

# PLAINS LITERATURE

English 211  
2-3:15 TR  
Andrews 22

Dr. Tom Lynch  
tlynch2@unl.edu  
Andrews 314  
Office hours:  
TR 12:30-2 or by appt.

## TEXTS

Richard Manning: *Grassland: The History, Biology, Politics, and Promise of the American Prairie*

Twyla Hansen: *Prairie Suite: A Celebration*

John Price: *Man Killed by Pheasant*

Mari Sandoz: *Old Jules*

Dan O'Brien: *Buffalo for the Broken Heart*

Rudolfo Anaya: *Bless Me, Ultima*

Susan Power: *Grass Dancer*

Marjorie Saiser: *Lost in Seward County*

**This class satisfies ACE Student Learning Outcome 5:** "Use knowledge, historical perspectives, analysis, interpretation, critical evaluation, and the standards of evidence appropriate to the humanities to address problems and issues."

*Through class lectures, course readings, audio-visual and internet resources, and field trips, students will gain knowledge of and historical perspectives on the literature that emerges from and seeks to represent the North American Great Plains. The class will apply place-conscious literary theories involving identity, ethnicity, gender, aesthetics, as well as social, political, and environmental history to the analysis and interpretation of literature. Through the application of standards of evidence appropriate to the humanities in both class discussion and in a variety of writing assignments, students will gain the knowledge and skills necessary to analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate the representation of the Great Plains in literary works. Students will consider the role literature plays in various issues involved with place-oriented identities, such as who "belongs," who doesn't "belong," what does it mean to "belong," and why. Students will consider the role of literature in exacerbating, or in ameliorating, various environmental problems on the Great Plains.*

*In order to assess the outcomes, students will participate in class discussions, will complete one "deep map," will write 6 reading responses and 1 field trip response, and will take a final essay exam. Students will be evaluated on their close-reading skills and on their ability to appropriately apply the theoretical perspectives introduced in the course to an analysis of the literature under consideration and to make insightful connections between the various literary works read.*

**AIM:** This class will introduce some of the issues and themes that characterize literature written by residents of the grasslands bioregions of the U.S., a place that is also called The Great Plains. The relationship between people and the land will be foregrounded. Within the Great Plains, ecologists identify three distinct ecological bioregions: the tall grass, the mixed-grass, and the short-grass prairie. The lifeways and experiences of people in these distinct bioregions can be quite different. This class will select readings from a diversity of cultures and locations in the Great Plains that reflect how culture and place interact in this variable landscape.

**TEACHING METHOD:** The class will consist of lecture, class discussion, and various audio-visual and internet resources where relevant. The class will make use of the fact that most students will, based on life experiences as plains-dwellers, have some expertise with which to assess the literary works. One required field trip will be scheduled to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

**READING LOAD:** This is a literature class. Surprise! There is quite a bit of reading. We will read roughly one book every two weeks. I expect you to keep up with the reading schedule and to be prepared to discuss the readings during class. I will feel free to call on you to ask your opinions about what we've read, and I'll expect an informed answer. If you think you will find this reading load daunting, I'd advise you to consider another class.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Students will write a series of reading responses to the assigned texts, create one "deep map," write one essay in response to a field trip, and take a final essay exam.

---

### APPROXIMATE GRADING PERCENTAGES (subject to change)

Attendance and participation: 15%

Deep Map: 5%

Field Trip essay: 10%

Reading responses: 50%

Final Exam: 20%

#### GRADING RUBRIC

100-97.5 = A+; 97-93 = A; 92.5-90 = A-; 89.5-87.5 = B+; 87-83 = B; 82.5-80 = B-; 79.5-77.5 = C+; 77-73 = C; 72.5-70 = C-; 69.5-67.5 = D+; 67-63 = D; 62.5-60 = D-; Below 60 = F.

---

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION:** The English Department policy statement on class attendance reads as follows: "Students who miss more than 20% of the scheduled class meetings of a course (for us that would be 6 classes) will ordinarily fail the course for that reason alone, except that (1) if the absences occur before the Withdrawal Passing period ends, the student may receive a "W" grade, and (2) if the absences are excused by the instructor or approved UNL policy and a large majority of them occur after the work of the course has been substantially completed, the student may receive an Incomplete ("I") grade."

I expect you to attend all classes, to arrive on time, to be prepared to discuss the assigned readings, and to stay for the entire class period. More than 3 absences will result in a proportional grade penalty. NOTE: illness is not an "excused" absence, it is covered in the "3-freebies." Excused absences relate only to "[university sponsored activity](#)," or a religious observance not already supported by the University. If you stop coming to class, you must also officially drop it. This is YOUR responsibility.

Bring your books to class; we will refer to them frequently. If I suspect students are not keeping up with the readings, I will give pop quizzes. Like the rest of your life, this class will be as interesting, or as boring, as you are. Take charge of your own education.

**READING RESPONSES:** You will maintain an informal (but graded) series of responses to the readings. These will usually be due bi-weekly. They should not be plot summaries of the works or a repetition of class lectures. In your responses, respond to some, but not necessarily all, of the following questions.

- Does the work's portrayal of the Great Plains fit with your own ideas of and experiences with this place? If not, how does it deviate? What might account for that deviation?
- Does the work help you see the Great Plains, or some aspect of it, differently? Has it taught you something new? Has it made you feel differently about the Plains? Explain.
- Does the work reinforce or challenge stereotypes about the Great Plains?
- How does the work compare and contrast with other works we have read in this class?
- Feel free to comment on anything else you wish to regarding the work

Be as specific as possible in your responses and back them up with details from the readings. Responses must be typed. Each entry should be about 500-700 words. Due dates are on the schedule. Since this assignment is partly designed to keep you current on the readings, late responses will not be accepted without prior approval. We will read from response entries in small groups in class and then discuss them with the larger group. So write them with the whole class as the intended audience.

---

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

**CELL PHONES AND OTHER ELECTRONIC GADGETS:** This may be a surprise to some of you, but ringing phones do not belong in the classroom. If your phone repeatedly interrupts class, I will feel free to drop you from the course as a disruptive influence. Except for laptops used for note-taking or other class activities, all electronic devices such as ipods must be turned off when you enter the classroom, and remain off. Please do not send text messages.

**PLAGIARISM:** Plagiarism means representing the words or ideas of another as one's own. This includes quoting or paraphrasing from published sources (yes, including the internet) without acknowledging/citing the source of your information, or presenting quoted materials as your own words. You must be very clear about attribution of sources and you must know how to cite sources in a paper. Students who are unfamiliar with how to cite sources should purchase a style manual such as the MLA (Modern Language Association) Handbook ([or find similar material on the internet](#)). **If I identify any plagiarized material in any of your work, I will FAIL YOU FOR THE SEMESTER, and you will be reported to the appropriate university authorities.** Neither ignorance nor extenuating circumstances justify plagiarism. (That is, I don't want to hear any excuses; tears will avail you not. Telling me you did it in high school and got away with it won't help either.) I will be glad to discuss any citation concerns you may have.

If you find yourself falling behind in your work due to extenuating circumstances, and feel tempted to plagiarize, DON'T. Instead, talk to me about your difficulties. We can arrange for projects to be turned in late, and, if circumstances warrant, we can even arrange for an incomplete grade in the class. I have a very generous and flexible system for deadlines, and a very inflexible and draconian system for plagiarism: take your pick. Don't test me. I will, and nearly every semester I do, fail students for plagiarism. In such cases, appeals from parents will not be considered.

**DEADLINES:** Unless arranged otherwise ahead of time, assignments are due at the times listed on the schedule. Late assignments will be accepted, but will suffer a proportional grade penalty. Unless otherwise arranged, no assignment will be accepted more than 2 weeks after the due date.

**WRITING CENTER:** The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class, other classes, or for nonacademic purposes including creative writing, cover letters and resumes, applications for graduate school, and wide range of other forms and genres. Knowledgeable peer consultants are available to talk with you as you plan, draft and revise your writing. Please check the [Writing Center website](#), or stop by the main center in 115 Andrews Hall, for locations, hours, and information about scheduling 25- or 50-minute consultations.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

## SCHEDULE

### AUGUST

- 25 Introductions
- 27 Deep map in-class project

### SEPTEMBER

- 1 Deep map discussion
- 3 Read in Manning, *Grasslands*, chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- 8 Read in Manning, *Grasslands*, chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.
- 10 Read in Manning, *Grasslands*, chapters 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

**READING RESPONSE TO MANNING DUE**

- 15 Read Hansen's *Prairie Suite*  
Field Trip to [Spring Creek Prairie](#)  
Carpool leaving at 1:30 from 14th St. cul de sac outside Andrews.

- 17 Discuss Hansen's *Prairie Suite* and field trip.

- 22 Read in Saiser's *Lost in Seward County*  
**RESPONSE TO HANSEN AND FIELD TRIP DUE**, see "Assignments"

- 24 Saiser, class visit.

- 29 **READING RESPONSE TO SAISER DUE**

### OCTOBER

- 1 VIDEO: Tallgrass Prairie
- 6 Read in Price, *Man Killed by Pheasant*: "Prelude" and essays in Part 1, pp. 1-106.
- 8 Price: Read essays in Part 2, pp. 109-175.
- 13 Price: Read essays in Part 3 and "On Kalsow Prairie," pp. 179-260.  
Class visit by John Price
- 15 **READING RESPONSE TO PRICE DUE**

- 20 FALL BREAK  
22 Read in Sandoz, *Old Jules*: Introduction and chs. I-VII.  
27 Sandoz: *Old Jules*: chs. VIII-XIII.  
29 Sandoz: *Old Jules*: chs. XIV-XXI.

#### NOVEMBER

- 3 **READING RESPONSE ON SANDOZ DUE**  
5 Read in O'Brien, *Buffalo for the Broken Heart*:  
10 O'Brien:  
12 O'Brien  
17 **READING RESPONSE ON O'BRIEN DUE**  
19 Read in Power, *Grass Dancer*:  
24 **Power:**  
26 **GIVE THANKS FOR NO CLASS TODAY**

#### DECEMBER

- 1 **READING RESPONSE ON POWER DUE**  
3 Read in Anaya:  
8 Read in Anaya:  
10 **READING RESPONSE ON ANAYA DUE**  
December 16, 5:30 TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE