 1-10

Thurs., Jan. 28

Heller, *Catch-22*, Chapters 11-21

Tues., Feb. 2

Heller, *Catch-22*, Chapters 22-32

Thurs., Feb. 4

Heller, *Catch-22*, Chapter 33 to end

Also read Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," N 2266

Tues., Feb. 9

The Beat Poets

Ginsberg, "Howl" and "A Supermarket in California," N 2574-

Ferlinghetti, "I Am Waiting" (handout)

Snyder, "Riprap," N 2672-

Thurs., Feb. 11

The Confessional Poets

Bishop, "In the Waiting Room," N 2166-

Lowell, "Memories of West Street and Lepke" and "Skunk Hour," N 2392-

Plath, [read in this order:] "Blackberrying," "The Applicant," "Daddy," "Lady Lazarus," and "Words" N 2698-

Sexton, "Her Kind" (handout), "The Truth the Dead Know," and "The Starry Night,"  
N 2641-

Tues., Feb. 16

Morrison, Introduction, N 2684-85, and *The Bluest Eye*: Read to end of "Winter" (93)  
Research: When did the slave trade become prohibited in America? What does the "one-  
drop" blood rule refer to? What were the "Jim Crow" laws? Eliza in Harriet Beecher  
Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved* escape across the same  
river: what is its name?

Thurs., Feb. 18

*The Bluest Eye*, Foreword and 95-163; also read Harper, "American History" and  
"Deathwatch," N 2854-

Tues., Feb. 23

*The Bluest Eye*, 164-216

Thurs., Feb. 25

Essay Exam

Tues., Mar. 2

Barthelme, "The Balloon," N 2247-51

Rich, Handouts and "Diving into the Wreck and "Transcendental Etude," N 2649-

Thurs., Mar. 4

DeLillo, *White Noise*, Chapters 1-16

Topic for paper due

Mar. 9 and 11 Spring Break

Tues., Mar. 16

Final day: Revisions/second thoughts re: topic for paper

*White Noise*, Chapters 17-21

Also, read interview by DeCurtis, 329-30.

Thurs., Mar. 18

*White Noise*, Chapters 22-33

Tues., Mar. 23

*White Noise*, Chapters 34-40

Also, read Osteen's Introduction

Thurs., Mar. 25

Paper due at beginning of class

Reading: Kingston, from *Warrior Woman* (handout)

Tues. Mar. 30  
Begin Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Parts I-III

Thurs., Apr. 1  
*The Handmaid's Tale*, Parts IV-VII and “When Afghanistan Was At Peace” (handout)

Tues., Apr. 6 No class meeting today—this is a Cedar Crest Monday

Thurs., Apr. 8  
*The Handmaid's Tale*, Parts VIII-X

Tues., Apr. 13  
*The Handmaid's Tale*, Parts XI-XIII

Thurs., Apr. 15  
*The Handmaid's Tale*, Parts XIV-XV and “Historical Notes”

Tues., Apr. 20  
Catch-up Day

Thurs., Apr. 22  
Lahiri, *The Namesake*, Chapters 1-4

Tues., Apr. 27  
*The Namesake*, Chapters 5-8

Thurs., Apr. 29  
*The Namesake*, Chapter 9-end

Tues., May 4  
Final take-home test due  
Last words

More voices (and still the list is far from complete): J. D. Salinger, Norman Mailer, Tennessee Williams, Cornell Woolrich, Saul Bellow, Truman Capote, Flannery O'Connor, Dawn Powell, Jack Kerouac, John Cheever, James Baldwin, Arthur Miller, Philip Roth, Vladimir Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut, Edward Albee, John Barth, Richard Yates, Thomas Pynchon, Tom Wolfe, E. L. Doctorow, Lucille Clifton, Joyce Carol Oates, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, Joan Didion, Alice Walker, Tom Wolfe, Ursula LeGuin, Bobbie Ann Mason, John Irving, Amy Tan, Annie Dillard, David Mamet, Raymond Carver, Billy Collins, Mary Oliver, Cormac McCarthy, Jamaica Kincaid, Sherman Alexie, Marilyn Robinson, Louise Erdrich, Barbara Kingsolver, Richard Powers, Carole Maso, Dennis Cooper, Mary Gaitskill, Stephen King, and Dave Eggers.

**When leading a discussion of a primary text:** present and direct our attention to significant points about the literary work and raise questions for discussion. Blow-by-blow plot summaries do not constitute effective presentations. Synthesize plot details concisely; note significant details. Direct us to ideas, clusters of images, uses of language and other matters of style and structure, uses of history, and connections with other works.

If you use secondary sources when leading a discussion, you must acknowledge those sources in your presentation: incorporate them directly and explicitly into your comments (“As \_\_\_\_\_ explains in her essay titled ‘ \_\_\_\_\_,’ . . .”).

**On Secondary Sources:** Dictionaries and encyclopedias are not appropriate for college-level research. You may start with an encyclopedic entry for basic information, but then you must build from there. Wikipedia and term-paper-sale sites are not acceptable sources. Always double-check web-based information. An effective critical study uses a combination of online and print sources. One excellent index to start with: MLA First Search.

### **Criteria for Essay Exams:**

An essay answer must consist of a series of clear, well-developed paragraphs, not a single paragraph. The thesis (main point) should be clearly stated in the introductory paragraph, and your essay should build clearly from one topic to the next.

Support your assertions with examples and specific details. You may find it helpful to include brief direct quotations. If you quote from or paraphrase sources (primary texts or commentary in the anthology and other texts), you must acknowledge those sources. For Exam #1, use parenthetical citations. For Exam #2 (the final “take-home” exam), provide parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page.

Sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation, and spelling all contribute to clarity. If an essay-answer displays serious weaknesses in these areas, 10-15 points will be deducted. Similarly, errors in formatting citations will result in the loss of a letter grade.

### **Criteria for Analytical Paper:**

Minimum length: 7 pages, not including your list of Works Cited. Your paper should incorporate at least two secondary critical sources; follow MLA format (7th ed.).

The criteria will be the universal criteria for effective literary papers: A clear and noteworthy thesis; clear, well-developed content; effective organization; evidence of close, perceptive reading; correct use of literary terms; a sustained and engaging tone; variety in sentence structure; absence of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling; and proper format (treatment of sources, handling of citations, presentation of quotations).

### **Preparing Your Work:**

--The analytical paper, and the second exam must be typed and submitted in hardcopy.

--All work should be double-spaced. Use one side of the page, one-inch margins, Times Roman font, and a font size of 12 (This is a sample of size-12 font).

- Proofread. And then proofread again. Using the spell checker is only the start. Read your work aloud to double-check for errors.
- Do not wait to print your paper until just before it is due (Something will inevitably go wrong).
- Keep a copy of everything that you write.
- Submit all work on time.
- Be, as Ben Franklin advised, cheerful and industrious.

### **Writing Rubric:**

#### **A Superior/Outstanding**

Work that uses an assignment as the occasion for a piece of writing compelling enough to engage readers on its own terms. It presents an insight or viewpoint with enough fullness and support to command readers' respect, if not their assent. The treatment of content is fresh, not hackneyed; the organization is coherent and effective; and the language is clear and vivid, not clichéd. Superior work uses sophisticated sentence structure, and needs little or no additional editing in terms of basic details of grammar, punctuation, and format. An "A" literary essay should avoid relying on plot summary and should use literary terms correctly; it should also demonstrate the proper handling of secondary sources.

#### **B Good**

Work that meets all of an assignment's expectations with competence. The work may lack the fresh thought or compelling development of "A" work\*, but it demonstrates, nevertheless, its author's ability to respond intelligently to an assignment's demands, to structure and focus writing clearly, and to choose words accurately and effectively.

\*In contrast to "A" work, a "B" paper may--despite its original thought--require a final editing that takes care of weaknesses in basics that detract from the content.

#### **C Fair**

"C" work shows evidence of attempting to meet the assignment's bare specifications, but lacks sharp focus, the full and purposeful development, or the stylistic awareness necessary for a higher grade. "C" work is clearly inadequate in at least one way.

Although "C" work may demonstrate competence in one or more facets, one or two pervasive weaknesses will outweigh its strengths. Weaknesses may include failure to engage meaningfully an important aspect of the writing task or to maintain a focus; skimpy or illogical development; repeated significant errors in grammar or idiom.

#### **D Poor**

Work which does not respond acceptably to an assignment, "D" work may misunderstand or disregard the assignment's intent, lack any pattern or organization, or make enough errors in Standard English to make it difficult for a reader to follow the author's thought.

#### **F Failure**

The following will merit a grade of "F": failure to submit an assignment, incomplete work, work that disregards the assignment's intent, work that displays pervasive weaknesses in both form and content, and, of course, plagiarism.





