

# SYLLABUS

## San José State University Department of English and Comparative Literature ENGL/ForL/Hum/JwsS 126, Holocaust Literature, Fall 2017

### Course and Contact Information

<b>Instructor:</b>	David Mesher
<b>Office Location:</b>	Faculty Office Building (FO) Room 220
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<b>Office Hours:</b>	T-Th: 8:00-8:30am and 4:30-5:00pm (and by appointment)
<b>Class Days/Time:</b>	T-Th: 1:30-2:45pm
<b>Classroom:</b>	Clark Hall (CL) Room 111
<b>Class Web Page:</b>	<a href="http://www.sjsu.edu/people/d.mesher/engl126/">http://www.sjsu.edu/people/d.mesher/engl126/</a>
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	Completion of core GE; satisfactory completion of the WST; completion of or concurrent enrollment in a 100W course
<b>GE/SJSU Studies Category:</b>	This course satisfies the requirement for SJSU Studies (upper-division GE) Area V.

### Course Format

#### Technology Intensive, Hybrid, and Online Courses

All written work in this course will be submitted and returned on Canvas – submitted by students in RTF (Rich Text Format, an option available in all word processors) and returned marked in PDF (Portable Document Format). To open returned material, students should (1) download the file to their device, without trying to open it; (2) open the latest version available of Adobe Reader (a free PDF program – other PDF programs may not work); and (3) drag the downloaded file onto the open Reader window.

#### Faculty Web Page and MYSJSU Messaging

Copies of the course materials such as the syllabus, major assignment handouts, and so on, may be found on the class web page at [www.sjsu.edu/depts/jwss/mesher/engl/126](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/jwss/mesher/engl/126). The same information is available on the course [Canvas](http://sjsu.instructure.com) page ([sjsu.instructure.com](http://sjsu.instructure.com)), which you will need to access in order to submit and receive back your essays online. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through [MySJSU](http://my.sjsu.edu) at [my.sjsu.edu](http://my.sjsu.edu) to learn of any updates.

## Course Description

This course surveys works written in languages primarily other than English by writers who were witnesses, victims or survivors of the Holocaust, the destruction of European Jewry which took place during World War II. This course will 1) provide students the opportunity to improve their abilities in reading, discussing, and writing about literature, with a focus on both form and content; 2) introduce students to examples of literature and other art forms dealing the Holocaust and other instances of genocide; 3) consider issues of historical accuracy, individual experience, and the literary construction of memory in both fiction and non-fiction; 4) enhance students' understanding of the historical, demographic, geographic, and cultural background of the Holocaust; 5) and consider issues and questions about genocide and treatment of "the other" more generally. Engl 126 satisfies Area V of the General Education (SJSU Studies) Requirements.

## Course Goals

This course should give students an appreciation for human expression in cultures outside the U.S. and an understanding of how that expression has developed over time. This course should also increase students' understanding of how traditions or cultures outside the U.S. have influenced American culture and society, as well as how cultures in general both develop distinctive features and interact with other cultures. Studying the literature of victims, survivors, and witnesses of the Holocaust, students will critically analyze the literature dealing with this and other instances of genocide in detail, in context, and in historical perspective.

## GE/SJSU Studies Learning Outcomes (GELO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. compare systematically the ideas, values, images, cultural artifacts, economic structures, technological developments, and/or attitudes of people from more than one culture outside the U.S. This learning objective will be met by comparing the suffering and response of individuals from different countries and areas of Europe to the systematic murder of millions and Jews and others by those supporting Germany and its allies during the Second World War. The literary works under study, whether non-fiction or fictional accounts based on personal experience, portray the political and social realities in communities throughout Europe during that time, and put a human face on the otherwise incomprehensible calculus of inhumanity, during that period and at other times and places. In Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, for example, images from Dante's *Inferno* are used as a counterpoint to scenes Levi himself encountered in the death camp; in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, the execution of a child in Auschwitz transfigures the familiar Christian image of crucifixion as a means of condemnation instead of salvation. There will be one essay on works set primarily in death camps, asking students to discuss the ways in which the authors use prior cultural assumptions to describe their experiences, and the ways in which those experiences go beyond culture and, indeed, beyond language.

2. identify the historical context of ideas and cultural traditions outside the U.S. and how they have influenced American culture. The long tradition of antisemitism is only one aspect of the bitter political, social, and religious history of Europe, with its intense national rivalries and ethnic distrust, out of which American culture originally arose. This learning objective will be met by placing the Holocaust within that tradition, as well as by making students aware of the indifference to Jewish suffering which was found at that time at all levels of societies across Europe, as well as in this country, which actively or passively produced the circumstances for genocide. The legacy of the Holocaust in contemporary America will be covered in class discussions and a final examination

question dealing with the final novel of the course, *Everything Is Illuminated*, by the American writer Jonathan Safran Foer.

3. explain how a culture outside the U.S. has changed in response to internal and external pressures. Have European cultures changed in the aftermath of the Holocaust? That is certainly one of the burning questions of this course, and this learning objective will be met through discussions of the roles played by non-Jewish individuals in both the saving and condemnation of Jews, as well as of the roles played by Europeans in other, often more recent examples of genocide which have taken place in Asia, in Africa, and in the heart of Europe itself. Whether change is possible for such long-held attitudes is a frequent theme of Holocaust literature, including in Imre Kertesz's *Fatelessness*, which connects this question to the issue of fate and free will by showing that only those who reject the notion of destiny can assume responsibility for their own actions.

### **Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)**

English Department Course Learning Outcomes:

- 1) Read closely and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature.
- 2) Show familiarity with major critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
- 3) Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
- 4) Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
- 5) Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) offer a close and informed reading of each of the texts covered in the course, and how they relate to national and international contemporary literary trends and techniques;
- 2) utilize major critical approaches to British and world Literature in discussing the themes and techniques of the works read;
- 3) write effectively in an academic style and context about the literature under study;
- 4) point to their written and oral presentations of material connected with the course as evidence of their individual accomplishments in contributing original critical insights to the discussion of this literature;
- 5) discuss with authority some of the background information and historical context necessary to understand fully the settings and themes of literature of the Holocaust and genocide.

### **Course Requirements and Assignments**

#### **Required Texts**

Weil, Jiri. *Life with a Star*. Northwestern. 978-0810116856.  
Frank, Anne. *The Diary of Anne Frank*. 978-0553296983.  
Fink, Ida. *The Journey*. Farrar. 978-0374701246.  
Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Hill and Wang. 978-0374500016.  
Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. Touchstone. 978-0684826806.  
Delbo, Charlotte. *Auschwitz and After*. Yale. 978-0300070576.  
Kertesz, Imre. *Fatelessness*. Vintage. 978-1400078639.  
Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Everything Is Illuminated*. 978-0141008257.

## Other Texts

Suggested: Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*. Franklin Watts.

## Library Liaison

Toby Matoush, toby.matoush@sjsu.edu, 408-808-2096

## Course Requirements and Assignments

**University's Credit Hour Requirement.** 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.

**Preparation and Participation:** Students should come to class having read the day's assignment and prepared to discuss it. Opportunities for such contributions may take the form of small-group or full-class discussions; in either situation, individual students may be called upon by the instructor to answer a question, interpret a passage, or express an opinion.

**Quizzes:** In order to ensure that you get credit for the considerable work you do in reading and reflecting on the works assigned for this course, there will be frequent quizzes (on average, one every two or three class meetings). I think of quizzes as one of the best ways for you to measure how carefully you are reading the texts, and how much of that reading you retain (at least for a day or so). The quizzes will cover significant information from that day's reading assignment, though that information may not be the sort readily accessible to you in plot summaries, outlines, or synopses, but only through personally experiencing the text for yourself. If you read well ahead of the assigned schedule, be sure to review your notes and come to class with a fresh and detailed impression of the works. A pattern of poor results on these quizzes should indicate to you that you are not doing the reading, or not reading attentively enough, or not reading with the care and analysis necessary to understand and appreciate the texts.

**Determination of Grades:** There will be two essays, both about 1500 words and counting 25% of the final mark each, and a final examination counting 25%. There will also be frequent quizzes, which will help determine the remaining 25%, along with participation in class discussions, the timely completion of readings and written work, and an oral presentation to the class. The first essay will be due in two or three stages; the second essay will require research beyond the class texts themselves. Grading will be on a 100-point scale for each assignment. For the final mark, 100-97 will be an A+, 96-94 an A, 93-90 an A-, 89-87 a B+, 86-84 a B, 83-80 a B-, 79-77 a C+, 76-74 a C, 73-70 a C-, and so on.

**Grading Information for GE:** Passage of the Writing Skills Test (WST) or ENGL/LLD 100A with a C or better (C- not accepted), and completion of Core General Education are prerequisite to all SJSU Studies courses. Completion of, or co-registration in, 100W is strongly recommended. A minimum aggregate GPA of 2.0 in GE Areas R, S, & V shall be required of all students.

**Submission of written work:** The two essays must be double-spaced, without a cover page but otherwise following MLA guidelines, in Rich Text Format (.rtf), and submitted online only, on Canvas, by the beginning of class on the days they are due. Work sent to Canvas will automatically also be

submitted on turnitin.com, to be checked for plagiarism, and students will have access to that report through their Canvas accounts. Late work will only be accepted by prior arrangement. Please do not email or leave at my office any work for this class. Corrected papers will be returned online in your Canvas account in pdf format; for instructions how to access those returned files, please see the first paragraph of this syllabus. Please keep a copy of all work submitted on disk, and retain all graded work returned until the end of the semester. Students should anticipate a significant delay in the return of late work. Please note that many people find it harder to proofread work on a computer screen than in printed form and, if that is true in your case, you may want to print out your final draft and make corrections to that, before submitting the finished file online. Finally, remember that I will also be keeping a copy of your marked work during the semester so that, when you submit your second essay, I can begin by reviewing the technical mistakes you made on the first one, and by looking to see if you have made progress in those areas on the second. You, too, should take the time to review those errors, and improve your writing.

**Oral reports:** Topics will be assigned early in the semester. Reports should be no more than five minutes, followed by time for questions. Please present, in a clear, organized, and interesting way, your research on the given topic. You may use visual aids if you would like, but please arrive early if you want to make a Powerpoint or other computer-supported presentation, to ensure that everything is working properly. Please submit a bibliography of your research at the time of your report, which will be graded along with your oral presentation. Reports will be recorded, and students may request copies of their own report.

**Classroom conduct:** Please do not read non-course related materials during class, and refrain from conversations or inappropriate comments while the instructor or classmates are speaking. Turn off cell phones, music players, and other likely distractions while in class. Computers and other electronic devices may be used only for note-taking and other course-related activities; otherwise they must be turned off. Since images on a screen, whether moving or still, are particularly visible and distracting to those around you, please do not access them during class and be sure your screen saver is off if your laptop is on. Permission of the instructor (and, possibly, other students) is needed to make sound or video recordings during class.

### **Dropping and Adding**

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about adding and dropping classes, including deadlines and penalties. Deadlines for adding and dropping are listed on the course calendar, below. Other information about academic policies is available at <http://info.sjsu.edu/home/schedules.html>. Exceptions to these policies must be granted by administrators, not instructors. **This semester, the last day to drop courses without an entry on your permanent record is September 6<sup>th</sup>. The last day to add courses or register late is September 13<sup>th</sup>.**

### **Assignments and Grading Policy**

1. Class participation, presentation, quizzes, and timely completion of work: 25%
2. First essay (1500 words total, in two parts): 25%
3. Second essay (1500 words): 25%
4. Final exam: 25%

In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. Grades

issued will represent a full range of student performance and will adhere to the following SJSU academic standards of assessment:

The “**A**” essay will be well organized and well developed, demonstrating a clear understanding and fulfillment of the assignment. It will show the student’s ability to use language effectively and construct sentences distinguished by syntactic complexity and variety. Such essays will be essentially free of grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors.

The “**B**” essay will demonstrate competence in the same categories as the “**A**” essay. The chief difference is that the “**B**” essay will show some descriptably slight weaknesses in one of those categories. It may slight one of the assigned tasks, show less facility of expression, or contain some minor grammatical, mechanical, or usage flaws.

The “**C**” essay will complete all tasks set by the assignment, but show weakness in fundamentals (usually development), with barely enough specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. The sentence construction may be less mature, and the use of language less effective and correct than the “**B**” essay.

The “**D**” essay will neglect one of the assigned tasks and be noticeably superficial in its treatment of the assignment—that is, too simplistic or short. The essay may reveal some problems in development, with insufficient specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. It will contain grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The “**F**” essay will demonstrate a striking underdevelopment of ideas and insufficient or unfocused organization. It will contain serious grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog (“The Grading System”). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A= excellent; B= above average; C= average; D= below average; F= failure. Courses graded according to the A, B, C, No Credit system shall follow the same pattern, except that NC shall replace D or F. In such cases, NC shall also substitute for W (or Withdrawal) because neither grade (NC or W) affects students’ GPA.

### **University Policies**

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

### Engl 126: Holocaust Literature, Fall 2017, Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class at least one week in advance. If you miss class, please check for changes to the schedule on the class web page at [www.sjsu.edu/depts/jwss/mesher/engl/126](http://www.sjsu.edu/depts/jwss/mesher/engl/126).

Day	Month	Date	Topic
Thursday	August	24	Intro
Tuesday	August	29	<i>Diary of a Young Girl</i> , 6/12/42 - 11/12/42
Thursday	August	31	<i>Diary of a Young Girl</i> , 11/17/42 - 9/16/43
Tuesday	September	5	<i>Diary of a Young Girl</i> , 9/29/43 - 3/2/44
Thursday	September	7	<i>Diary of a Young Girl</i> , 3/4/44 - 4/18/44
Tuesday	September	12	<i>Diary of a Young Girl</i> , 4/19/44 - 8/1/44
Thursday	September	14	<i>Life with a Star</i> , ch. 1-10
Tuesday	September	19	<i>Life with a Star</i> , ch. 11-17
Thursday	September	21	<b>No class</b>
Tuesday	September	26	<i>Life with a Star</i> , ch. 18-23
Thursday	September	28	<i>The Journey</i> , pp. 3-89
Tuesday	October	3	<i>The Journey</i> , pp. 90-167
Thursday	October	5	<i>The Journey</i> , pp. 167-250
Tuesday	October	10	<i>Night</i> , pp. 3-65
Thursday	October	12	<i>Night</i> , pp. 66-115
Tuesday	October	17	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> , ch. 1-5
Thursday	October	19	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> , ch. 6-13
Tuesday	October	24	<i>Survival in Auschwitz</i> , ch. 14-17
Thursday	October	26	<i>Fatelessness</i> , ch. 1-3
Tuesday	October	31	<i>Fatelessness</i> , ch. 4-5
Thursday	November	2	<i>Fatelessness</i> , ch. 6-7
Tuesday	November	7	<i>Fatelessness</i> , ch. 8-9
Thursday	November	9	<i>Auschwitz and After</i> , pp. 3-57
Tuesday	November	14	<i>Auschwitz and After</i> , pp. 58-114
Thursday	November	16	<i>Auschwitz and After</i> , pp. 115-171
Tuesday	November	21	<i>Auschwitz and After</i> , pp. 172-231
Thursday	November	23	<b>Thanksgiving</b>
Tuesday	November	28	<i>Everything Is Illuminated</i> , pp. 1-74
Thursday	November	30	<i>Everything Is Illuminated</i> , pp. 75-145
Tuesday	December	5	<i>Everything Is Illuminated</i> , pp. 146-213
Thursday	December	7	<i>Everything Is Illuminated</i> , pp. 214-276
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Final Exam, 12:15 - 2:30 pm</b>

**The first essay for the class will cover *Diary of a Young Girl*, *Life with a Star*, and *The Journey* and will be due on October 17<sup>th</sup> (rough draft) and November 7<sup>th</sup> (final draft). The second essay will be due on November 30<sup>th</sup> (covering *Night*, *Survival in Auschwitz*, and *Fatelessness*). You will have an opportunity to write on *Auschwitz and After* and *Everything is Illuminated* at the final exam.**