

LIT200 American Short Stories

3rd and 4th quarters, Sophomore

Instructor Nicolangelo Becce, Ph.D.

Style of Class Lecture

Number of Credits 2

Day and Period Friday, period 2

Course Description

In American literature, the short story represents one of the most vital, prolific and adaptable literary forms, chosen by many American writers as the preferred medium to describe the changes that affected the United States during its history. This course is thus an introduction to the diversity of American culture as described by American writers through short stories. As each generation of Americans changed, short stories embodied those cultural changes.

During the course, a selection of American short stories from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be read and discussed. Special attention will be given to their formal and rhetorical characteristics as well as their impact and legacy on American history and culture.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- 1) analyze the chronological and historical development of the American short story through its most representative authors;
- 2) experience how literary and cultural texts can transform one's perception and understanding of self, other and communities;
- 3) become familiar with the act of analyzing, interpreting and evaluating short stories through appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks, acknowledging alternative interpretations and developing critical thinking.

Prerequisites

None

Class Materials

Reading and study materials will be distributed in class.

Course Methods

The teaching method used in this course will follow a seminar style. Students will be encouraged to contribute, with personal observations, to in-class discussion based on the reading assignments. The instructor will start from the in-class discussion to develop brief and informal lectures based on the assigned readings and the students' questions and observations.

Evaluation/Assessment

Students will write response papers to either one of the readings or a combination of readings. While not formal pieces of academic writing, these response papers will describe the readings' main arguments, the student's personal current thinking (including confusion) and will offer at least one question for class discussion. At the end of the course, students will write a final paper in which they can analyze any aspect of American short stories in general and of the texts discussed in class. Each student will present her/his paper to the class at the end of the course.

Grading

30%	Participation and In-class Discussions
30%	Weekly Response Papers

30%	Final Paper
10%	Final Paper Presentation

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Course

Week 2: The Origins of the American Short Story

In-class discussion on the first examples of American short stories and the rise in popularity of this literary form.

Week 3: American Renaissance and Short Stories

In-class discussion on the development of the American short story during the literary periods of American Romanticism and Transcendentalism.

Week 4: Short Fiction and Social Change

In-class discussion on the profound changes that affected the United States of America after the Civil War, and how American short stories described these tumultuous changes.

Week 5: The Jazz Age, Harlem Renaissance and Short Stories

In-class discussion on short stories as a vehicle to understand the disillusionment of an era as well as a privileged instrument for literary experimentation.

Week 6: Postmodern and Contemporary Short Stories

In-class discussion on the short story as one of the most vital, prolific and adaptable literary forms of contemporary literature, and its use in a variety of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social and religious contexts that reflect the heterogeneity of the United States of America.

Week 7: The American Short-Story Cycle

In-class discussion on a peculiar literary format, a hybrid between short story and novel, often explored and preferred by American short story writers.

Weeks 8-9: Ghost Stories (Week 8: End of Quarter 1)

In-class discussion on one of the most popular genres of short story, through an analysis of its development during the nineteenth century, or the golden age of ghost stories.

Weeks 10-11: Detective Stories

In-class discussion on the detective story as a quintessentially formulaic genre that capitalizes on a rigorous balance between predictable plots and innovative solutions.

Weeks 12-13: Science Fiction Short Stories

In-class discussion on the literary genre defined by Ray Bradbury as "the sociological study of the future."

Weeks 14-15: Class Presentations of Final Papers

Week 16: Conclusions (End of Quarter 2)

Course / instructor evaluation

Preparation and Follow-up

- Preparation: Read the relevant portions of the reference materials (about one hour)
- Follow-up: Review the content of the lecture and note any points you are not sure of (about one hour)