

San José State University
College of Humanities and the Arts, Department of English and Comparative
Literature
English 168, American Novel, Spring 2020

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2-4; Thursday, 1:30-2:15
Class Days/Time: Tuesday/Thursday, 10:30-11:45
Classroom: Sweeney Hall 348

Course Description

Writer John Steinbeck best articulated his views on human engagement in a 1955 essay, "Some Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency," published in the *Saturday Review*: "I believe that man is a double thing," he wrote, "a group animal and at the same time an individual. And it occurs to me that he cannot successfully be the second until he has fulfilled the first." Often we consider things the other way around: know thyself before connecting to others. In this section of 168, we will consider the shifting dynamic among self, family and community as reflected in major American novels from the mid-19th century to the 21st century. We'll also discuss literary history: Romanticism, Realism, Sentimentalism, Naturalism, Modernism, Post Modernism.

Course Goals

The goals of this course are to appreciate the historical trajectory of American literature, as well as a variety of literary periods; to appreciate some of the most enduring novels of the past decades and why the aesthetic and cultural appeal of each remains significant; to read closely and thoughtfully a variety of American novels.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to:

read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric;

show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American and World Literature;

write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;

develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;

articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Required Texts/Readings

Edgar Allen Poe, *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838)

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)

Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

Stephen Crane, *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* (1893)

Anzia Yeziarska, *The Bread Givers* (1925)

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929)

Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973)

Leslie Ann Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

Tommy Orange, *There There* (2019)

Course Requirements and Assignments

1. Oral Presentation & Handout 10%
2. Short Paper 15%
3. Reading Responses & Quizzes 15%
4. Participation 15%
5. Midterm Examination 20%
6. Research Paper: Book Club, Proposal & Final Draft 25%

Description of Assignments:

1. Oral Presentation, 10% (10 minutes): Each student will give an oral presentation on one of the novels read in class. Please make an appointment with me at least two weeks before your report (dates on syllabus). Your presentation

will discuss one scholarly article or book chapter that analyzes the text; briefly summarize the critic's central points, cite examples relevant to your understanding of the critic's argument; clarify your own assessment of the critic's argument. Prepare a one-page handout for the class.

2. Short Paper (15%): a 750 word (3 page) analysis/close-reading of one extended passage from one of the texts covered in the course. Please select a passage that was not discussed in class. Turn in the paper before the midterm exam.

3. Reading Responses & Quizzes (15%): Once a week, either on Tuesday or Thursday, hand in a short, typed reading response (250-300 words). These must be handed in at the beginning of class, not online. In each, please respond specifically to the text, noting something that was interesting/puzzling/intriguing to you as you read the book. **These will be graded on a 1-4 scale, with 4 being excellent, 3 good, 2 adequate, and 1 sketchy or too general.**

Quizzes will be given on occasion to make sure that everyone is caught up with the reading.

4. Participation (15%): The professor's lectures will provide background information; please come to class fully prepared, having read the assigned pages for the day. Please look up any unknown references in the book and brief background about the author. Read the introductions to the book only *after* you complete the text. Please be an active participant in class discussions.

5. Midterm Examination (20%): Short answer/essay exam on texts completed to date.

6. Bookgroups and Research Project, 4th unit. In this class, the 1-unit enhancement will require you to attend the Tommy Orange event on February 6 at the Hammer Theater; read an additional novel; and engage in the research process, working in groups and with your instructor:

As part of the enhanced units for major courses, I would like you to select a novel from the list below to read in a book group. While I will give you some time in class to meet with book club members, you will also have to schedule time outside class to meet. Each group will formulate a research project based on your reading/discussions/ and research. Each group will consult at least 5 library resources (academic texts or journals) and include those in an annotated bibliography, due at the beginning of April.

Research Paper

Each member of the group will write a research paper, drawing from your reading, discussion, and research. Each student should add at least one source in addition to the 5 the group considered. Papers will differ, but The purpose of this paper is to explore essential questions about the book you read for the Book Club, should be eight to ten pages in length, and include a “Works Cited” with at least five library sources (academic books or journal articles). It should be written in clear, correct English with logical paragraph breaks, an introduction that gives your thesis, and a conclusion. Appropriate use of textual evidence from the novel and from your research are key to successful research papers.

Frank Norris, *The Octopus* (1901)

Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose* (1972)

Willa Cather, *My Ántonia* (1918)

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Blithedale Romance* (1852)

Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (1884)

Grading Information

The research essay, as well as the exams, reading responses, and short paper are graded on clarity, originality, specificity (do not include long quoted passages, but refer to specific scenes in texts), and precision. In addition, the research paper must include outside sources, correctly cited (MLA guidelines). Major grammatical errors will lower your final grade (comma splices, incomplete sentences, misuse of subordination, subject/verb agreement).

A and A-: A superior piece of writing. The topic focused, the language sharp, and the writing free of grammatical errors. The piece has originality and style, is elegant, thoughtful and persuasive. If research is included, it is relevant and clearly cited.

B+ and B: A good piece of writing, solid and clear. But it may lack the innovation and sharpness of the top category. The point is clear but could be supported with additional details. There may be minor spelling, typographic, and/or grammatical errors. But it is interesting enough to hold a reader’s attention. If research is included, it is mostly solid and the paper draws from the research.

B- and C+: This response may be too broad or unsupported. Examples may be general rather than specific. There may be grammatical errors. The central idea may

not be fresh. The writing may be wordy and vague. If research is included, scholarship might not be relevant, fresh or focused on the topic and hand. Citations may be infrequent, general.

C and below: These essays are unfocused, without a sharp thesis. Examples are general or the essay lacks examples. Research is not thorough. There may be serious grammatical errors. If research is included, sources may be general, unfocused, not cited properly.

Late essays/notebooks receive lower grades.

Determination of grades: Final grades will be determined by each student's evaluation on the listed assignments. All work is to be completed under under "Course Requirements and Assignments"—ie, reading group project and research paper, response papers, short essay, presentation and midterm. Failure to complete any of the assignments will result in a 0 earned for that part of the course, thus significantly lowering the final grade.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: *A+/A/A-* = excellent; *B+/B/B-* = above average; *C+/C/C-* = average; *D+/D/D-* = below average; *F* = failure. *Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.*

Classroom Protocol

Students are expected to attend each class and engage actively in discussions and to read assigned texts carefully. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, and students arriving late will miss quizzes. Use of computers is permitted only when students are reading books electronically, and I ask that those students sit in the front. Otherwise, no computers or cell phones in class.

University guidelines: "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 three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus."

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo>), which is hosted by the Office of Undergraduate Education. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

University Writing Center:

Help is available for your writing assignments at the [University Writing Center Website](#). Contact the Center for appointments or drop in on the second floor of MLK Jr. Library: 408-924-2308, writingcenter@sjsu.edu

SCHEDULE, SPRING 2020

WEEK 1

Jan. 23: Introduction to course

WEEK 2

Jan. 28: *There There*, Prologue and Part I.

Jan. 30: *There There*, Part II. Tommy Orange is reading at the Hammer Theater on Feb. 6 at 7PM. This event is required.

WEEK 3

Feb. 4: *There There*, Parts III, IV

Feb. 6: *Arthur Gordon Pym* (PDF) **Book Group novel choices due. At least 3 people per group.**

WEEK 4

Feb. 11: *Arthur Gordon Pym* (PDF)

Feb. 13: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Chapters 1-9.

WEEK 5

Feb.18: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Chapters 10-20. **Book Groups first 30 minutes of class—each student should bring 3 questions about the text to group.**

Feb.20: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 21-32

WEEK 6

Feb. 25: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, complete

Feb. 27: *Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters 1-14.

WEEK 7

March 3: *Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters 15-31 **Book Groups first 30 minutes of class.**

March 5: *Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters, 32-43

WEEK 8

March 10: *Maggie, Girl of the Streets*.

March 12: *Bread Givers*, Book I.

WEEK 9

March 17: *Bread Givers*, Book 2. **Book Groups meet first 30 minutes of class; each participant will bring three questions that may shape final project (to be turned in).**

March 19: *Bread Givers*, Book 3

WEEK 10

March 24: *The Sun Also Rises*, Chapter 1-10

March 26: *The Sun Also Rises*, Chapter 11-18. **Short papers due by this date.**

WEEK 11: Spring Break

WEEK 12

April 7: *The Sun Also Rises*, complete. Part III will be part of your exam.

Midterm exam.

April 9: *The Sound and the Fury*: April Seventh, 1929 (Benjy) **Book Groups meet first 30 minutes of class. By this date, each member of the group should have a clear idea of questions to address in research project—turn in at end of group.**

WEEK 13

April 14: *The Sound and the Fury*, June Second, 1910 (Quentin)

April 16: *The Sound and the Fury* April Sixth, 1928 (Jason)

APRIL 18: *The Sound and the Fury*, April Eighth, 1928 (Dilsey)

WEEK 14

April 21: *Sula*, Part I. **Book Group meeting to discuss drafts of research essays.**

April 23: *Sula*, Part II.

WEEK 15

April 28: *Ceremony*, Sections 1-4

April 30: *Ceremony*, Sections 5-8

WEEK 16

May 5: *Ceremony*, complete

May 7: Final paper due.