

English 200: Reading Literature
“Rebels, Antiheroes, and Other Losers”

Spring 2011
Professor Lloyd Michaels

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Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:30, TTh 3:00-4:15; and by appointment

Required Texts

English 200 Coursepack
Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*
Murfin and Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*
Sophocles, *Antigone*
Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*
Wright, *Native Son*

Course Description

English 200 is the introductory course to the discipline. It is designed to provide students with both an appreciation for the value of literature and the critical tools for literary study. This section of the course will focus on several models of critical practice, including formalism, reader response, historical contextualization, and ideological interpretation.

Course Objectives:

1. To master basic terms of literary criticism
2. To read texts closely and critically
3. To identify the conventions of different literary genres
4. To differentiate among various methods of interpreting texts
5. To formulate an interpretive argument both in writing and in class discussion
6. To recognize cultural and literary significance of historically underrepresented perspectives and traditions
7. To acquire skills in literary research
8. To gain confidence in writing and speaking about literature
9. To appreciate the significance and pleasure to be derived from thoughtful reading of literature
10. To prepare for more advanced study in the English Department

To create some thematic consistency to the syllabus, we will study texts that center on an isolated, marginalized, or resistant individual in conflict with vested authority. These characters share many traits but can be distinguished from one another as heroes, villains, victims, or antiheroes. Most of them, in one way or another, are “born to lose.”

Attendance

Because English 200 is predicated on discussion rather than lecture, regular attendance and informed participation are required. *No more than three unexcused absences will be allowed without grade penalty.* Whenever possible, students should notify me in advance if they plan to miss a class meeting. More than simply occupying a seat, students must be prepared to respond to topics announced in advance and to the particular text being discussed each day.

Academic Requirements

1. Regular written assignments, usually no more than 1-2 pp.
2. 3-4 formal essays of increasing length and complexity
3. Mid-Term and Final exam

Grading

I am a holistic grader, which means, in part, that I do not calculate your final grade mathematically. Because the opportunities for evaluating students in this course are so frequent and varied, it is impossible to assign precise percentages for each assignment. In general, the final grade will be weighted as follows:

Graded formal essays	40%
Mid-Term Exam	15%
Final Exam	25%
Participation/Improvement	20%

Students are invited to visit during office hours at any time during the semester to discuss their current standing in the course.

Course Design

English 200 is improvisational in design, which means that we will follow intelligent discussion wherever it leads us. The course is broadly organized into four sections:

1. *Close Reading*: The essential practice of all literary study, regardless of critical approach, is careful, methodical (re-)reading of the text. In this introductory section, which may take as much as three weeks, students will analyze a variety of short forms—parable, sonnet, narrative prose—from several different interpretive perspectives. The brevity of these texts will allow students to read the longer works that comprise the rest of the course.
2. *Joining the Conversation*: One difference between literary study in college as opposed to high school is that here you are asked not merely to express your own ideas about a work of literature but to present those ideas in response to the thoughts of your classmates or, more frequently, to those of other scholars. In this section, you will practice summarizing the ideas of others about such problematic characters as Sophocles' *Antigone* or Browning's *Duke of Ferrara* before staking out your own position in the critical conversation.
3. *Reading with a Purpose*: This section builds on the arguments you have developed in analyzing texts to describe some general theories of literature: formalist, expressive didactic, and mimetic. *Notes from Underground* will serve as a case study of how literature can be read with distinctive objectives and values in mind
4. *Conducting Research*: In this concluding section, students apply the various methodologies practiced earlier in the course to Wright's *Native Son*, then read several scholarly articles that analyze the novel from different critical perspectives.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, constitutes a kind of intellectual theft. Plagiarism occurs when you use another author's language or specific ideas without giving proper credit. It is a violation of Allegheny's Honor Code and will be treated accordingly.

Be very careful when taking notes, either from print or Web sources, to distinguish between your own words and thoughts and those that originate elsewhere. When in doubt, consult me; when I am not available, err on the safe side and document the source. Be certain to cite all secondary sources, both in the text and at the end in a list of Works Cited. (In this class, MLA documentation style is required. See the Learning Commons link <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/> for more about acknowledging sources and avoiding plagiarism.)

Students with Disabilities

Any student who feels the need for an accommodation based on a documented disability should contact me as well as John Mangine in the Learning Commons (john.mangine@allegheny.edu, 332-2898). The Learning Commons arranges reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities.

Weekly Schedule of Readings

Note: The following syllabus should be regarded as tentative. Since the readings are particularly light during the first five weeks, students should take care to 1) read these early texts several times, enough to have them nearly committed to memory, and 2) read *Notes from Underground* and *Native Son* during the first half of the semester, completing them before the first day of discussion for each.

<u>Tu-Th</u>	<u>Readings</u>	<u>Topics & Terms</u>
1/25-27	Kafka, "Give It Up!", "The Judgment"	close reading; formalism narrative; story; discourse bildungsroman structure
2/1-3	Doctorow, "The Writer in the Family" O'Connor, "Good Country People"	point of view allegory; symbolism
2/8-10	Oates, "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?"	grotesque
2/15-17	Shakespeare, "Sonnet 18"; "Sonnet 73" Wordsworth, "Nuns Fret Not"; "London, 1802" Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" Keats, "Ozymandias" McKay, "The Harlem Dancer"; "If We Must Die"	sonnet self-reflexivity allusion didacticism

2/22-24	Browning, "My Last Duchess" Gemmette, "Browning's 'My Last Duchess': An Untenable Position" Jerman, "Browning's Witless Duke" Perrine, "Browning's Shrewd Duke"	dramatic monologue; persona irony
3/1-3	Eliot, "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"	intertextuality antihero
3/8-10	Aristotle, from <i>The Poetics</i> Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>	tragedy; tragic hero; hamartia anagnorisis; catharsis
3/15-17	Walsh, "Antigone Now"	MID-TERM EXAM
SPRING BREAK		
3/29-31	Dostoevsky, <i>Notes from Underground</i>	ideology cultural studies
4/5-7	Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus"	myth; existentialism
4/12-14	Wright, <i>Native Son</i> Butler, "Point of View"	imagery
4/19-21	Joyce, "The Tragic Hero" Bryant, "The Violence of <i>Native Son</i> "	realism; naturalism; socialist realism
4/26-28	France, "Misogyny and Appropriation in <i>Native Son</i> "	feminist criticism