

CHAMINADE UNIVERSITY OF HONOLULU
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & FINE ARTS
DIVISION OF ACCELERATED PROGRAMS
Course Outline and Syllabus

EN432: Themes in Am. Lit: 1940-Present
Semester:
Location:
Instructor: Robert A. Rogers
H#: 524-3012

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Welcome to EN432! This course is designed to increase students' awareness and appreciation of a particularly dynamic and expressive period of American literature, the literature of our time. Exploring and examining contemporary writing is an invaluable technique for gaining real insight into our cultural characteristics and values. The time between 1940 and the present has been truly unique with an exponentially accelerating rate of change in all areas of our lives. We have often failed to appreciate the profoundly destabilizing effects of these changes, the human cost of our uncritical fascination with progress. This failure is clearly reflected in the characters, the conflicts and the thematic concerns of our literature of social protest.

In our collective journey from the defining Allied victory of World War Two to the largely unfulfilled promise of the Kennedy Camelot years (an impossibly idealistic American dream) to our divisive Vietnam experience and to the threat of instant nuclear annihilation practically guaranteed by MAD policies (an impossibly horrific American nightmare) we have tried to integrate these contradictory experiences into our inner lives and into our culture. Our literature has encompassed these contradictions by portraying the human condition in extremes, from the sacred to the obscene, from the socially adept to the alienated and defiant, and from the self-actualized to the intentionally self-destructive. And in a continuing response to these extremes, the individual in search of identity and meaning is the intended thematic focus of this course.

It is hoped that this ambitious and richly rewarding approach to the course will provide both a literary and cultural context for the works we examine. Furthermore, it is hoped that students will be motivated to go beyond the requirements of the course and the ten weeks of the semester to continue the enriching process of discovery: new stories, new authors, and new insights into the human experience as reflected in literature. Finally, it should be mentioned that in our frantically busy, overscheduled lives, few people really have the time to read much anymore. And so this course has the added value of giving students an important reason to make time for one of life's most privileged luxuries -- the opportunity to sit down with a good book. Enjoy!

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Students must have completed EN101 and 102 as well as EN255 or 256 prior to enrolling in this course. Students are responsible for the application of all relevant and appropriate MLA techniques to the writing of the term papers. Also, these papers must adhere to commonly accepted university standards of formal, written English as used for academic purposes.

The second prerequisite is equally important. Because reading is both time and focus intensive, it is indeed essential that students be willing and able to make a significant commitment of time and effort to the successful completion of this upper division course. And although not a formal prerequisite, a love of reading is most beneficial.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

A successful and rewarding experience in EN432 will include the following. First, students must demonstrate careful reading of the assignments and preparation for each class with detailed, interactive and insightful class

discussions. A fundamentally important strategy for success in a course which meets only ten times during the semester includes uninterrupted class attendance and a conscientious preparation of all assigned materials for each and every class meeting. Second, students must respond with fully developed and clearly focused short essay answers to the two exams of the course. Third, students must produce two short papers (4-6 pages of text) using the MLA writing style and incorporating the views of at least two critics. And finally, students must write a 1-2 page reaction paper for each of the three novels on the syllabus.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

The following are intended to maximize the personal and academic value of this course for students:

1. to explore representative works by major American authors from 1940 to the present with focus on their unique styles and thematic concerns as well as how they illuminate the thematic overview of the course, the search for identity and meaning in the contemporary American experience;
2. to gain greater insight into any author's most extraordinary creative accomplishment -- bringing characters to life through language;
3. to appreciate that writing is an intensely personal experience and to respect the fact that every author reveals much about his or her sense of the world so that, at some level -- literal, psychological or imaginative -- every creative work is somewhat autobiographical;
4. to examine "character" in literature -- the conscience, the conflicts, the strengths, the weaknesses or flaws, the recognition of human limitations and of human potential and of that occasional heroic response from the common man;
5. to acknowledge certain universal thematic concerns common to all literature as they are revealed through the characters. One approach to character and theme, an instructor originated construct, is "T³" which essentially examines the thematic significance of transgression, transformation, and transcendence as they are relevant to literature;
6. and to recognize that the best of literature stands the test of time and transcends cultural specifics and the limitations of place. Therefore, characters, in all their humanity, are both authentically individual as well as valid universal reflections of our world and ourselves.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

University policy mandates that accurate records be kept for each meeting of the class. This is particularly important for students who are benefiting from government tuition subsidies and loan programs, because the university itself has an obligation to report situations of non-attendance to appropriate government agencies. Therefore, it is the students' responsibility to be in class on time as much as humanly possible. Students are not allowed to sign in for a class meeting unless they are present for the entire instructional period, or unless they have the instructor's prior permission. Because of the critical importance of class discussions, excessive absences would have a significant negative impact on the course grade. However, students on verified deployment or medical or emergency leave will receive full credit for written work mailed and postmarked by the due date to the following address: 1137 Wilder Ave. #803, Honolulu, HI 96822-2757.

SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR THE COURSE

Several handouts and examples are provided which serve as instructions and models for student success with the term papers and the short essay exams. Read them carefully and keep them for reference. Please remember that this is your class and you are always welcome to ask any questions about anything that will contribute to your success in this course.

GRADING POLICY

The course grade will be determined based on six grades of approximately equal value. There are two major exams, two term papers, three short reaction papers which equal one grade, and a grade for the level of sustained, active class participation. The dates of the major exams and the term papers are indicated on the syllabus in capital letters. Please note that it is imperative for students to be in class on these dates because makeup exams would be quite challenging. At the conclusion of the course, students who submit a stamped, self-addressed envelope together with their final exam will have it returned to them corrected within a reasonably short time. Included also will be the course grade.

Also, there is an optional, extra credit project incorporating poetry, video, and music. Details of this project will be provided in class.

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EN432: Themes in Am. Lit: 1940-Present
Semester: Winter 1998
Location: Pearl Harbor
Instructor: Robert A. Rogers
H#: 524-3012

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Nine Stories (Little, Brown), by J. D. Salinger
2. A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories (Harcourt Brace), by Flannery O'Connor
3. Contemporary American Poetry (Penguin, Second Edition), edited by Donald Hall
4. Why Are We in Vietnam? (Holt), by Norman Mailer
5. On the Road (Penguin), by Jack Kerouac
6. Beloved (Plume), by Toni Morrison
7. Any EN102 text for MLA reference

MEETING/DATE MATERIALS TO BE COVERED

- #1, W-1/14: 1. Course introduction and overview of the syllabus.
2. Reading for academic purposes: Theme, form, content, and style.
3. Class discussion: "Comfort Woman"
4. Handout: "Term Paper Guidelines"
5. Handout: "Structuring Short Essay Answers"
6. Class discussion: "Fear and Loathing in Hollywood: Doomed Love at the Taco Stand"
- #2, W-1/21: 1. J. D. Salinger: The man and the author.
2. Class discussion: "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Uncle Wiggly in Connecticut," "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," "The Laughing Man," and "Down at the Dinghy"
- #3, W-1/28: 1. Flannery O'Connor: The Southern tradition in literature.
2. Class discussion: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "The River," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," "A Stroke of Good Fortune," "Good Country People," and "The Dis-Placed Person"
- #4, W-2/4: 1. TERM PAPER #1.
2. Handout: Sample mid-term reading, question and answer.
3. Focused review for Mid-Term.
4. Class discussion: Contemporary American Poetry, 39-154.
- #5, W-2/11: 1. MID-TERM EXAM.
2. Return of Term Paper #1: Revisiting the paper with individual student consultations.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT CLASS MEETING

1. Nine Stories, pp.3-130.
1. A Good Man Is Hard to Find, pp. 1-79, 167-252.
2. Focus sign-up for Term Paper #1: author, story, thematic focus, critics.
1. Contemporary American Poetry, pp. 39-154.
2. TERM PAPER #1.
1. Review for Mid-Term Exam.
1. Why Are We in Vietnam?
2. 1-2 page reaction paper: Vietnam

MEETING/DATE MATERIALS TO BE COVERED

- #6, W-2/18: 1. Reaction Paper #1: Vietnam?
 2. Norman Mailer: Provocation and protest.
 3. Class discussion: Why Are We in Vietnam?
- #7, W-2/25: 1. Reaction Paper #2: Road.
 2. Jack Kerouac: Autobiography as fiction.
 3. Class discussion: On the Road.
- #8, W-3/4: 1. Reaction Paper #3: Beloved.
 2. Toni Morrison: The author and her thematic vision.
 3. Class discussion: Beloved.
- #9, W-3/11: 1. TERM PAPER #2.
 2. Focused review for Final Exam.
 3. Class discussion: Contemporary American Poetry, 155-265.
- #10, W-3/18: 1. Reexamination of the thematic focus of the course:
 The individual search for identity and meaning in
 America after the Second World War.
 2. FINAL EXAM.
 3. Course evaluations.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT CLASS MEETING

1. On the Road.
 2. 1-2 page reaction paper: Road.
1. Beloved.
 2. 1-2 page reaction paper: Beloved.
 3. Focus sign-up for Term Paper #2:
 author, story, thematic focus, critics.
1. TERM PAPER #2.
 2. Contemporary American Poetry, pp. 155-
 265.
1. Review for Final Exam.
 2. Self-addressed, stamped envelope.
- End of course.