

English 203 **Studies in American Literature**

Spring 2011
Section 00
MWF 11-11:50 a.m.
Arter 205

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These volumes are so far from being intended as a substitute for genuine history, that the ambition of the writer would be fully gratified if, by this work, any of our young countrymen should be stimulated to investigate the early history of their native land.

So concludes the preface of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in Massachusetts*, the first novel we will read in this course and one that will provide a touchstone for us throughout the semester. Our goal will be, in part, "to investigate the early history of [our] native land" (or, if the United States happens not to be your country of birth, the early history of the nation in which you now reside). Much more so, however, we will be investigating how American literature has helped to construct and reconstruct a narrative of national history, one that helps us ("our young countrymen," Sedgwick calls them; our young countrywomen, too, I will add) to imagine a relationship between ourselves and our national predecessors—our "Founders," as we may or may not wish to call them.

To do this, we will focus on two colonial settlements that have since been interpreted (in literature, film, popular history, and other forms of culture) as sites of national origin, sites at which "America" itself may be said to have begun. The first of these is Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the New World and the place that furnishes us one of our earliest national myths, the Pocahontas story, as well as one of our original sins, slavery. The second is Massachusetts, the most important setting in the story of early American "freedom" yet also the site of the first wars to exterminate natives. The course will thus provide you some sense of U.S. literary history. More than this, however, it aims to provide you a sense of U.S. literary *historicity*: a sense of how works of the imagination both reflect the historical moments at which they were produced and contribute to an ongoing, never settled, and always charged set of debates concerning who "we" are, what our "early history" represents, and to whom our "native land" belongs.

Required Texts All texts (except for those uploaded to Sakai) are available at the Campus Center bookstore. If you do not already own copies of the texts ordered for this course, buy the editions listed below. If you happen already to own a different edition of a text and do not wish to purchase another, check with me to make sure your edition is acceptable.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie* (Rutgers)
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Penguin)
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems* (Signet Classics)
Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (Penguin)
John Updike, *Roger's Version* (Fawcett Columbine)
Sherman Alexie, *Indian Killer* (Grove)
Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (Vintage)

Course schedule Tentative and subject to change

Wed. 1/19	Introduction and Course Overview	
Fri. 1/21	John Smith, from <i>The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles</i> (Sakai)	
Mon. 1/24	John Winthrop, from “A Modell of Christian Charity” and <i>The Journal of John Winthrop</i> (Sakai)	
Wed. 1/26	Smith and Winthrop continued (no additional reading)	
Fri. 1/28	Class does not meet: read additional texts, prepare reports	
Mon. 1/31	Sedgwick, <i>Hope Leslie</i> , Preface-vol. 1, ch. 3 (pp. 1-40)	Reports due
Wed. 2/2	Sedgwick, <i>Hope Leslie</i> , vol. 1, chs. 4-7 (pp. 41-94)	
Fri. 2/4	Sedgwick, <i>Hope Leslie</i> , vol. 1, chs. 8-12 (pp. 95-169)	
Mon. 2/7	Sedgwick, <i>Hope Leslie</i> , vol. 2, chs. 1-5 (pp. 173-235)	
Wed. 2/9	Sedgwick, <i>Hope Leslie</i> , vol. 2, chs. 6-9 (pp. 236-294)	
Fri. 2/11	Sedgwick, <i>Hope Leslie</i> , vol. 2, chs. 10-15 (pp. 295-353)	
Mon. 2/14	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , “The Custom House” and ch. 1 (pp. 7-46)	
Wed. 2/16	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , chs. 2-5 (pp. 47-79)	
Fri. 2/18	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , chs. 6-12 (pp. 80-138)	
Mon. 2/21	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , chs. 13-17 (pp. 139-173)	
Wed. 2/23	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> , chs. 18-Conclusion (pp. 174-228)	
Fri. 2/25	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> continued (no additional reading)	
Mon. 2/28	Longfellow, <i>The Courtship of Miles Standish</i> , sections I-IV (pp. 178-200)	
Wed. 3/2	Longfellow, <i>The Courtship of Miles Standish</i> , sections V-IX (pp. 201-227)	
Fri. 3/4	Longfellow, <i>The Courtship of Miles Standish</i> (no additional reading)	Paper 1 due
Mon. 3/7	Dickinson, “God is a distant—stately Lover,” “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church,” “The Bible is an antique Volume,” “The Brain—is wider than the Sky,” “Dust is the only Secret,” “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers,” “‘Faith’ is a fine invention,” “‘Heaven’ is what I cannot reach!” (Sakai)	
Wed. 3/9	Dickinson, “To hang our head—ostensibly,” “I cautious, scanned my little life,” “I never felt at Home—Below,” “Savior! I’ve no one else to tell,” “I never saw a moor,” “He fumbles at your Soul” (Sakai)	
Fri. 3/11	Dickinson, “Dare you see a Soul <i>at the White Heat?</i> ” “I like a look of Agony,” “I’m ‘wife’—I’ve finished that,” “Did the harebell loose her girdle,” “I started Early—Took my Dog” (Sakai)	
Mon. 3/14	Dickinson, “My life had stood—a Loaded Gun” (Sakai)	
Wed. 3/16	Twain, <i>Pudd’nhead Wilson</i> , “A Whisper to the Reader”—ch. 8 (53-110)	
Fri. 3/18	Twain, <i>Pudd’nhead Wilson</i> , chs. 9-16 (111-176)	
Mon. 3/21-Fri. 3/25	Spring Break	
Mon. 3/28	Twain, <i>Pudd’nhead Wilson</i> , chs. 17-Conclusion (177-226)	
Wed. 3/30	Twain, <i>Those Extraordinary Twins</i> (229-303)	
Fri. 4/1	Updike, <i>Roger’s Version</i> , Book I (3-74)	

Mon. 4/4 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Book II (75-148)
Wed. 4/6 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Book III (149-226)
Fri. 4/8 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Book IV (227-284)

Mon. 4/11 Updike, *Roger's Version*, Book V (285-329)
Wed. 4/13 Alexie, *Indian Killer*, I (pp. 3-153)
Fri. 4/15 Alexie, *Indian Killer*, II (pp. 157-296)

Mon. 4/18 Alexie, *Indian Killer*, III (pp. 299-420)
Wed. 4/20 Alexie, *Indian Killer* continued (no additional reading)
Fri. 4/22 Morrison, *A Mercy* (pp. 3-41)

Mon. 4/25 Morrison, *A Mercy* (pp. 42-83)
Wed. 4/27 Morrison, *A Mercy* (pp. 84-136)
Fri. 4/29 Morrison, *A Mercy* (pp. 137-196)

Mon. 5/2 Morrison, *A Mercy* continued (no additional reading)

Paper 2 due

Course policies and procedures

Contacting me In addition to my regular office hours, I am available for appointments; you will need to e-mail or talk to me before or after class to arrange one. I tend to do most of my e-mailing in the morning and early afternoon. I cannot be counted upon to check e-mail during the evening, though, so if you're wanting to correspond about an upcoming paper, do not wait until the evening before it's due to contact me.

Readings You should complete the assigned reading before each class and be ready to discuss it. Longer readings are divided into sections, and you are responsible only for those pages assigned for that day.

To borrow a line from a great teacher of mine, you should also think of reading as a contact sport. Active reading requires writing, so be sure to mark your text, noting specific passages, questions, etc. you would like to discuss in class.

Attendance and participation The success of the course depends on the enthusiastic participation of each and every member. I thus expect you to arrive to every class having completed the assigned reading and prepared yourself to contribute to class discussion. Come with responses to the questions I may have posed during the class before. Come also with questions and comments of your own—and, more generally, with a willingness to involve yourself in the give-and-take of that day's discussion. I do a fair amount of preparation to ensure productive discussions, but my favorite classes are inevitably those that assume lives of their own (which is to say, those in which students take the lead and work collaboratively to address the issues they find most compelling).

You may wish to e-mail or meet with me before or after class if there are specific issues you would like to discuss. I consider these forms of participation, too, though they cannot entirely substitute for active in-class participation.

Your participation grade (15% of your final grade) will reflect how well you make these contributions. The student who does not miss class and comes always prepared, always willing to contribute insights of his or her own, and always willing to respond thoughtfully to the questions and comments of others will receive a grade in the "A" range. The student who does not miss class but contributes less frequently will receive a "B." The student who misses class routinely (four or five unexcused absences) will receive a "C," as will the student who shows up but participates infrequently and/or unpreparedly. The student who receives a "D" participation grade likely has six unexcused absences. The student who has seven or more unexcused absences simply fails the course.

Excused absences generally involve family emergencies or illness. In the case of illness, you are required to provide a doctor's note. Should you miss class for any reason, you are responsible for knowing what went on, including any changes to the syllabus or revisions to assignments.

Papers You will write two 5-6 pp. papers for this course, each of which will count for 20% of your final grade. We will discuss later what constitutes a successful paper, and I will provide you a handout that outlines my expectations and explains what in my book separates “A” from “B” work, etc. Handouts for both papers will arrive at least two weeks before their due dates.

Weekly reading quizzes You will be quizzed often, probably each Friday, on the assigned reading for the week. These will be brief in-class writing assignments, and they will show me that you are keeping up with the reading. They will also help us to launch into lectures/discussions. Some may ask you to identify specific passages from the assigned reading. Others may be more conceptual: I might ask you to comment on the importance of a particular character or key idea, for example, or I may ask you compare the current text with an earlier one. Regardless of the question, the answer should be detailed. Show me that you have read the assigned material carefully, looking up words and historical references with which you are unfamiliar. I want to see evidence that you have read the assignment completely, thoroughly, and thoughtfully.

If you miss a quiz because of an excused absence, you will be allowed to make it up; it will be your responsibility to contact me and arrange a time outside of class to take the make-up. You will also be able to drop your lowest quiz grade. We will take a total of 11.

Quizzes will normally commence at the beginning of a class period; if you arrive late, you may miss part or all of the quiz. (Note: There will be no quiz during weeks 1 or 2. Your first quiz will be Fri., Feb. 4).

Week 3 reports At the beginning of the third week of classes you will turn in a brief report on one supplementary reading you yourself do for this course. This reading will concern some figure or event from early American history likely to prove relevant to one of our later discussions. If and when it does, you should feel especially well qualified to guide class discussion.

Exams There will be no midterm or final exam for this course. The weekly quizzes will take the place of exams and provide some objective measure that you’re keeping up with the reading.

Plagiarism Article III, section 3 of the Allegheny College Honor Code defines plagiarism as “using the ideas or words of another without citing the sources from which the ideas or words are taken.” We will devote a portion of an upcoming class to discussing plagiarism and how to avoid it. Know now simply that I take it very seriously, that it will result in an “F” for the course, and that I will refer any instance of it to the Honor Committee.

Grading Your grade for the course will be computed as follows.

Participation.....	15%
Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	20%
Weekly quizzes	40% (Your best 10 of 11 quizzes)
Week 3 report	5%

Cell phones and other noisemakers Let us remind each other to silence these before class begins. My son currently has mine set to play a heavy metal guitar riff when a call comes in. No one wants to hear that in the midst of a vigorous discussion of an Emily Dickinson poem.