

# English 200 **Reading Literature**

Spring 2011  
Section 04  
MWF 10-10:50 a.m.  
Oddfellows 221

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This course focuses on the act of *close reading*, that most essential of activities for higher-level literary study. We will read examples of different genres, including short stories, novels, plays, and poetry. We will also read texts representing different historical periods, our earliest being a sonnet from 1595, our most recent a play from 2008. With all texts, however, our goal will be to move beyond comprehension (*What's going on here?*) and evaluation (*Do I like this or not?*) in order to engage in analysis (*How does this text work? How is it put together? Why might its author have made the choices he or she made in terms of language, structure, point of view, tone, etc.? How does it compare to things we've read before? What makes it "literary"? And so forth*). By asking these questions, we will be pursuing the learning goals common to all sections of English 200:

- mastering the basic terms of literary criticism;
- recognizing the conventions of different literary genres;
- formulating and developing interpretive arguments both in writing and in classroom discussion;
- and recognizing the cultural and literary significances of historically underrepresented perspectives and traditions.

While our focus will therefore always be on the act of critical reading, many of our texts will raise additional questions involving social class and spectatorship, giving our course something of a central theme. This is especially true of the three longer texts (the two novels and one play) that serve as the focal points around which this course is constructed. In all of these texts (and in a few of the poems, too) individuals are continually looking up to or down at others, both literally and figuratively. As readers we must confront whether we share these perspectives or whether our relations to the text are more ironic. *Point of view*—a literary device we would be discussing at some length anyway—becomes a more interesting concept when contemplated in this light. In addition to giving our course a loose theme and making it easier for us to compare what might otherwise seem unrelated texts, my point in drawing attention to issues of class and spectatorship is to give you some sense of what to expect in upper-division English courses, most of which are more focused and more topical than English 200. My not-so-secret agenda, in other words, is to encourage you to take additional courses in English, for in them you will be able to capitalize on the skills you hone in this course.

**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.

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Penguin)  
Nella Larsen, *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen* (Anchor)  
Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays* (Penguin)  
R.S. Gwynn, ed., *Poetry: A Pocket Anthology*, 7th ed. (Penguin Academics)  
Murfin and Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (Bedford-St. Martin's)

**Course schedule** Tentative and subject to change

- 1/18 Introduction and Course Overview  
1/20 "Close Reading" (*Bedford Glossary* p. 65) + in-class writing exercise
- 1/23 Babel, "My First Goose" (Sakai)  
1/25 Babel, "My First Goose" (*cont.*)  
1/27 Babel, "My First Goose" (*cont.*)
- 1/30 Twain, "A True Story" (Sakai)  
2/1 Jewett, "The Mistress of Sydenham Plantation" (Sakai)  
2/3 Chesnutt, "The Passing of Grandison" (Sakai)
- 2/6 Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (Sakai)  
2/8 Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (Sakai)  
2/10 Twain, Jewett, Chesnutt, Bierce, and Faulkner (*cont.*): no additional reading **Paper 1 due**
- 2/13 Chopin, *The Awakening*, chs. I-IV (pp. 43-53)  
2/15 Chopin, *The Awakening*, chs. V-XI (pp. 53-79)  
2/17 Chopin, *The Awakening*, chs. XII-XIX (pp. 79-109)
- 2/20 Chopin, *The Awakening*, chs. XX-XXXIX (109-176)  
2/22 Chopin, *The Awakening* (*cont.*): no additional reading  
2/24 Chopin, *The Awakening* (*cont.*): no additional reading
- 2/27 **Exam #1 (in class; take-home assigned 2/27, due 2/29)**  
2/29 Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, First Act (pp. 291-316) **Take-home exam 1 due**  
3/2 Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Second Act (pp. 317-343)
- 3/5 Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Third Act (pp. 344-358)  
3/7 Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (*cont.*): no additional reading  
3/9 Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (*cont.*): no additional reading
- 3/12 Larsen, *Passing*, Part I (pp. 163-208)  
3/14 Larsen, *Passing*, Part II (pp. 209-241)  
3/16 Larsen, *Passing*, Parts I-II (*cont.*): no additional reading
- 3/17-3/25 SPRING BREAK
- 3/26 Larsen, *Passing*, Part III (pp. 242-275)  
3/28 Larsen, *Passing* (*cont.*): no additional reading  
3/30 **Exam #2 (in class; there will be no take-home portion for this exam)**
- 4/2 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems to be announced)  
4/4 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/6 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA) **Paper 2 due**
- 4/9 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/11 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/13 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)
- 4/16 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/18 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/20 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)

4/23 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/25 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)  
4/27 Gwynn, *Poetry* (poems TBA)

4/30 Conclusion

Paper 3 due

5/7 Exam #3 (in class + take-home: both due 5/7, 9 a.m.)

## 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 assignment, 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, illness, or activities related to other collegiate commitments (athletics, e.g., or the occasional field trip required by another course). Excused absences do not generally involve personal travel plans; if your ride home for fall break necessitates that you leave campus a day early, you do so at the expense of an unexcused absence. 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 three papers for this course, the first of which will be 4-5 pp. in length, the other two 5-6 pp. We will discuss soon 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" from "C" work, etc. Handouts for all papers will arrive at least two weeks before their due dates.

**Exams** There will be three exams for this course. Each will be cumulative in terms of concepts and noncumulative in terms of readings. Details will be provided in advance of each exam.

**Short assignments** From time to time I will ask that you complete brief, informal writing assignments, sometimes in class, sometimes before class. Before-class assignments should be typed; in-class assignments will of course be handwritten. Both will ask that you focus on some question designed to force close-reading and, in some cases, to prepare you for upcoming formal papers. Short assignments will be graded on a +/✓/- basis.

**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 .....	10%
Paper #2 .....	15%
Paper #3 .....	15%
Exam #1.....	12.5%
Exam #2.....	7.5%
Exam #3.....	12.5%
Short assignments .....	12.5%

**Disability concerns** Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

**Religious accommodation** If you need to miss class due to a religious observance, then please speak to me in advance to make arrangements to cover material from that day.

See <http://sites.allegheny.edu/religiouslife/religious-holy-days>.