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LIVE CLASSES

American Literature

Dr. Whit Jones, Ph.D.

Syllabus

2024-2025

Personal Note

Welcome! I'm glad to have you in my American Literature course! I've taught literature at the college level for around thirty-eight years—at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Go Heels!), where I taught American literature—some as a graduate teaching assistant while working on my Ph.D. in English and American literature, and at Bryan College, where I was a full-time English professor. Years ago, however, I taught four years of public high school English, and I've helped my wife homeschool all four of our children, so I have a good idea of both what is required for success in college and what it takes to help high school students see the beauty and truth of classic literature, its relevance to their lives and their walk with Christ, and the skills required for writing clearly and persuasively about literature or any text in any course.

Some students don't like studying literature because they haven't been taught it well. They've been given the impression that they should be really impressed by a story just because Twain, Hemingway, or Faulkner wrote it, even though they don't really understand the story or see what makes it special. It's particularly for such students that I wrote the *American Literature*, 2nd edition, including all the introductions to periods and authors, the questions and answers on individual literary works, the chapter and semester tests, and the paper assignments and examples.

In all my teaching, I try to help students see the special skill that went into a story, poem, or play and the deep truth about life and human nature that it conveys—the truth that helps them better understand themselves and the person sitting next to them, the truth that can make them better followers of Christ. So, in the end, my students seem to gain a significant understanding of why generations of readers have continued to find a classic

literary work worth reading. The students also see how they themselves have profited from reading it, why they might want to read it again sometime, and how they can explain it intelligently to someone else.

Studying literature is meant to improve the enjoyment and insight with which we live our daily lives. In my course you can gain tools that help you see that literature is both true and fun, even if you haven't had that experience with it in the past. And you can learn thinking and writing skills that prepare you for college courses in many subject areas besides English.

Description:

In American Literature, we'll start with the literature of the colonial period in America, when the country was first being settled, literature that includes well-written historical accounts such as William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, the work of early American poets Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, and sermons by the great early American preacher Jonathan Edwards.

Then we'll move to the literature of the period that includes the American Revolution, a period that is known in Western European history as the Age of Reason. In this period we'll study such writers as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and his wife Abigail, and an American farmer originally from France named J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur.

Then we'll explore the Romantic Age in American literature, which occurs in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and includes some of America's greatest early imaginative writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville.

The writers we'll study from the Age of Realism, which goes from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, include Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Mark Twain (whose picture is on our text).

The final period in the course is the Modern Age, which goes from the beginning of World War I to the 1960s and includes such writers as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, T. S. Eliot, Harper Lee, and Lorraine Hansberry.

The literature that we'll study includes historical accounts, political statements, letters, sermons, autobiographies, short stories, novels, poems, and a play, so there will be plenty of variety in the course. You'll see how deeply Christian many American writers are but also how consistent with much of biblical truth even the non-Christian writers are. Of course, where a writer's vision of life and human nature diverges from the Christian worldview, we'll discuss that as well, and the discussion will help you build discernment that will give you a better sense of what you as a Christian believe and why, and a better understanding of how to talk with unbelievers. Finally, you'll see the impressive intellectual depth and artistic excellence of much of American literature.

Prerequisites:

None.

Course Materials:

- [American Literature, 2nd Ed.](#) by Dr. Whit Jones
- The following works (paperback or PDF—you can find some on the internet):

- *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
- *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

At the beginning of the school year you need only have the *American Literature*, 2nd Edition, text. We'll be using this crucial book from day one.

The other four works—by Twain, Lee, Hemingway, and Hansberry—we will use as the year progresses. Any version of these four works—hardback, paperback, an online text or pdf version, or within a literature anthology—is fine. You will be able to see when we will get to these later works by looking at the Table of Contents of *American Literature* and the Assignments guide I have provided for you on Canvas. There will also be a few short stories and poems that are not in the text because paying copyright fees for them would significantly increase the cost of the text. My Assignments file makes it clear when we will be reading these works, and students have always been able to find them online.

Assignment Structure:

Participation Grade

Students need to be disciplined about being on time for their online classes. It's best to click on the link in the "Meeting Link for Live Classes" module in Canvas around ten minutes before class begins, so if there's any problem entering, you can solve it before class time.

It's better for you to come late to class than not come at all, but significant or persistent lateness will hurt your *class* participation grade. If you are sick or, for some reason, have to miss a class meeting and you don't want to lose class participation credit, you or your parents need to email me about why you had to miss it.

Another part of your class participation grade will depend on your use of the chatbox during each class to share some of your homework answers. I don't want just to lecture on the works assigned; I also want to respond to points that you make about the works assigned for that week and any questions that you ask.

Homework Reading & Answers Quiz

Have the typed answers you turned in for the Homework Reading and Answers Quiz available on your computer during class. I ask students to copy and paste some of these answers into the chatbox as part of our class discussion and their class participation. I'll also try to have students occasionally read a few lines aloud to the class for some extra credit in-class participation. (A working microphone is not required for the class but is recommended.) Also, of course, have your *American Literature* text available during class, and have some way of taking notes on what I and the other students say during class. In order to make the highest grade and get the most out of the course, you'll need to be an active learner.

For each week's class, you'll have a significant reading assignment. On the Homework Reading and Answers Quiz, I'll ask you to pledge on your honor that you've read at least 75% of the assigned reading in order to get full credit for your homework for that week. I'll also ask you to pledge that you've written/typed or done verbal answers for a number of questions in the text that have been assigned for that week. You are on your honor to answer these questions yourself *before* you look at my answers online at Apologia Book

Extras (Password: WhitLit)—or where I've provided the answers in Canvas. I provide the answers in Canvas as a courtesy to everyone taking the course. You are also required, however, to check your answers by looking at my answers. Therefore you'll also pledge on the Homework Reading and Answers Quiz that you've answered all the assigned questions and checked these answers against mine. For the final part of this quiz, you must turn in typed answers for several of the text questions that I have chosen in that week's assignment.

Chapter Tests

Unless the Assignments file indicates an exception, every two weeks, you'll take the chapter test on the chapter in the text that we've been studying, a test that will be on Canvas for you. Each test involves objective questions (matching, identification, short answers) and an essay question. You will be on your honor to study the book and the questions and answers, but then close them all and take the chapter test online in Canvas from memory, except for the essay question. I'll usually give you the essay question on the test in advance and let you prepare notes for it, which you are free to take out and use when you're writing the essay, though you may not use them for the objective parts of the test. I'll grade the test essays for clear, accurate, grammatically correct, and persuasive writing, but I will take into account that you have limited time on a test essay.

Semester Exams

At the end of each semester will be a final semester exam. I will give you a review guide for the exam, and you will take it instead of taking a final chapter test. Since the exams cover the whole semester, each exam will be weighted more heavily in your grade than a single chapter test.

Interpretation Paper

Finally, you'll have two significant literary interpretation papers to do in this course. The first paper will be an interpretation of a short story by Herman Melville, and the second semester's paper will be an interpretation of a poem by Robert Frost. You will receive a good deal of help from my instructions for writing the paper, but beyond that help, you are on your honor not to do any research in a book or on the internet about the story or poem you're interpreting, not to use Artificial Intelligence, and to use only ideas that you develop on your own or learn in class. (Even ideas you learned in class I want you to put in your own words.)

Here are the percentages that show how heavily these parts of the coursework that I've just discussed will be weighted in figuring your final course grade:

- Class Participation Average: 10%
- Homework Quiz Average: 25%
- Chapter Test Average: 30%
- Final Semester Exam Average: 20%
- Interpretation Paper Average: 15%

Due Dates and Late Policy:

Any homework assignment, chapter test, or paper not turned in on time will be counted late, and a point deduction will be made. Up to ten percentage points or a letter grade deduction will be made if the assignment is a full week late, but I don't like deducting points and encourage students to be on time with their work. I will be sure to specify the day and time by which every assignment is to be turned in. Missing classes and the class participation involved may also result in a grade deduction. If there is a reasonable excuse for the missed class or a good reason for the student to be given extended time on an assignment, the student or her parent needs to

email me the reason for the absence, lateness, or extension. It's best for me to be alerted ahead of time about any missed classes or late work, so if possible, email me ahead of time about them.

Class Canvas Portal:

Students will access the course through the Canvas course portal:

<https://apologia.instructure.com/>.

Weekly Live Lecture:

Mondays, 2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. EST

Wednesdays, 2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. EST

Live Lecture Attendance Policy:

Class participation is a significant part of the course grade.

Any students who are not able to come to the live class on any given week may watch the recording of the class that will be posted in “Class Recordings” on Canvas and gain credit for class participation by emailing me the following.

- The date of the class they missed
- The legitimate reason they had to miss that class
- A statement that they've watched all of that week's recording
- Two of their best-typed homework answers for that week, with the literary work and number of the question, clearly noted, along with each answer.

Conduct & Academic Dishonesty:

Although it is okay for students to communicate with each other informally before class through the Chatbox, during the time I'm teaching the class, I expect students only to ask meaningful questions and make comments relevant to our discussion of the literature and the tests and papers on it. They are not to type anything into the Chatbox during our class discussion that is off-topic, flippant, or in any way offensive. In all your interactions with me as a teacher, I expect to be treated with respect, and I expect you to show Christian kindness and courtesy at all times to each other. Repeated misbehavior could result in my asking the student to leave the course. Of course I wouldn't expect ever to have to do this. I've found that my Apologia students tend to be noticeably more mature and godly than most young people their age.

Students should not be directly in contact with one another outside of class unless both students have the knowledge and permission of a parent or guardian. Apologia does not oversee the direct contact between students (as in a study group) and holds no responsibility for the content of these exchanges, in the same way, that my high school teachers had no control over what my friends and I said to each other after school. It is the responsibility of the student to foster Christlike friendships and the responsibility of the parent/guardian to supervise online activity at home. In short, feel free to be in touch with each other outside of class, but make sure your parents know.

I expect you to be truthful in all the pledges you make in this class regarding homework, tests, and papers. Any pledge that I find to be untrue or any assignment that I find that you have cheated on, rather than doing your own work and doing it according to the rules I've set, I will automatically give

a grade of *O* (Even an *F* in my class is fifty points better than a *O*). Apart from the profound effect on your grade, untruthfulness could cause you to learn much less in this course than you are capable of. But being truthful has even larger implications than the grade you make or what you learn in a course. Truth is the basis of all relationships, and a habit of untruthfulness can destroy a marriage, a close relationship with a child, or a friend and even eliminate a chance to lead someone to Christ.

Part of this truthfulness means that all of the writing you must be your own—your own words and sentence structures. You are never to copy my answers for your homework, and you are never to use the wording of any other source unless you use quotation marks and attribute the words to that source. Even if you use just the ideas from a published source, not the exact words or sentence structures, you must acknowledge that source.

When you are pledging on the Homework Reading and Answers Quizzes that you have read at least 75% of the assigned reading in the work we're studying, you must really have done that reading in order to answer "True" to that statement. The same is the case with the statement on the quiz that you have answered all the assigned questions and *then* (and only then) checked them against mine in order to improve your own. Unless I specify that you can use research and you acknowledge that research and give proper credit, you are on your honor to use only your own words and ideas, along with your consideration of my answers and anything you learned in class discussion when you answer homework questions, take a test, or write a paper. The use of Artificial Intelligence is prohibited in this course unless I specifically ask you to use it for some special reason, and it is unlikely that I will.

Ephesians 4:15 asserts the crucial importance of “speaking the truth in love,” and developing a habit of truthfulness is fundamental to our growing close to and pleasing Christ. Remember that upright or sinful behavior in any area of our lives quickly turns into a habit, and habits have tremendous momentum in our lives for good or ill. We all know that hypocritical, dishonest people who call themselves Christians have been a major reason why Christianity has been discredited in America, just as we know that faithful, consistent Christians have been potent witnesses to the truth and love of God by their lives as well as their words. So I urge you, for many reasons, only one of which has to do with your grades and learning in this course, to be truthful in all your work in this course. If you ever feel tempted to cheat because of time pressures or a sense that you’re incapable of doing the work, please contact me. I will seek to encourage you and calm you, and I will help you get the work done honestly, even if it has to be late.

Help and Questions Outside of Live Class:

You can contact your instructor at DrJones@Apologia.com or (423) 665-9588 (no calls after 10 p.m., please).