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## American Literature

### I. Course Description

In this course, we will read, analyze, and discuss literary/cultural texts that were produced in America before the twentieth century. Instead of reading these texts chronologically, we will group them into four categories, each of which deals with one specific topic: settler colonialism, religion, gender, and slavery. This arrangement makes it easier for us to spot interconnections between texts and to interact with them in an active manner.

### II. Classroom Policies

#### 1. Attendance:

This class relies heavily on peer teaching, which means that you will probably learn as much from your friends as from me. To be responsible for your friends, please come to class and be ready to share your ideas. Also, most class meetings will begin with an online review quiz, so be punctual!

#### 2. Communication:

The best way to reach me is through email. I check my inbox at least once a day, so if you have not heard from me within 24 hours, send the message again. Remember to put in the subject line the name of the course, your name, and the subject of the email—"Am. Lit., Tom Cruise, Sick Leave," "[American Literature] Question from Nicole Kidman," etc. If you are resending your message or if you are adding onto the previous message(s), also put "second/third attempt" in the subject line like "Am. Lit., Tom Cruise, Sick Leave, second attempt" or "[American Literature] Question from Nicole Kidman, second attempt".

#### 3. Other policies (to be decided by the class):

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### III. Class Organization

I want you to take something away from the class, something that is relevant to you and to the world where you find yourself. I wish that you will know who you are and what you like (to do) when we part. This may sound corny, but I sincerely believe that such a goal is what college education is for. Therefore, we will focus more on concepts than on details, more on reflection than on memorization, more on social engagement than on aesthetic appreciation—though the beauty and nuance of literary works are crucial to our enquiry as well. Part of the unorthodoxy of this class consists in the fact that you will teach your friends about a text or texts, about your research, and about historical trends. It must be so because we do not have time to cover all the importance texts (but you can check out my YouTube videos if you have a hard time understanding assigned texts). For our weekly meetings, we will spend the first 40 minutes to do group discussion: students in charge of texts A inform those in charge of texts B and vice versa. After that, we will refresh our memories about what we have learned in the previous week and explore how our new knowledge can respond to, modify, or overturn our old perceptions. Then we will play a game or participate in an activity, before I give a lecture on the authors/contexts/literary works (including but not limited to assigned materials). Each class will end with you answering our weekly guide question in your reading journal/research notes.

### IV. Grading Rubrics

As a college student, you have the right to decide how you want to be graded. If you feel more comfortable taking exams, you can choose the traditional approach. If you think you are more of an artist than a student, you can choose the innovative approach. If you want to apply for graduate school, you can choose the research approach. Rest assured that I do not favor one type of students over the others.

Traditional Approach		Innovative Approach		Research Approach	
Participation	20%	Participation	20%	Participation	20%
Cultural Fair	10%	Cultural Fair	10%	Cultural Fair	10%
Reading Journal (due Jan. 4)	30%	Reading Journal (due Jan. 4)	30%	Reading Journal (due Jan. 4)	20%
		Creative Project (due Dec. 7, in class)	30%	Research Notes (due Jan. 11)	10%
Final Exam (on Jan. 11)	40%	Short Essay (due Dec. 7, in class)	10%	Longer Essay (due Jan. 18)	40%

- Participation

At the end of the semester, you will be asked to evaluate your contribution to the class. This includes, but is not limited to, asking questions, sharing ideas, observing class policies, putting efforts into assignments, reading extensively, etc. Your self-evaluation will make up half of the 20%, and the other 10% will be based on your quiz scores.

- Cultural Fair

What was it like to be a colonist? If you were a colonist, what would you eat on a daily basis? How would that influence the roles men and women play? What would you be afraid of? How would you conquer your fear? Who would you go to if you have a dispute with your neighbor? Where would you find comfort? How would you entertain yourself in a harsh environment? These questions may seem irrelevant to the topic of our class and to our discipline, but aren't they more crucial to our understanding of the literary texts than questions like "What is this text mainly about"? Food preparation, religion, self-defense, conflict resolution, etc.—these are aspects of life, and literature is only one of the aspects. You will have about two weeks to do research as a group, and we will host a "Colonial America Fair" for classmates and friends. In exchange for your hard work, the texts organized around the topic "settler colonialism" will not be tested, and the best group chosen by me will be awarded handsomely. So have fun!

- Creative Project

You can choose one of the following three projects:

- (a) Design your book cover

Create a book cover for Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* and prepare to explain your design to classmates.

- (b) Deliver a video message

Find a news clip that involves issues of gender (equal work equal pay, the role of housewives, domestic violence, women growing old, LGBT movements, etc.) and edit it so that it can have a conversation with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter*. Also prepare to explain your work (3-4 minutes long) to classmates.

- (c) Speak up for the character

Write a monologue (2-3 minutes long) for any female characters/authors that we have touched upon. This can be an expression of suffering or a celebration of joy in the face of some incidents; this can also be the character's/author's reaction to an imaginary situation.

- Final Exam

You will be tested on reading materials (and only the reading materials) assigned after Week 7. Authors include, in the order of appearance, Edward Taylor, Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Emerson, Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley, William Hill Brown,

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Whitman, Crèvecoeur, Thomas Jefferson, Harriet Jacob, and Frederick Douglass. There will be ten multiple-choice questions (20%), three short-answer questions (30%), and a list of three essay-length questions from which you choose one (50%). I know that you may not be familiar with all the authors, so only passages that I have analyzed in class will appear in the multiple-choice section. Short answer questions are in fact modifications of our weekly guide questions, so you should have no problem answering them. Finally, you will have the chance to write an essay in response to the issue of religion, gender, or slavery.

- Reading Journal

Keeping a reading journal helps you monitor your progress and recall what you have learned from the reading assignment. Each week you should produce a record no longer than an A4 page. Remember to always bring your reading journal to class because you need it as a reference when you summarize the assignment to your friends and because you will also use it for in-class activities and for note-taking. What follows is an example of an entry:

Week 2

A: "The Puritan Vision of America" on YouTube

Time Spent: 2 hours

- I. **What I already know** (Briefly summarize what you learned from the previous lesson or from your own knowledge about the topic, e.g. settler colonialism)
  - A. Settler colonialism involves power
  - B. Unlike other forms of colonization, settlers never leave the colony.
  
- II. **What I want to know:** (Before you start watching/reading/researching, briefly write about what you expect to learn from this experience)
  - A. What is Puritanism?
  - B. Why did they go to America?
  
- III. **What I have learned:** (Find one key aspect/passage/fact/event of the materials and at least **four** other observations of lesser importance)
  - A. Key aspect: This video is about . . .
  - B. Other observations:
    - 07'33''
    - 12'57''
    - 18'10''
    - 32'46''

- Research Notes

In addition to our in-class activities and note-taking, you will come up with an annotated bibliography of 10 items in consultation with the instructor. An annotated bibliography is a list of books, book chapters, and/or journal articles that are relevant to your research topic. You need to annotate, or to actively summarize, the arguments that the item presents and to make connections between the item's arguments and your own. Please follow the MLA citation format for each entry. To learn how to do this, visit Purdue University's "MLA Formatting and Style Guide," available at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

- Short Essay

Write a short essay (500-800 words) in relation to explain your creative project.

- Longer Essay

Write an academic essay (2000-2500 words in MLA style) in relation to a topic of your own choosing. However, you should contact me as early as possible if your topic is not related to settler colonialism, religion, gender, and slavery. No specific weeks are designated for a meeting, but I encourage you to work closely with me.

V. Required Text

All reading materials can be found on the instructor's personal website [www.weichenliu.com](http://www.weichenliu.com)

## VI. Weekly Schedule

Week	Date	Topics	Reading(s) <small>asterisks suggest difficulty</small>	Note
1	SEP 14	Introduction: "Why are we reading American literature in Taiwan?"		
2	SEP 21	Settler Colonialism 1: "What is settler colonialism?"	A. "The Puritan Vision of America" on YouTube (**) B. "American Puritanism (I)" on YouTube (***)	
3	SEP 28	Settler Colonialism 2: "What difficulties did the early settlers encounter?"	A. William Bradford's <i>Of Plymouth Plantation</i> : IV, VII, IX, X, XI (**) B. John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" (****)	@ Deciding group topics
4	OCT 5	Settler Colonialism 3: "How were Indians portrayed by European travelers/settlers?"	A. Samuel de Champlain's <i>Voyages</i> : pp. 59-64 (*) B. Robert Juet's <i>The Third Voyage</i> : pp. 65-67 (*)	@ Group meeting with instructor
5	OCT 12	Settler Colonialism 4: "How did early settlers' life shape their worldview?"		@ Colonial America Cultural Fair
6	OCT 19	Religion 1: "Is Puritanism religious or political?"	A. Your own research on the Antinomian Controversy (****) B. Your own research on Roger Williams (****)	
7	OCT 26	Religion 2: "Is Taylor's and Edwards's God the same one?"	A. Edward Taylor's "Psalm Two," "The Soul's Groan," "Christ's Reply," "Upon Wedlock, and Death of Children" (**) B. Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (***)	
8	NOV 2	Religion 3:	A. Benjamin Franklin's	

		“What is Franklin’s/Paine’s attitude towards religion?”	<i>Autobiography</i> : pp. 481-495 (**) B. Thomas Paine’s “The Crisis, NO. 1” and “The Age of Reason” (***)	
9	NOV 9	Religion 4: “Do you like Emerson’s God?”	A. Emerson’s “The Divinity School Address”: pp. 256-269 (***) B. Emerson’s <i>Nature</i> : III, IV, VII (****)	
10	NOV 16	Gender 1: “What might be some of the restrictions that were imposed upon female poets in early America?”	A. Anne Bradstreet’s “The Prologue,” “To Her Father with Some Verses,” “The Author to Her Book,” “Here Follows Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House” (**) B. Phillis Wheatley’s “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” “To the University of Cambridge,” “Thoughts on the Works of Providence,” “To S. M.” (**)	
11	NOV 23	Gender 2: “How do male writers portray female characters?”	A. William Hill Brown’s <i>The Power of Sympathy</i> : selections (***) B. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter”: pp. 430-450 (***)	
12	NOV 30	Gender 3: “Who do you think is the hero(ine) of this novel, Hester, Dimmesdale, or Pearl?”	Nathaniel Hawthorne’s <i>The Scarlett Letter</i> : Selections (****)	& Working on the creative project
13	DEC 7	Gender 4: “Is Whitman’s poetry homoerotic?”	Walt Whitman’s <i>Song of Myself</i> : 11-15 and “A Woman Waits for Me” (*)	& Showcasing the creative project
14	DEC 14	Slavery 1:	A. De Crevecoeur’s <i>Letters</i>	

		“Did your author’s America include blacks?”	<i>from an American Farmer</i> : III and IX (***) B. Thomas Jefferson’s “The Declaration of Independence” and <i>Notes on the State of Virginia</i> : XIV (****)	
15	DEC 21	Slavery 2: “What does it mean to be democratic when it comes to the question of slavery?”	A. Your own research on the Lincoln-Douglas debate (****) B. Your own research on the Dred Scott decision (****)	
16	DEC 28	Slavery 3: “What rhetorical strategies did Jacob/Douglass use?”	A. Harriet Jacob’s <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> : I, VII, X, XIV, XLI (***) B. Frederick Douglass’s <i>My Bondage and My Freedom</i> : I, II, III and “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July” (****)	
17	JAN 4	Slavery 4: “Are we more likely to be sympathetic when we see cruelty than when cruelty is reported to us?”	Screening of <i>12 Years a Slave</i>	# Reading journal due
18	JAN 11	Final Exam		# Research notes due

Last day to submit longer essay: Jan. 18

Last day to submit grades: Jan. 25