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# Live Classes

## American Literature, Options 1 and 2

Whit Jones

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Syllabus

2025-2026



## Personal Note from Instructor:

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'm finishing my thirty-third year as 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 (the youngest of whom is turning twenty-five in a few weeks), 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 about 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 or 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* text, which is now in a 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—truth that helps them better understand themselves and the person sitting next to them, 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. That's why the course can serve as both a [writing credit](#) and an [American literature credit](#).

## Recommended Grade Level:

10<sup>TH</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12th grade.

## Prerequisites:

None.

## Live Lecture Date & Time:

American Literature, Option 1, meets on Mondays at 2:00-3:20 pm EST.

American Literature, Option 2, meets on Wednesdays at 2:00-3:20 pm EST.

## 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 American'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 1960's 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.

Throughout the course I will use a Homework Reading and Answers Quiz each week to make sure you're keeping up with the reading. You'll pledge that you've read at least 75% of the assigned reading and answer questions on that reading, including some written answers. You'll check your answers against the answers I provide for correction before you turn in the quiz and come to class. In the live Zoom class you'll share some of your written answers and make other comments in the chat box as we discuss that week's reading. Over the course of the year you'll take several chapter tests, three to four per semester, take a first and second semester exam, and write a paper in MLA format interpreting a short story and a paper interpreting a poem.

As I grade your writing over the course of the year, I will comment on both your strengths and weaknesses in such areas as grammar, punctuation, and formatting, clarity and accuracy in your thesis and sub-points, and persuasiveness in the support you provide for them through specific examples from the literary work and analysis of those examples. By the end of the year, you should know a great deal more not only about American Literature and the life truths its authors communicate but about how to write clearly, correctly, and persuasively for any college course.

## Required Class Materials:

- *American Literature*, 2nd Edition, by Whit Jones, Apologia
- *Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain
- *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee
- *The Old Man and the Sea*, by Ernest Hemingway
- *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.

## Recommended Class Materials:

It would help you to have a pen and highlighter, for marking passages in the literary works we read and taking notes, and a notebook for keeping track of these notes and copies of some of the helpful files I provide in Canvas. A working laptop camera would be helpful—I appreciate being able to see students' faces when we're sharing prayer requests and praying before the recorded class begins, though this camera is not required. A working laptop microphone would also be helpful, since I give occasionally students extra class participation credit if they're willing to read a paragraph or poem stanza aloud for the class to hear.

## Course Topics:

We will cover the range of American Literature, including short stories, novels, poems, sermons, political writings, and a play—works ranging from the Colonial Period to the Modern Age. And we will consistently be addressing how these works apply to our lives and our walk with Christ.

# Assignment Structure:

## Class Participation

I'll expect all students to be present every week for our online class Zoom meeting. Be on time. It's best to click on the "Meeting Link to Live Class" link in Canvas ten or so minutes before class begins so that if there's any problem entering, you can solve it before class time. It's better for you come late to class than not come at all, but significant or persistent lateness will hurt your class participation grade. Another part of your class participation grade will depend on your using the Chat box to share at least one homework answer during each class meeting. I also appreciate student questions and comments during class on the works we're studying. I don't want just to lecture on the works assigned. I also want to respond to questions that you ask and the points that you make.

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 Chat box as part of our class discussion. I'll also try to activate each student's microphone occasionally and have him or her read a few lines aloud to the class as part of his class participation. (A working microphone is not required for the class but recommended. I may have two or three students occasionally read a dialogue from a play aloud.)

Any students who are taking the class but 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:

1. The date of class they missed.
2. The legitimate reason they had to miss that class.
3. A statement that they've watched all of that week's recording.

4. 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.

Students are not allowed to gain class participation credit for a missed live class unless they have that “legitimate reason” for missing. If they do have such a reason, however, and follow the directions above, they get full class participation credit for that class. Class participation is a significant part of the course grade.

### **Homework Reading and Answers Quiz**

For each week’s class you’ll have a reading assignment. On the Homework Reading and Answers Quiz that you turn in thirty minutes before class, I’ll ask you to pledge on your honor that you’ve read at least 75% of the assigned reading. Each week I’ll also assign you to answer questions on this reading. You may do many of the answers orally or in handwriting, if you prefer, but I will require you to type some of them that I specify and turn them in as part of that week’s Quiz. I require you to pledge on the Quiz that you’ve checked all your answers against the answers I’ve provided in Canvas, but *only after* you’ve first attempted your own answer. (The answers are also available online at Apologia Book Extras [Password: WhitLit].)

### **Chapter Tests**

Typically I ask my students to take around three to four chapter tests per semester. 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 homework 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 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 after you’ve finished the objective part, when you’re writing the essay. I’ll grade the test essays for clear, accurate, grammatically correct, persuasive



writing, but I will take into some 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. Since these exams cover the whole semester, each exam will take longer and be weighted more heavily in your grade than a single chapter test is. I will give you the essay question for each exam in advance as well, so that you can prepare notes and use them when writing the essay.

## Interpretation Papers

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 the homework and class discussion on these works and from my instructions for writing the papers.

## Grading:

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%  
(making each exam weighted about 2.5 times a single chapter test)
- Interpretation Paper Average: 15%.

# Due Dates and Late Policy:

I will be sure to specify the day and time by which every homework quiz, survey, chapter test, semester exam, or paper assignment is to be turned in. Any assignment 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 may 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. When truly extenuating circumstances, verified by your parents, are the reason for the lateness, I will provide extra time on the assignment with no late penalty.

## Student Conduct:

### Academic Dishonesty

I'll 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 0. (Even an *F* in my class is fifty points better than a 0.) 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 relationship, 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% 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 (AI), including programs such as Grammarly, which complete or rewrite sentences for you, is prohibited in this course, unless I specifically ask you to use it for some special reason. This class is meant to teach you to do your own good thinking and writing, without leaning on outside crutches.

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.

## Class Behavior

Although it is okay for students to communicate with each other informally before class through the Chat box, during the time I'm teaching the class, I expect students to ask only 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 Chat box during our class discussion that is off topic or 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.

## Instructor Availability for Questions:

You may contact me at [DrJones@Apologia.com](mailto:DrJones@Apologia.com) and, if a significant need arises, at (423) 665-9588 (just no calls after 10 pm, please).