

LIT300 Topics in American Literature

1st and 2nd quarters, Sophomore

Instructor	Nicolangelo Becce, Ph.D.
Style of Class	Lecture
Number of Credits	2
Day and Period	To be advised

Course Description

The course offers an overview of American literature through a selective examination of major authors, trends and historical contexts, as well as a sample of representative literary texts. Special focus will be given to the discussion of historical, social, political and economic issues that arise from the reading of the literary selection.

During the course, American literature will be analyzed as the literary narration of the birth, expansion and transformation of the United States of America during its history, and, at the same time, the cultural impact of American literature on the history of the United States of America will be explored.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- 1) analyze American literary texts within their historical, cultural, social and political contexts;
- 2) understand the relationship between American literature and the national identity of the United States of America;
- 3) experience how literary and cultural texts can transform one's perception and understanding of self, other and communities;
- 4) become familiar with the act of interpreting literary texts through appropriate theoretical and methodological tools, 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 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

Introduction to American literature and its historical background.

Week 2: The Puritan Legacy

In-class discussion on the Puritan influence on American literature and culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Week 3: "What then is the American, this new man?": Revolution and Independence

In-class discussion on the principles of order, rationality, individual possibilities and ethics in the great literary and political personalities that led to the birth of the United States of America.

Week 4: Romanticism and American Renaissance

In-class discussion on the distinctive features of American Romanticism and what has been defined as the golden age of American literature, the "American Renaissance."

Week 5: Civil War and Social Change

In-class discussion on the main features of American literature and culture in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Week 6: The Turn of the Century

In-class discussion on the new forms of literary naturalism and realism that became predominant in American literature between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Week 7: Modernism

In-class discussion on the artistic revolution that happened in the years before and after the First World War, and the new wave of literary criticism inspired by Modernist ideals.

Week 8: The Lost Generation (End of Quarter 1)

In-class discussion on the American literary production that expresses the disillusionment towards the hedonistic materialism and moral corruption of the United States of the 1920's.

Week 9: The Harlem Renaissance

In-class discussion on the new cultural and artistic current developed by the African American communities in the big cities of the Northeastern United States between the 1920's and 1930's.

Week 10: American Literature and the Postwar Era

In-class discussion on the rich and variegated literary production of the years that follow the Second World War in the United States.

Week 11: The Beat Generation

In-class discussion on the American literary movement that aimed at the discovery of new and significant areas of existence, against the conservative values of contemporary social institutions.

Week 12: Postmodernism

In-class discussion on the main features of the movement that completely redefines the aims and methods of the cultural and artistic production of the twentieth century.

Week 13: After 9/11: Recent Trends in American Literature

In-class discussion on the literary response to the terroristic attacks of 9/11 as a starting point to reanalyze the multiple identities of contemporary United States of America.

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)