

IDENTITY IN AMERICA

AMERICAN LITERATURE // ENGLISH 2329.008 // 7-8:20 pm MW // University Hall Room 9

Dr. Wayne Gay // Office: Preston Hall 201 // wgay@uta.edu // 817-522-1859
Office Hours: noon-1 pm MF (MWF after Oct. 1) and by appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS

Because many of the texts in this course will be downloaded from Blackboard, students should own a three-ring binder for storing downloads with additional paper for note-taking.

1. Bechdel, Allison. *Fun Home*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
ISBN: 0-618-87171-3
(paperback, hardback, and electronic editions are acceptable)

2. Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York: Random House, 2015.
ISBN: 978-0-8129-9354-7
(paperback, hardback, and electronic editions are acceptable)

REQUIRED TEXTS (cont'd)

3. Jackson, Shirley. *Novels and Stories*. Ed. Joyce Carol Oates. New York: Library of America, 2010.
ISBN: 978-1-59853-072-8
4. Sapphire. *Push*. New York: Knopf, 1996.
ISBN: 0-679-44626-5

(any of the numerous editions and printings of *Push* are acceptable)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

General:

This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirements in Language, Philosophy, and Culture. The required objectives of these courses are the development of students' critical thinking, communication skills, personal responsibility, and social responsibility. Many elements of this course foster development of these objectives, which are explicitly addressed in the "Signature Assignment" (see below). The departmental guidelines for sophomore literature can be found by typing "sophomore literature" in the "Search UT Arlington" box on the University website: http://www.uta.edu/uta.

Specific to this section:

Rather than a comprehensive overview of American Literature, this section will offer a selection of outstanding and significant texts dealing with the concept of Identity. The theme of identity will be explored in several of its possible meanings within American culture, including ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status, as well as the concept of the establishment of identity in culture and in literature.

The principal method of approaching this literature will be "reader response," based on the philosophy that the reader is the most important element in a work of literature—without whom, indeed, the work of literature does not exist.

We will acknowledge the existence and usefulness of the concept of "great literature" and the "masterpiece." We will be aware of authorial intent as an integral part of a work of literature. And we will acknowledge the work and ideas of scholars who have devoted energy to finding specific meanings within works of literature.

But we will be aware that all of these elements pale in significance compared to the examination of the effect a work of literature—or visual art, or architecture, or music—has on the reader or consumer of that work. We will examine why and how a work of literature affects the reader (and, by extension, the way any cultural artifact affects the consumer), with the aim of becoming more intelligent, critical readers of literature and consumers of any cultural artifact, whether it be a pop song, a political advertisement, a sermon, a movie, the design of a building, or any of the thousands of cultural artifacts we experience daily in the extraordinarily rich and varied culture in which we live.

COURSE POLICIES AND GRADING

The bulk of the work outside of the class in this course will consist of writing short responses to the reading assignments *before* those assignments are discussed in class. Each student will submit, on Blackboard, by noon on the Saturday preceding each week of classes, a 300-word response to any portion of the week's reading assignment. Those assignments will be graded on a pass-fail basis, without regard to grammar or punctuation.

Since this course includes elements of lecture and group discussion, attendance and participation in class is required. To that end, your level of attendance will directly affect your final grade, as noted below.

The course will also include two open-book essay exams (a mid-term and a final) written in class, and graded on a pass-fail basis. The written portion of the final exam will be administered primarily on Monday, November 23; the official final exam period, at which ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY, will take place on Monday, December 14, at 5:30 pm-8 pm in the regular classroom space.

The course also requires a "Signature Assignment" paper written outside of class in proper MLA formatting. This is the one assignment in which grammar, punctuation, formatting, structure, and citation will be taken into consideration in evaluation and grading.

I. SHORT RESPONSES

Failure to turn in all 8 responses on time will result in a drop of the final grade, as follows:

1 or 2 responses missing: final grade drops to B or lower
3 or 4 responses missing: final grade drops to C or lower
5 or 6 responses missing: final grade drops to D or lower
7 responses missing: final grade will be an F

II. ATTENDANCE

Death of an immediate family member, attendance at officially-sanctioned University business, military service, and observance of a religious holiday are excused absences, all of which require documentation on the part of the student for the instructor.
Observance of a religious holiday should be documented WITHIN THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF THE SEMESTER.

Illness, work assignments, car trouble, traffic, childcare issues, alarm clocks that didn't go off, hangovers, job interviews, and falling in love over a cup of coffee ARE NOT EXCUSED ABSENCES. The student may take four unexcused absences, which is a generous allowance, without his or her grade falling. Do not take an unexcused absence frivolously; if you come down with the flu or have an important, life-changing event such as a job interview late in the semester, you will need your free unexcused absences!

Your final grade will fall as follows on the basis of attendance:

Five or six unexcused absences: final grade falls to a B or lower
Seven or eight unexcused absences: final grade falls to a C or lower
Nine or ten unexcused absences: final grade falls to a D or lower
Eleven or more unexcused absences: final grade of F

III. MIDTERM EXAM

Students should be prepared to bring a working laptop OR a bluebook or greenbook to class on Wednesday, October 21, as well as all notes and texts read so far for an open-book exam.. The exam will be graded on a pass-fail basis; students who fail to write satisfactory essays totaling 750 words will fail the exam. Failure to complete the midterm exam satisfactorily will result in the final course grade being lowered by one letter.

IV. FINAL EXAM

The final exam will consist of two portions: a written exam administered beginning on Monday, November 23, and a discussion section administered on Wednesday, December 16 at 8:15-10:45 pm. The written portion will follow exactly the same format as the written midterm exam, and will be graded on a pass-fail basis; failure to complete the written portion of the Attendance at the final discussion portion of the exam is mandatory; failure to attend the discussion portion will result in lowering of the final course grade by one letter. DO NOT SCHEDULE PLANE TRIPS OR JOB INTERVIEWS to take place between 8:15 pm and 10:30 pm and 8 pm on Wednesday, December 16.

V. SIGNATURE ASSIGNMENT

The signature assignment is a short paper well within the capabilities of any university student; the details are further outlined below. This is the one paper in this course in which improper formatting, structure, and mechanics will result in a lowered final grade. (See “More About the Signature Assignment” below.) A good deal of attention will be given in class toward compliance with the requirements of this paper. Failure to comply with these instructions will result in lowering of the final course grade by one letter.

VI. PLAGIARISM POLICIES AND TUTORIAL

All students are required to participate in the UTA plagiarism tutorial; link and deadline for the tutorial will be announced early in the semester. Although there are many aspects of participation in this course, failure to complete and submit evidence of completion of the plagiarism tutorial will result in a grade of F for the course. Understanding the concept of plagiarism is fundamental to this course, in other coursework, and in your future career.
To summarize, plagiarism consists of willfully representing someone else's work as your own. This includes presenting ideas without adequate documentation as well as allowing friends, acquaintances, or associates to do your work for you. University penalties for violation of plagiarism policy will be applied to short papers, exams, and the signature assignment.

The alert student will observe that any student, even one who is not particularly talented in terms of academic literary criticism, can, by attending and participating regularly, by turning in all papers on time, and by complying with the instructions for the signature assignment, reasonably expect to earn a grade of A in this course. While making an A in a literature class should not be the core of your being, it can have profound effect on issues such as admission to graduate or professional school, the awarding of financial aid, or presenting an impressive GPA on initial job applications. University policy permits this instructor to award the grade of A to as many students as have earned it; nothing would make me happier than to be able to give an A to every student in this class. However, the grade of A is reserved for students who attend and participate regularly, who turn in all assignments on time, and who comply with the other very reasonable requirements of the course.

FOOD & ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Students who because of scheduling or medical reasons need to consume a small amount of food or water in the classroom should do so discretely, and should remove trash on leaving.

Recent studies have demonstrated that handwritten note-taking is considerably more effective as a learning tool than electronic note-taking. Because of this, and the tendency of some individuals to shop, communicate with friends, study for other classes, or engage in otherwise distracting activities, the use of electronic devices, including iPads, phones, or laptops, will not be permitted during regular classes. The exception is in the case of the midterm and final exam.

SCHEDULE

WEEK I: August 31, September 2

Monday & Wednesday: Introduction to Course

WEEK II: September 9

NO CLASS ON SEPTEMBER 7

Wednesday: Continued Introduction

WEEK III: September 14 & 16
Before class: download and read "Introductory Readings"

Monday and Wednesday: Introduction to Literary Criticism

WEEK IV: September 21 & 23: Two great American poets
Before class: download and read posted poems of Wheatley and Dickinson. Submit Response No. 1 on Blackboard by noon on Saturday, September 19

Monday and Wednesday: discuss poetry of Wheatley and Dickinson

WEEK V: September 28 & 30: Short Stories
Before class: download and read posted short stories. Submit Response No. 2 on Blackboard by noon on Saturday, September 26.

Monday and Wednesday: Discuss stories by Everett, Cather, Diaz, and Alexie

WEEK VI: October 5 & 7
No reading assignment or Response.

Monday and Wednesday: Introduction to Signature Assignment

WEEK VII: October 12 & 14
Before class: read Push and Submit Response No. 4 by 12 noon on October 10.

Monday and Wednesday: discuss *Push*

WEEK VIII: October 19 & 21
No Rreading assignment or response this week.

Monday: Watch Classified X in class

Wednesday: Midterm exam

WEEK IX: October 26 & 28
Before class: Read *Fun Home* and Submit Response No. 5 by 12 noon October 24

Monday and Wednesday: Discuss *Fun Home* in class

WEEK X: November 2 & 4

No reading assignment or response this week. Complete Signature Assignment and prepare three copies to bring to class.

Monday: Peer editing of Signature Assignment. Mandatory!
Monday and Wednesday: Watch *The Celluloid Closet* in class

WEEK XI: November 9 & 11

Before class: Read *Between the World and Me* and submit Response No. 6 by 12 noon on Saturday November 7. Make corrections to Signature Assignment and submit an electronic copy to Blackboard by 12 noon on Monday, November 9. Bring a printout of the Signature Assignment to class.

Monday and Wednesday: Discuss *Between the World and Me*

WEEK XII: November 16 & 18

Before class: Read *The Adventures of James Harris* (in Jackson collection) and Submit Response No. 7 by 12 noon on Saturday November 14.

WEEK XIII: November 23 & 25

No reading assignment due this week.

Monday: Written portion of final exam.
Wednesday: Completion of final exam if necessary.

WEEK IX: November 30 & December 2

Before class: Submit Response No. 8 (cultural artifact) on Blackboard by 12 noon on Saturday, November 28.

Monday and Wednesday: Discussion of submitted cultural artifacts

WEEK X: December 7 & 9

Monday and Wednesday: Continued discussion of submitted cultural artifacts

FINAL EXAM

Wednesday , December 16, 8:15 pm-10:30 pm. Continued discussion of submitted cultural artifacts. ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY! Failure to attend will result in the lowering of your final grade by one letter.

TITLE IX

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is a federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education. It reads: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from discrimination based on gender, including inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment (including sexual violence, stalking, domestic violence and/or dating violence) and sexual misconduct in any form are prohibited and will not be tolerated. Any individuals who engage in such conduct will be subject to disciplinary action.

Complaint against a UTA student, visitor, or staff or faculty member for sexual harassment, sex discrimination, or sexual assault, should be made to the Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinators. Victims of sexual assault should also consider contacting the UTA Police Department at (817) 272-3003.

OTHER PERTINANT ISSUES:
Students with disabilities or special needs should identify themselves at the beginning of the semester and provide the instructor with authorized documentation from the the Office for Students with Disabilities (817-272-3364). Students needing academic counseling should consult their Undergraduate Advisor; for other types of counseling, contact the University College Hotline (817-272-6107). To prepare for emergencies, be aware of classroom exits. For on campus problems requiring police assistance, dial 817-272-3003

****

More about the Signature Assignment

The signature assignment addresses all four of the course University prescribed objectives. **Personal responsibility**: This essay includes the integration of outside sources; it therefore requires students to demonstrate personal responsibility as they use the words and ideas of other writers in an accurate and ethical manner. Citing sources properly isn't just a matter of mechanics. It's a question of personal responsibility (with real consequences for students) that overlaps with students' responsibility to the academic community of which they are a part. The construction of a clearly articulated thesis statement supported by a careful analysis of textual evidence demonstrates **critical thinking** and **communication skills**. The development of a well-organized essay that demonstrates the correct use of grammar and other writing mechanics and demonstrates an awareness of the how to appeal convincingly to an audience further addresses the communication objective. The critical analysis of the way the selected text engages a significant issue of social responsibility related to current issues in American life addresses the **social responsibility** outcome.

Specific Requirements :

Write a well-organized, effectively developed 3-page argument identifying and expanding on a contemporary issue identified in one of the texts studied in the course. Write coherent sentences and paragraphs exercising grammar, spelling, and punctuation appropriate for a sophomore English course. Practice standard MLA formatting including consistent double-spacing (no extra space between paragraphs!), 1-inch margins, and Times New Roman 12-point type.

Students must properly integrate material from three secondary sources into their analysis in a way that gives credit to the authors whose ideas and language they are incorporating. This is not a research paper or a summary of the work of literature, but a paper in which students draw on the selected text and secondary sources to communicate an interpretive argument about their chosen text through the lens of social responsibility. Students will be required to complete the UTA Library plagiarism tutorial and submit the results on Blackboard. The due date and information for the link will be forthcoming early in the semester.

Appropriate Secondary Sources**:**

- National newspapers (e.g., *New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Dallas Morning News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram*)
- Print magazines (e.g., *The Atlantic, Harper's, New Yorker, Time, Newsweek*)
- Online magazines (e.g., *Slate, Salon*)
- Scholarly articles (e.g., academic articles published in peer-reviewed journals; you can find citations for these articles by using the MLA International Bibliography database, JSTOR, or Project Muse—all of which UTA's library gives you access to online)
- Scholarly books or book chapters (it's a good bet a book is scholarly if it's published by an academic press, such as Duke University Press; if you're not sure, ask your instructor)
- Historical documents (e.g., old newspaper articles, letters, speeches, journal entries) from academic databases (see the History subject guide on the library website for ideas)

Students interested in using a source that isn't listed here should check with the instructor.

In order to receive a grade of C or higher on the signature assignment, students *must*

1. write an essay that is at least 3 pages long
2. integrate three appropriate sources (besides the literary text)
3. have a thesis
4. have a title
5. incorporate at least one quotation from the literary text
6. have a Works Cited page using MLA form (not counted in the 3-page length requirement)
7. format the paper in correct MLA style, including correct line-spacing and type face

A sample signature assignment, written by the instructor, will be posted on Blackboard.