

Great Plains Literature

English 481/858P CD

Dr. Susanne Bloomfield

Spring 2010: Tuesday 6:30-9:20 p.m.

Course Overview

Great Plains Literature will trace the history of the settlement of the Plains from pre-European contact to the present day. In each unit, texts will feature Native American as well as immigrant experiences to trace the conflicts and the changes over time, not only in the land itself but within the cultures. The class will focus on the distinctive features of the various cultures in these works, a comparison of their themes, symbols, characterizations, styles, narrative techniques, and cultural significances, and their place in the American literary tradition.

Texts by Native American writers include *Waterlily* by Ella Cara Deloria, *The Long Knives Are Crying* by Joseph Marshall III, *Mean Spirit* by Linda Hogan, and *Miko Kings* by LeAnne Howe. *Giants in the Earth* by O.E. Rolvaag focuses on Norwegian immigrants, *Yonnonديو* by Tillie Olsen describes German Jewish immigrants, *Old Jules* by Mari Sandoz depicts the Swiss settlers, and *My Antonia* by Willa Cather depicts Swedish and Bohemian immigrants. The more traditional works, which present the contrasting Euroamerican world view, include *A Lantern in Her Hand* by Bess Streeter Aldrich, *Plains Song* by Wright Morris, *Plainsong* by Kent Haruf, and *Sandhills Ballad* by Ladette Randolph. Gender will also be addressed. For example, *A Lantern in Her Hand* is written from a woman's point of view while *Giants in the Earth* is from a male perspective; *Waterlily* is female centered whereas *The Long Knives Are Crying* focuses on the male experience.

A special emphasis on primary and secondary research will help students understand the social, cultural, and political contexts of each work, and students will be assigned readings that address these issues. *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction* by Diane Dufva Quantic and *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* by Richard Etulain will provide literary and cultural backgrounds. Students will join Literature Circles as they study different texts in separate groups simultaneously. In addition, they will have a choice of final projects according to their degree emphasis, including researching and writing a formal seminar paper, designing a unit of lesson plans, or completing a creative project on an aspect of Great Plains history and culture.

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Reading List

Everyone

The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction by Diane Dufva Quantic
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995

Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional? by Richard W. Etulain
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1999.

A Different Plain by Ladette Randolph, ed.

Literature Circles

Choose one from each group, listing your choices 1-3.

Myth of the Garden

Waterlily by Ella Cara Deloria

My Antonia by Willa Cather

A Lantern in Her Hand by Bess Streeter Aldrich

Taming the Wilderness

The Long Knives Are Crying by Joseph Marshall III

Giants in the Earth by O.E. Rolvaag

Old Jules by Mari Sandoz

The Great Depression on the Plains

Mean Spirit by Linda Hogan

Yonondio by Tillie Olsen

Plains Song: For Female Voices by Wright Morris

Great Plains Today

Miko Kings by LeAnne Howe

Plainsong by Kent Haruf

Sandhills Ballad by Ladette Randolp(*Note: Unfortunately, the details, background readings, and additional materials for each lesson, are collected on Blackboard)

Assignment Schedule

Jan. 12

Introductions; Assignments & Requirements; Read Literature Circle Book Summaries; Introduce Literature Circles and Roles; Discuss Student Models of Roles; Students turn in Book Choices; Discuss Manifest Destiny (Handout).
Videos & Power Point

Jan. 19

Discuss *Does the Frontier Experience Make American Exceptional?*
Discuss "Sense of Place"
Undergraduate/Graduate Reader Responses due (350 words/500 words)

Jan. 26

Read and Discuss *The Nature of the Place* (pp. 1-95)
Reader Responses due (350 words/500 words)
Undergraduate/Graduate Reader Responses due (350 words/500 words)

Feb. 2

Myth of Garden Literature Circles Discussions
Undergraduates: Read, respond, and share one scholarly source on your LC book or author (350 words)

Feb. 9

Myth of Garden Literature Circles Discussions
Graduates: Read, respond, and share one critical article on your LC book or author (500 words)

Feb. 16

Myth of the Garden Literature Circle Presentations
Individual Reading Logs Due
Discuss *The Nature of the Place* (pp. 96-169)

Feb. 23

Taming the Wilderness Literature Circles Discussions
Undergraduates: Read, respond, and share one scholarly source on your LC book or author (350 words)

Mar. 2

Taming the Wilderness Literature Circles Discussions
Graduates: Read, respond, and share one critical article on your LC book or author (500 words)

Mar. 9

Taming the Wilderness Literature Circle Presentations
Individual Reading Logs Due

Mar. 16

No Class: Spring Break

Mar. 223

Great Depression Literature Circles Discussions
Undergraduates: Read, respond, and share one scholarly source on your LC book or author (350 words)

Mar. 30

Great Depression Literature Circles Discussions

Graduates: Read, respond, and share one critical article on your LC book or author (500 words)

Apr. 6

Great Depression Literature Circle Presentations

Individual Reading Logs Due

Apr. 13

Great Plains Today Literature Circles Discussions

Undergraduates: Read, respond, and share one scholarly source on your LC book or author (350 words)

Apr. 20

Great Plains Today Literature Circles Discussions

Graduates: Read, respond, and share one critical article on your LC book or author (500 words)

Apr. 27

Great Plains Today Literature Circle Presentations

Individual Reading Logs Due

May 4

FINALS CLASS

Final Project due

Assessment

6 Critical Readings & Responses @ 4 points each = 24 Points

4 Literature Circles @ 8 points each = 32 points

Individual Role Logs = 6 points

Discussion & Presentation Participation = 2 points

Final Paper/Project = 44 points

Rubrics

CRITICAL READINGS & RESPONSES (28 POINTS TOTAL)

4 (scholarly source; succinct summary; interpretative analysis)

3 (relevant source; adequate summary; little analysis)

2 (general source, repetitive commentary)

1 (weak source, too short)

0 (no response, late)

LITERATURE CIRCLES (28 POINTS TOTAL)

Individual Role Logs (6 points)

5-6 (comprehensive, specific, promotes thought-provoking discussion, quotes for support)

3-4 (adequate, some specifics, promotes general discussion, no textual quotes)

1-2 (shows superficial reading of the text, content-based discussion)

0 (no response, late)

Presentation Participation (4 points)

2 (Initiates discussion, uses textual support, responds concretely to others)

1 (Short, general comments in the group presentation)

0 (Does not actively participate)

FINAL PROJECT (44 POINTS TOTAL)

44-41 = A (creative, well-developed content that shows depth and complexity of thought, focused, stylistically and grammatically mature, structure appropriate for content)

40-37 = B (well-developed content that shows some complexity of thought, focused, organized, correct style, minor grammar errors)

36-32 = C (conventional, somewhat general or repetitive, adequately organized but mechanical, competent style but flaws in sentences, more serious grammatical errors)

31-28 = D (general, imitative, disorganized, major style and grammar errors)

98-100 = A+

94-97 = A
90-93 = A-

87-89 = B+
84-87 = B
80-83 = B-

77-79 = C+
74-77 = C
70-73 = C-

67-69 = D+
64-67 = D
60-63 = D-
Below 60 = F

Project Ideas

Students must have all projects approved by Dr. Bloomfield before they proceed! All will be posted on Blackboard to be shared with classmates.

Literature Emphasis Majors

- Write a 10-12 page Critical Analysis of one of the novels (or compare/contrast novels) that we are studying in class, using at least three outside research sources (in addition to the literary text/texts) for support (2,500-3,000 words). Use 2009 MLA format with Works Cited. Graduate students write 12-15 pages (3,000-3,750 words) using at least five outside research sources (in addition to the literary text/texts) for support.

English/Language Arts Education Emphasis Majors

- Design a detailed three- to four-week Plains Literature Unit with Differentiated assignments. Consider using Literature Circles. The unit must include a detailed explanation of each day's activities (objectives & standards, instructional sequence with times, assessments, materials), information or handouts for mini-lectures, questions for class discussion, quizzes, tests, all assignments explained in detail, assessments and rubrics, and an overview with objectives.

Creative Writing Emphasis Majors

- Write an original short story (2,500-3,000 words) utilizing the Great Plains as the Setting.
- Write a series of poems utilizing the Great Plains as the setting.
- Write a scene from another character's point of view. (2,500-3,000 words)
- Write diary entries (2,500-3,000 words) for one of the characters that details events of that person's life and his or her personal thoughts about it.
- Rewrite the last chapter of a book or story with a different ending (2,500-3,000 words).

- Choose one major scene from one of the novels and rewrite it as a stage play or screen play, complete with stage or screen directions, costume suggestions, body language, etc. (2,500-3,000 words)
- Write Letters to the Editor in the voices of two or three characters about an event or situation about which they agree or disagree. (2,500-3,000 words).
- Write letters between characters in the novel. This could be a collaborative project.
- Rewrite the story for younger children as a story book.
- Write and present a news broadcast about events in the book.
- Write a scene from another character's point of view.
- Write an original short story (2,500-3,000 words) utilizing the Great Plains as the Setting.
- Write a series of poems utilizing the Great Plains as the setting.
- Other ideas as approved by Dr. Bloomfield.

Drawing Conclusions & Making Connections

***Waterlily* by Ella Cara Deloria**

***My Antonia* by Willa Cather**

***A Lantern in Her Hand* by Bess Streeter Aldrich**

1. What is the name of the book, its publication date, and the author? Give some background on the author and BRIEFLY summarize the plot, setting, and major characters.

2. Which myths are present in your novel? Give an example or two. Does the text uphold or deflate the accepted myth? Is the garden enclosed, the wilderness tamed? What has happened to Manifest Destiny? How about the Turner myth?

3. Are assumptions about assimilation and/or acculturation addressed? Do you see any examples of synthesis or mediation in the text on the part of the characters or the author?

4. What are the attitudes, implied or explicit, toward Native Americans? If a Native American text, what are the attitudes, implied or explicit, toward European Americans?

5. What role does the land play in the novel? What are the attitudes toward the land?

6. Share three interesting discussions your circle had about this book.

7. Which critical approaches would be most successful with this text? Explain?

8. What are the strengths of this book? Its weaknesses? Why do you think it is considered a "standard" in Great Plains Literature? Would you recommend this book to others?

Drawing Conclusions &

Making Connections

***Plainsong* by Kent Haruf**

***Sandhills Ballad* by Ladette Randolph**

***Miko Kings* by LeAnne Howe**

1. What is the name of the book, its publication date, and the author? Give some background on the author and BRIEFLY summarize the plot, setting, and major characters.

2. Which myths are present in your Literature Circle Text? Give an example or two. Does the text uphold or deflate the accepted myth? Is the garden enclosed, the wilderness tamed? What has happened to Manifest Destiny? How about the Turner myth?

3. What role does the land play in the novel? What are the attitudes toward the land?

3. Share three interesting discussions your circle had about this book.

4. How does this book compare or contrast with the other books we have reads this semester?

5. What are this book's strengths and weaknesses? Do you think this book with become a "standard" of Great Plains Literature.

Literature Circle Roles 1

(adapted from Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels)

A Prepare a brief summary of today's reading.

Write a short summary of the reading section. In addition, analyze in more detail the story, the characters, and/or setting. What are the essential events, and why are they essential? How do the characters change or not change by this point in the book? What is the purpose of the minor characters? How are the conflicts resolved? Are they resolved? If the setting is important, explain its significance. How does the setting affect the characters? This should not be a simple summary; it should be summary details plus commentary.

B Ask questions brought up by this book.

What were you wondering about while you were reading? Did you have questions about what was happening? What a character did? What a word meant? What was going to happen next? What an image symbolized? What the ending meant? Jot down questions you would like to have answered. Add your thoughts about the answers to these questions.

C Find connections between the book, yourself, and the wider world.

Connect the reading to your own past experiences. This can include happenings at school or in the community, to stories in the news, to similar events at other times and places, to other people or problems that you are reminded of. Include summaries of scenes and page numbers. Look for connections between the book and other writings on the same topic or by the same author. This might be a good place to analyze the theme or tone of the book.

D Locate special sections or quotations for discussion.

Go back to some especially interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the reading and think about them more carefully. Include summaries of scenes and/or quotations and page numbers. Why did you choose them? Discuss why you think they are interesting or significant.

E Notice the images or pictures the author draws in your mind.

Good readers make pictures in their minds as they read. What images in today's reading especially stood out for you? Include summaries of scenes and/or quotations and page numbers. How does the author achieve such a memorable scene? Does the author use appeals to the five senses? Color? Comparisons? Are the images symbolic?

Literature Circles Roles 2

(Definitions adapted from *Bridging English* by Milner & Milner)

Historical/Biographical Critic

Examine the texts according to how history—of the author or of the times—shapes the work.

Formalist/New Criticism Critic

Analyze not *what* the text means but *how* it means: explicate character development, plot structures, setting, language, images, tension, irony, ambiguity, paradox, and tone.

Archetypal Critic

Search for recurrent universal images (water, fire, circle, garden, desert, numbers), motifs (creation, initiation [separation, transformation, return]), hero's journey, quest, transformation [physical, spiritual, social], immortality), patterns, and literary genre (spring: comedy, summer: romance, fall: tragedy, winter: irony).

Feminist Critic

View the women characters and their roles, employing tools from other disciplines: history, psychology, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and history.

Marxist Critic

Examine the social, cultural, and political milieu of the text, especially the explicit and implicit assumptions of the author and the times and the issues of social and economic justice.

Psychological Critic

Explore the world of the unconscious: the levels of consciousness (conscious, preconscious, unconscious); the theoretical structure of the psyche (id, ego, superego); the influence of defense mechanisms: repression, reaction formation, projection, rationalization, displacement, regression); syndromes such as the Oedipus and Electra complexes; the natures and interpretation of dreams.

New Historicist Critic

Offer new perspectives on readings of traditional texts of the past, enlarging the range to include minority, personal, and popular writings and noting how the reader's vision is determined by the historical context of the writers and the readers, ourselves.

Reader Response Critic

Look at the role that the reader's individual background and personality play in interpreting the text, how the reader creates meaning and what influences the reading.

Deconstruction Critic

Closely look at the text linguistically and metaphorically, destabilizing it as having any consistent meaning. Focus on the relationship of human beings and the natural world and how class, race, gender, nationality, politics, and economics influence it; shift from the human-centric to the bio-centric.