

## **ENGLISH 255--SEMINAR IN THEMATIC STUDIES OF AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Spring 2018: San Jose State University

Tuesdays, 4:00-6:45 PM, BBC 221

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**Course Title:** Road Trip!: Dreams and Nightmares of American Culture

**Code:** 28180

### **Course Description:**

The Open Road symbolizes Americans' longing to recreate themselves, to leave the past behind: "Nothing behind me, everything ahead of me," as Kerouac put it. Perhaps it began with Lewis and Clark's expedition. More likely it came packed in the trunks and cases that crossed the ocean with pilgrims and convicts in America's first wave of colonizers. Immigrant experience plants the seeds of the Road Trip in American Culture, which has always had a dark and light character—a journey of loss mingled with hope, as in *The Grapes of Wrath*. This seminar will explore the Road Trip as image, theme, motif, and method in American Fiction, Poetry, and Song. If the Road Trip symbolizes an American Dream of mobility and freedom, it also reflects an American Nightmare of ceaseless wandering, a (usually) male-centric vision of perpetual youth and escape. The course will deal with core novels and poems in the American Road Trip Canon by writers like Whitman, Twain, Frost, Kerouac, and Steinbeck; and also more recent works by writers like Hunter Thompson, Cynthia Kadohata, Mona Simpson, Bill Bryson, William Least Heat-Moon, and Cormac McCarthy; as well as popular songs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will touch on film and TV's contributions to the Road Trip mystique. Class members will make presentations of their research as they write seminar papers and help to put together online resources for students, teachers, and independent researchers wanting to know more about the topic.

### **Texts:**

Bryson, Bill. *A Walk in the Woods*. 9780767902526

Carroll, Andrew, and Donald Maclean, eds. *Songs for the Open Road*. 9780486406466

Heat-Moon, William Least. *Blue Highways*. 9780316353298

Kadohata, Cynthia. *The Floating World*. 9780345381620—out of print

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. 9780140283297

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. 9780307277923

*Songs of the Open Road*. 9780486406466

Steinbeck, John. *Travels With Charley in Search of America*. 9780140053203

Thompson, Hunter. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. 9780679785897

Thoreau, Henry David. "[Walking \(or, The Wild\)](#)."

Twain, Mark. [Huckleberry Finn](#).

Whitman, Walt. "[Song of the Open Road](#)."

Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. 9780312427597

**Graduate Program Learning Outcomes: Students will...**

- 1) demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
- 2) demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research.
- 3) demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
- 4) demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion, b) formulate and defend original arguments, c) employ effectively the language of their discipline and d) write under time constraints.
- 5) demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.
- 6) receive appropriate instruction to prepare for teaching careers.
- 7) receive appropriate instruction to prepare for further graduate study.

**Course Student Learning Objectives: Students will...**

- a) demonstrate familiarity with methods of literary and cultural research;
- b) demonstrate familiarity with major theories, criticism, and texts of American Literature;
- c) demonstrate the ability to gather, evaluate, organize, and format information others may use to read and understand American literary works.

**Course Time Requirements and One-Unit Enhancement:**

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus. Because this is a four-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following one-unit enhancement: increased course content (reading and research), and service to the academic community (building content for a website on the course theme of the Road Trip / Open Road).

**Grading and Written Work:**

The purpose of assigned reading and writing in English 255 is to help you think creatively and improve your understanding, writing and oral skills. The MA Program's student learning outcomes and course student learning objectives (LOs), are listed in relation to assignments (described in detail below). Course grades will be weighted thus:

Exercise in Criticism	20% [LOs 1, 3, 4, a]
Report ( <i>Oral Presentation and Handout</i> )	10% [LO 5, 6, b]
Reading Responses, Peer evaluations, and Participation	20% [LOs 3, 7]
Building Content for Course Theme Website	20% [LOs 2, 6, c]
Seminar Paper (14-18 pp.) ( <i>Prospectus, Draft, Final MS</i> )	30% [LOs 1, 2, 3, 4, b]

I will certainly work with you when you have a schedule problem, but please make arrangements in advance. Late work may be lowered one full grade. See University Policy on Academic Integrity (strictures against cheating, copying, submitting work done in previous courses, and plagiarizing), as well as other relevant [university policies](#) on the SJSU Graduate Programs

website.

### **Description of Assignments:**

1. **Exercise in Criticism:** A 2-4 page assessment of a significant book chapter or journal article that deals with the course theme.
2. **Introductory Report:** Make a presentation on one of the works assigned, offering a critical perspective supported by secondary source(s). The presentation is meant to serve as a prompt for discussion. Prepare a bibliography and any other appropriate items: chronology, pictures, charts, family trees, outlines, quotations, key terms, recordings, PowerPoint. Oral Report Length: 10-15 minutes. *Please* observe the time limit. If your handouts are extensive, you will not be able to cover everything in detail. *Please avoid simply reading what is in your handout or PowerPoint.* Describe it, explain it, walk us through it quickly, but don't simply read it out loud. The oral report should be a demonstration of your mastery of the material through extemporaneous speech. Sign up for a date to make your presentation.
3. **Reading Responses & Participation:** Each week, on or before Monday—that is, the day *before* class—submit by email to the instructor a response to the reading for the next class session, including any pertinent questions. In class, find opportunities to contribute to the discussion and demonstrate understanding of the text. Try to find a way to make one original contribution to the course (in class or via the website) during the semester.
4. **Open Road / Road Trip Website:** Contribute ideas and information, including bibliographies, filmographies, disc-ographies, timelines, public-domain images, analyses, discussions, etc., as well as mini-essays, lesson plans, or other useful materials for the course's website, which is meant to offer assistance to anyone interested in studying or teaching the course theme.
5. **Seminar Paper:** on a topic relating to Modernism and/or Postmodernism in American literature. You must address one or more significant literary texts in 14-16 pages, with an appropriate bibliography (normally, at least ten items). Follow the *MLA Handbook*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. *Written prospectus, including bibliography, and rough draft required.*

## ENGLISH 255: SPRING 2018 CALENDAR

Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
Jan. 30	Introduction to the course: <i>Songs for the Open Road</i> (focus on Byron, R.L. Stevenson, Frost, Hughes, Service, Cavafy)
Feb. 6	Whitman, “Song of the Open Road.” More poems from <i>Songs for the Open Road</i> .
Feb. 13	Twain, <a href="#"><i>Huckleberry Finn</i></a> . Focus on Chapters 1 through 16, and 43 (last chapter).
Feb. 20	Kerouac, <i>On the Road</i> , and Ginsberg, “ <a href="#">A Supermarket in California</a> .”
Feb. 27	American Road Music: TBD
March 6	Steinbeck, <i>Travels With Charley in Search of America</i> .
March 13	Wolfe, <i>The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test</i> .
March 20	Thompson, <i>Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas</i> .
March 27	Spring Recess
April 3	American Road Films: TBD
April 10	Website Talk-around: Reports on Research.
April 17	Heat-Moon, <i>Blue Highways</i> .
April 24	McCarthy, <i>The Road</i> .
May 1	Bryson, <i>A Walk in the Woods</i> .
May 8	Kadohata, <i>The Floating World</i> . Last class session
May 18	Seminar Paper Due