

Instructor: Matt Lavin

Course: **08G:009 American Lives**

Time and Place: Spring 2011, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 11:30 a.m.-12:20 p.m., 14 EPB

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. at Capanna Coffee; or by appointment.

Using a list of works ranging from immigrant fiction of the 1920s to the postmodern novel, this course explores how different writers have asked what it means to be an American. Each section of American Lives explores some aspect of American identity through literature. This section of American Lives focuses on a range of responses to that question all focused on two major aspects of American identity: individuality (a sense of self) and location (a sense of place). Using selfhood and place as our key interpretive focal points, we will examine how literature both maintains and challenges national myths of American identity. In Anzia Yeziarska's Bread Givers, how do Jewish immigrants in the 1920s understand their role as newcomers to the United States, against the backdrop of the increasingly modernized the New York cityscape? How does Willa Cather's novel of Swedish and Bohemian immigrant homesteaders in Nebraska (O Pioneers!) differ from Yeziarska's urban narrative? And how does Jean Toomer, a black writer associated with Harlem Renaissance, tell yet another American story as he charts the African American experience across the geography of country and city, North and South? These three texts are mere examples of the kinds of complexities we will tackle in the coming weeks. We will read seven concise novel-length works (approximately two weeks for each book), all unique in their own way. Requirements for the course include reading these texts, participating in class, two in-class oral presentations, two formal written assignments, and a final exam.

REQUIRED TEXTS: Available at the University Bookstore

1. Willa Cather, O Pioneers! Penguin Classics, 210 pp. \$10.00 [978-0140187755]
2. Anzia Yeziarska, Bread Givers Persea Books, 336 pp., \$10.00 [978-0892552900]
3. Ernest Hemingway, In Our Time Scribner, 160 pp. \$14.00 [978-0684822761]
4. Norman Maclean, A River Runs Through It University of Chicago Press, 239 pp., \$12.00 [978-0226500669]
5. Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49 Harper, 192 pp., \$12.99 [978-0060913076]
6. Sandra Cisneros, Woman Hollering Creek Vintage, 192 pp., \$12.95 [978-0679738565]
7. Jean Toomer, Cane Norton Critical Editions, 336 pp, \$13.75 [978-0393-93168-6]
8. N. Scott Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain, 89 pp. \$14.95 [978-0826304360]

You are required to buy the correct editions of the books for this class. Also, you will need to bring a notebook, paper, and a pencil or pen with you to class every day. Plan to keep your class notes and handouts from past classes in your notebook and make sure you have all course materials with you when you come to class.

OFFICE HOURS: Once during the semester I will require that you to come to my office hours for a face to face conversation. This meeting will be an early discussion of the course and your performance to date. I will also respond to your first assignment at this time, and conduct a revision consultation. Students who miss the required office visit will lose class participation points. During all other weeks you are invited but not required to come visit me during my office hours. Come with questions, comments, concerns, or just to visit more generally. You do not need to buy anything from Capanna to see me there.

GRADING POLICY: All assignments are due on or before the stated due date. **Late work is not accepted.** Extensions are possible only in the event of a family or medical emergency, but you must arrange an extension with me face to face. If you know you will be absent on an assignment due date, speak to me in advance. In the event of a legitimate emergency that causes you to miss class, I reserve the right to require a make-up assignment so that you do not fall behind on the work you missed. You will be graded based on the following percentages:

- Participation: 30% (Includes class preparedness, note-taking, class discussion, informal assignments, etc.)
- Formal Writing Assignments (typed, double-spaced, stapled): 30%
- In-Class Presentations: 20%
- Final Exam: 20%
- **Total: 100%**

GRADING POLICY CONTINUED:

- **A** work is excellent. It *notably* exceeds minimum expectations. It is original, thoughtful, well-developed, and has no more than four errors.
- **B** work is good. It exceeds minimum expectations. It is thoughtful but not particularly nuanced. It is organized logically and has few errors.
- **C** work is average. It meets minimum expectations. It offers some insight, is reasonably clear, and its errors are not such that they notably distract from the content.
- **D** work does not meet all expectations, but it is developed enough to earn some credit. It may have noticeable organizational problems or offer little more than summary. Errors may be distracting.
- **F** work is either so incomplete that it does not deserve full credit, or it does not resemble the particular assignment. Errors may be so distracting that they detract from content.

GRADING – ATTENDANCE:

- Attendance is more than just filling a seat. You must be alert, prepared, and contributing to the class interaction. I will take attendance every class period; I will also record your participation daily.
- Tardiness is not acceptable. It's distracting and infuriating. If you have a class that meets across campus and lets out ten minutes before we start, you should drop my class. I will tally a tardy as one half of an absence. If you arrive more than 20 minutes late you will be marked absent. If you know for a fact that you will need to be late for class regularly, you should drop this class.
- Absent students cannot participate and are graded accordingly. As this is an elective, I would expect students to be here on time and eager to learn every class period.
- Special conditions may apply in the case of a legitimate emergency.

GRADING - PARTICIPATION:

- Your participation grade is not an automatic A. Students are often surprised to learn that this aspect of the course kept them from the grade they expected.
- This type of course is not about purely based on memorizing and repeating a set of facts. In order to achieve the goal of this class—to better understand various ways of reading and how texts affect our lives—you must not limit yourself to only your interactions with the texts; you must also build on what others bring to the reading experience.
- Excelling at class participation includes attending class regularly and showing evidence that you have done the reading and thought about it. Show me that you are paying attention to others and taking detailed class notes when appropriate. Refrain from distracting behaviors like interrupting class, zoning out, passing out, passing notes, text-messaging, blogging, twittering, doing homework for another class, or cooking a four course meal.

- By far the most distracting habit of recent years has been the impulse to send and receive text messages during class time. I will not tolerate this practice. I expect phones to be off and put away during class. If you need to leave your phone on because of an emergency situation, speak to me in advance.

GRADING – FORMAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS: There will be two formal papers during the semester. The first paper is **Wednesday, February 23** and the second paper is due **Monday, April 18**. I will circulate assignment descriptions with further details as these due dates approach. If you are unhappy with a grade on the first formal written assignment, you may speak to me during my office hours about submitting a revision for some additional credit. If I find your case convincing, I will allow you to submit a revised paper. (This policy applies only to the first formal writing assignment because the second assignment will be due too late in the semester.)

GRADING – In-Class Oral Presentations: Each student is required to do two in-class oral presentations. Presentations will take place on a rolling basis, with one or two students per class period offering the entire class a fresh perspective on the work of literature we are currently reading. I will circulate assignment descriptions with further details and an assignment sheet for dates and topics.

FINAL EXAM: The General Education Literature Program requires a final examination. You must take the final exam during the time scheduled by the university. An undergraduate student who has two final examinations scheduled for the same period or more than three examinations scheduled for the same day may file a request for a change of schedule before the published deadline at the Registrar's Service Center, 17 Calvin Hall, 8-4:30 M-F, (384-4300).

SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Sexual harassment is reprehensible and will not be tolerated by the University. It subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Visit the sexual harassment awareness site at <http://www.sexualharassment.uiowa.edu/> for definitions, assistance, and the full University policy.

WRITING CENTER: This is an important resource that can help many of our students and can make our job as writing instructors a bit easier. For more information about the hours and offerings of the Writing Center go to its website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/>

PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's writing, speech, or idea as if it were your own. The University has a written policy concerning cheating and plagiarism. Improper use of non-original material may result in a failing grade for an assignment and/or the entire course. Plagiarism may also result in additional disciplinary action taken by the CLAS and The University of Iowa.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: I would like to speak with any student who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements may be made. Please see me in my office during office hours or by appointment within the first two weeks of class.

SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCIES: The University of Iowa Operations Manual section 16.14 outlines appropriate responses to a tornado or to a similar crisis. If a tornado or other severe weather is indicated by the UI outdoor warning system, members of the class should seek shelter in rooms and corridors in the innermost part of a building at the lowest level, staying clear of windows, corridors with windows, or large free-standing expanses such as auditoriums and cafeterias. The class will resume, if possible, after the UI outdoor warning system announces that the severe weather threat has ended.

CLASS GRIEVANCES: If you have a concern regarding any part of this course, please speak to me directly during my office hours or by appointment; I will do what I reasonably can to help. If, after we meet, you still have concerns, you may contact a program associate (Katie Gubbels or Lindsey Row-Heyveld, 64 EPB). If necessary, final decisions will be made by Brooks Landon, the director of the General Education Literature program (376 EPB, ph. 335-0641).

CLAS: This course is given by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. This means that class policies on matters such as requirements, grading, and sanctions for academic dishonesty are governed by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Students wishing to add or drop this course after the official deadline must receive the approval of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Details of the University policy of cross enrollments may be found at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~provost/deos/crossenroll.doc>

WEEKLY CALENDAR

Week 1: First Impressions

Monday, 1/17: Holiday, No Class

Wednesday, 1/19: Introductions, Syllabus

Friday, 1/21: “Imagination in Place” by Wendell Berry (COURSE PACK); Introductions continued

Week 2: Pioneers and Prairies

Monday, 1/24: O Pioneers! (pp. 1-48)

Wednesday, 1/26: O Pioneers! (pp. 49-84)

Friday, 1/28: O Pioneers!; “Pioneers, O Pioneers!” by Walt Whitman (COURSE PACK)

Week 3: Pioneers and Prairies

Monday, 1/31: O Pioneers! (pp. 85-137)

Wednesday, 2/2: O Pioneers! (pp. 138-183)

Friday, 2/4: O Pioneers! (pp. 184-210); “Hands” by Sherwood Anderson (COURSE PACK)

Week 4: Local and Global

Monday, 2/7: In Our Time (pp. 11-49)

Wednesday, 2/9: In Our Time (pp. 51-77)

Friday, 2/11: In Our Time; “The Open Boat” by Stephen Crane (COURSE PACK)

Week 5: Local and Global

Monday, 2/14: In Our Time (pp. 78-129)

Wednesday, 2/16: In Our Time (pp. 130-157)

Friday, 2/18: In Our Time; “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien (COURSE PACK)

Week 6: The Postbellum South

Monday, 2/21: Cane (Page Numbers TBA)

Wednesday, 2/23: Cane (Page Numbers TBA) **PAPER 1 DUE**

Friday, 2/25: Cane (page Numbers TBA); “Why I Live at the P.O.” by Eudora Welty (COURSE PACK)

Week 7: The Postbellum South

Monday, 2/28: Cane (Page Numbers TBA); “The Flowers” by Alice Walker (COURSE PACK)

Wednesday, 3/2: Cane (Page Numbers TBA)

Friday, 3/4: Cane (Page Numbers TBA); “Everything That Rises Must Converge” by Flannery O’Connor (COURSE PACK)

Week 8: Bright Lights, Big City

Monday, 3/7: The Bread Givers (pp. 1-66)

Wednesday, 3/9: The Bread Givers (pp. 67-110)

Friday, 3/11: The Bread Givers (pp. 111-138); Woody Allen, Gershwin (Movie clip, in class)

Week 9: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 10: Bright Lights, Big City

Monday, 3/21: The Bread Givers (pp. 139-234); Excerpt from *Bright Lights, Big City* by Jay McInerney (COURSE PACK)

Wednesday, 3/23: The Bread Givers (pp. 235-268)

Friday, 3/25: The Bread Givers (pp. 269-297); “Coney Island of the Mind” by Lawrence Ferlinghetti (COURSE PACK), “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes (COURSE PACK)

Week 11: Postmodern Place

Monday, 3/28: The Crying of Lot 49 (pp. 1-80)

Wednesday, 3/30: The Crying of Lot 49 (pp. 81-119)

Friday, 4/1: The Crying of Lot 49 (pp. 120-152)

Week 12: Indigenous Voices

Monday, 4/4: “The School Days of an Indian Girl” by Zitkala-Sa (COURSE PACK)

Wednesday, 4/6: The Way to Rainy Mountain (pp. 3-42)

Friday, 4/8: The Way to Rainy Mountain (pp. 43-89)

Week 13: The Mountain West

Monday, 4/11: A River Runs Through It (pp. 1-51)

Wednesday, 4/13: A River Runs Through It (pp. 52-104)

Friday, 4/15: A River Runs Through It; “We Are Not in This Together” by William Kittredge (COURSE PACK)

Week 14: Suburban Dreams, Nightmares

Monday, 4/18: “The Swimmer” by John Cheever (COURSE PACK) **PAPER 2 DUE**

Wednesday, 4/20: “A Small, Good Thing” by Raymond Carver (COURSE PACK)

Friday, 4/22: “The Safety of Objects” by A.M. Homes (COURSE PACK)

Week 15: Borderlands

Monday, 4/25: Woman Hollering Creek (pp. 1-24)

Wednesday, 4/27: Woman Hollering Creek (pp. 25-40)

Friday, 4/29: Woman Hollering Creek (pp. 41-67)

Week 16: Borderlands

Monday, 5/2: Woman Hollering Creek (pp. 68-113)

Wednesday, 5/4: Woman Hollering Creek (pp. 114-136)

Friday, 5/6: Woman Hollering Creek (pp. 137-165)

TBA: Final Exam