

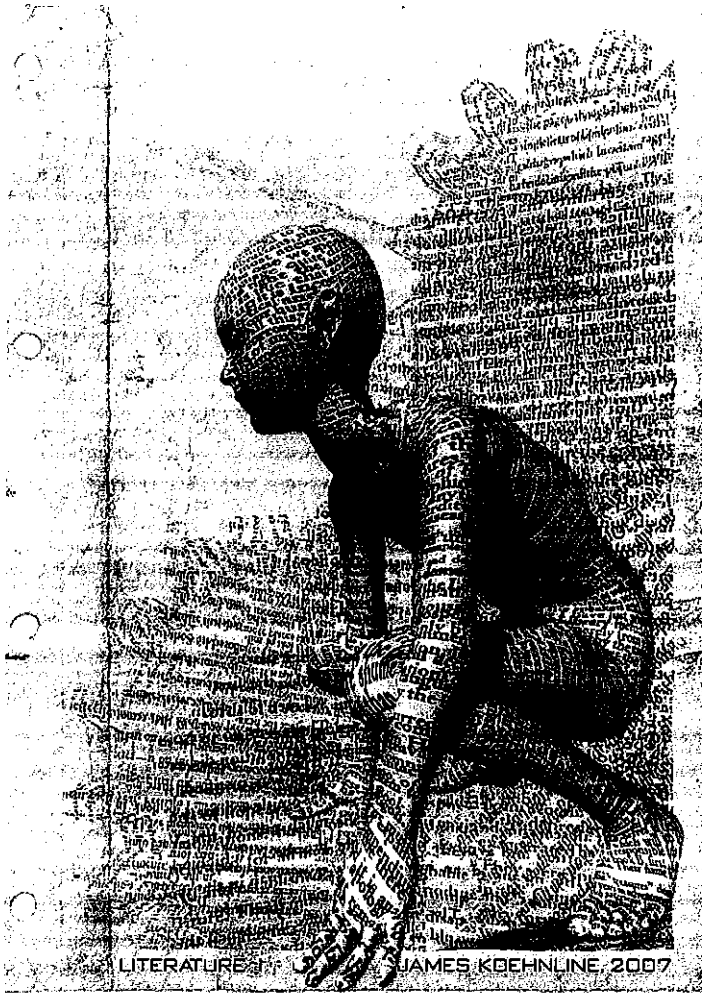
English 200, Section 05
Reading Literature
Spring 2012

MWF 11:00AM – 11:50AM, Oddfellows 105B
Prof. Ryan S Paul (rpaul@allgeheny.edu)
Office: Oddfellows 213 (x2320)
Office Hours: T/Th 2:00PM – 5:00PM

The famous literary critic Cleanth Brooks writes that “the method of art ... is always indirect.” Literature’s “indirection” is both its challenge and its reward. It does not communicate to us in straightforward, clear fashion; rather, it speaks to us through suggestion, paradox, intuition, comparison, contradiction, imagination – it presents us with not one but many meanings existing simultaneously and, sometimes, in conflict with one another. To once more quote Brooks, the language of literature “is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations.” To truly *read* literature, I argue, is merely to “absorb”; it is to challenge our everyday ways of thinking, to engage with complexity, to unfold the literary text into multiple dimensions.

This course is designed to develop your ability to read literature – specifically to **close read**. We read in one form or another every day of our lives: street signs; anecdotes; TV shows and movies; and, of course, books. But often we do not think about our process or how the words we see combine to make meaning. The practice of close reading enables us to become conscious of the way literature communicates through the close attention to the particulars of the literary text: its language, its shape, its sounds, its emotions, its ideas. Our joint endeavor will be to learn how to engage in this detailed analysis of literature and communicate the complexities of our insights.

Over the semester we will study a variety of texts. We will begin by studying poetry, learning how to unfold the highly compressed ideas expressed in its words, forms, and literary devices. We will discuss the short stories of Angela Carter, adding new concepts to our critical toolbox as we consider issues of narrative, gender, and sexuality. We will move on to William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and learn how historical context affects the interpretation of literature while also studying the particularities of the dramatic form. Our final text will be the novel *Things Fall Apart* by Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. Our study of this text will allow us to expand our view beyond the traditions of Western culture and think about literature as a multi-cultural and global experience. We will also consider the effects of a global context on our reading and thinking, literature as a means to encounter and communicate with different cultures, and our responsibilities as citizens not just of a nation but of a transnational world. The end goal will be to develop the ability to consider a variety of literary texts through multi-levelled analysis: to pay close attention to language, cultural context, and theme. All the while, we will consider the appropriate way to write about literature, discussing issues such as argumentation, organization, and style. Behind all of this work will be some of the bigger, philosophical questions about reading: what is literature? What differentiates it from other forms of communication? What is the purpose of literary analysis? What do we bring to the practice of reading, and how can we become better and more sensitive readers? And perhaps most importantly, what does literature offer us as individuals, as citizens, and as young scholars?



Course Advice

Be an active reader: annotate your text with questions and ideas, and keep a reading journal. In it, record interesting phrases, situations, or words that you might want to think about further in class or for a writing assignment. Also, come to class having familiarized yourself thoroughly with what happens in the works we are discussing, since plot summary may not be an explicit part of the discussion.

Be patient. In many ways, learning to read analytically is like learning to read all over again. It can be daunting, especially when some of the texts come from different times and/or places. It takes practice and diligence. Do not expect that a quick skim of the text will be enough to understand it or to succeed in class; you will need to pay careful attention to what you are reading, and often you will need to read it again and again. You will also find that the works make reference to problems, concepts, and events that are unfamiliar to you. This is part of both their difficulty and their appeal. Be sure to investigate words, names, or ideas that you do not know.

Course Goals

At the end of the semester, you will be able to:

- Differentiate between the major forms of literature
- Identify literary devices, master a set of literary terms, and apply the fundamental vocabulary of literary analysis
- Carefully read and analyze the language of literary texts
- Understand how literature shapes and is shaped by its cultural contexts
- Develop sophisticated interpretations of literary texts
- Articulate these interpretations in carefully structured written arguments

Student Responsibilities

In order to reach these goals, you should:

- Attend class every day
- Take copious notes Participate actively in class discussion with original and insightful comments
- Prepare for every class thoroughly by completing all assigned readings and reviewing your notes
- Complete all assignments
- Meet with your fellow students, your instructor, and/or members of the Learning Commons staff as necessary to discuss course materials and assignments
- Adhere to all Allegheny College and classroom policies on academic integrity, classroom behavior, etc.

Course Texts

Required:

Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*. Norton Critical Edition. Edited by Francis Abiola Irele. W.W. Norton, 2009.

Angela Carter. *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories*. Penguin, 1995.

Ross Murfin & Supryia M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Third Edition. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Evans Shakespeare Editions. Edited by Grace Tiffany. Wadsworth-Cengage Learning, 2012.

Additional readings provided by the instructor.

Recommended:

A good dictionary. In addition to keeping a pocket dictionary with you when you read, I would highly recommend you familiarize yourself with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, available online through the Pelletier Library website. It is far superior to free online dictionaries and should **always** be used instead.

The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Seventh Edition.

Grades

Quizzes: 10%
Class Participation: 10%
Papers: 30%

Exam 1: 15%
Exam 2: 15%
Final Exam: 20%

The **Quizzes** are designed to test your knowledge of the course material, your ability to think critically, and your ability to read carefully and retain important information. They will take a variety of forms: passage identification, short answer, short essay, group presentation, etc. Also, you will regularly be assigned various worksheets or short writing assignments as **Homework**.

The **Papers** will assess your ability to read and interpret literary language, your ability to construct a thoughtful, original, and well-organized essay, and your demonstration of a thorough knowledge of the text (or texts) to be analyzed. In addition to a number of short (1-2pp) essays, you will write at least 2 longer (4-5pp) essays. Topics will be announced in due time.

The **Exams** will test your ability to identify and apply literary terms through short answer, definition, and analysis. The **Final Exam** will be a comprehensive review of literary concepts (via short answer and short essay) and a test of your close reading abilities.

In addition to the material explicitly outlined on the syllabus, you are responsible for any information or ideas that come up over the semester. Take careful notes, review them regularly, and internalize all the material we cover. A significant amount of the work for this course will occur **outside** of class. We will not cover every aspect of every text or topic during our meetings, but you are still responsible for all the material assigned. The work done in the classroom is designed to provide you with models for literary analysis; your job is to take the tools and lessons learned and master them through diligent practice.

Active participation in class discussion and activities is essential for your success and the success of the class as a whole. So, attendance and class participation are **Mandatory**. You should come to class every day prepared and excited to engage with the material and your fellow students. Each student is allowed 3 unexcused absences without penalty, with each additional unexcused absence incurring a 3% penalty to your final grade. Medical, college-related, and religious absences will be excused only with proper documentation, and advance notice is greatly preferred. And please, turn your cellphone ringers off, and no texting.

All students are responsible for making up any missed work; in-class assignments missed for unexcused absences cannot be made up. If you know in advance you will be absent on a day that a paper is due, turn it in early or make other arrangements with me. Late papers are penalized 1 letter grade per class-day late.

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.

Obligatory Content Warning: As with any subject, some of the material we study may not be to everyone's tastes. Some of the works discuss controversial issues – like racism, sex, and violence – in explicit language. If this will be a problem, you should speak with your instructor ASAP in order to discuss a possible solution; the simplest and most effective is usually to register for a different course.

Daily Schedule

*The readings and assignments listed here constitute only part of the work of the class.
I will regularly handout additional (short) texts for us to read and analyze.*

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>
W 1/18	Introduction to the course.
F 1/20 — F 1/27	Poetry as Symbolic Action; Voice and Persona Ezra Pound, "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" Langston Hughes, "Silhouette" John Donne, "The Flea" <i>Bedford:</i> Persona, Tone, Voice, Diction, Image
M 1/30 — F 2/3	Narrative, Atmosphere, Symbolism Angela Carter, "The Bloody Chamber" <i>Bedford:</i> Theme, Atmosphere, Symbol, Motif, Narrative, Plot, Character
M 2/6 — F 2/17	Figurative Language Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress" Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro" William Shakespeare, Sonnet 1, 2, 3 <i>Bedford:</i> Figurative language, Metaphor, Simile, Tenor, Vehicle
M 2/20 — W 2/29	Form and Meter; Narrative Structure Shakespeare, Sonnet 129 John Donne, Holy Sonnet 14 Angela Carter, "The Company of Wolves" <i>Bedford:</i> Meter, Stress, Accent, Scansion
F 3/2	Exam 1

M 3/5 —
F 3/16

Point of View, Conflict, Transformation
Angela Carter, "The Tiger's Bride," "The Werewolf," "The Fall River Axe Murders"
Bedford: Point of View, Action, Setting, Conflict

3/17 –3/25

SPRING BREAK

M 3/26 —
W 4/11

Drama and Historical Context
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* & contemporary sources
Bedford: Race, Primitivism

F 4/13

Exam 2

M 4/16 —
M 4/30

Race, Post-Colonialism, and Literature
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
Bedford: Post-colonialism

FINAL EXAM

9:00AM Tuesday, May 8

Additional Class Policies

Please turn off all electronic devices when you come to class. You may use laptop computers, but **only** for taking notes or other work directly related to class.

Students are encouraged to stop by during office hours with any questions or concerns. You may also stop by my office at any time convenient for you, but I may or may not be available. If you absolutely cannot make my office hours, you may set an appointment with me for an alternate time.

I do not meet with students to discuss papers or other assignments the day before they are due. If you would like to meet with me to discuss an assignment, please meet with me as early as you can so that we can develop a productive course of action.

The best way to contact me is via email. I am regularly available during “business hours” (Monday – Friday, 9AM – 5PM), and if you email me during this time I usually will respond within a few hours. If you email me in the evening, over holidays, or during the weekend, I probably will not get back to you in less than 12 hours. I **do not** chat or instant message through the Allegheny webmail system.

I do not discuss grades via email or phone. I also do not discuss your performance on an assignment until you have thoroughly reviewed your work and my comments. If you would like to discuss how you did on a particular assignment, please wait at least one day after I have returned it to you.

Essay-grading Criteria

So you can understand what is expected of you, I have indicated the general criteria I use to evaluate all writing assignments in this class. I base my grades on careful consideration of all aspects of a writing assignment, from the author’s fluency with language to the concepts being explored. Grades are determined based on actual product, not on intention; if you intend to make a particular argument but are unable to do fully articulate it, you will be graded on the quality of the argument you do produce, not on the ideas that you were trying to write.

An essay in the A range is founded on an original, logical and coherently organized set of ideas; it makes a clearly discernible and persuasive argument (even if the reader disagrees with its argument) and articulates this argument with a clear, direct, and thoughtful thesis statement. Its thinking is, at each turn, absolutely clearly articulated: words carry thought, they don't obscure it; its sentences use only the words their ideas require; its paragraphs have distinct though related roles in the essay's larger argument, each holding one thoroughly asserted idea (not two competing ideas, not one idea half-asserted). Its sentences are without the grammatical, spelling or typographical mistakes that exacting proofreading would catch. An A paper produces a nuanced argument, considers multiple perspectives, carefully examines and explains the evidence put forth by the author, makes a clear and persuasive case for the validity of its thesis, and clearly and cogently states the significance of its argument. All of this takes *a lot of work*. If it is all very nearly accomplished, the essay usually earns an A-.

An essay in the B range: a very good paper, founded on solid, persuasive thinking, the writing of which is clearly and effectively executed. What usually prevents an "A" is a lack of originality, complex and thorough thinking, or careful proofreading. If two of these virtues are absent, the essay will usually earn a B- or rest between a B and a C; these papers often contain potential but some crucial flaw (a weak thesis statement, unclear organization, etc.) keeps it from being a solid B. Other common attributes of a B paper include: a thoughtful but not entirely persuasive argument, omission of key examples or textual evidence,

inability to integrate textual evidence smoothly into your own writing, failure to fully address a perspective important to making the argument, a conclusion that does not articulate the full significance of the argument, some tangents or digressions that detract from the coherence and logic of the argument.

An essay in the C range: some conspicuous flaw usually earns an essay a C; its argument is really underdeveloped, it lacks a clear thesis statement, it is disorganized, its diction is consistently inarticulate, or it is in dire need of proofreading. Note that a C denotes “average” or sufficient work: it accomplishes the bare minimums established by the assignment and demonstrates that the student has “done the work” to a level of adequate competence but has not shown a mastery of the material or assignment. A C paper will put forth an argument, but one that is simple, obvious, or vague; it supplies some evidence from the text, but this evidence is often not suited to the case being made; its conclusion simply restates the introduction without articulating the overall significance of the essay; its introduction is often too broad and vague, or it does not suit the topic and/or argument; it follows slavishly the five paragraph structure. C papers also often include many assertions without explanation, clarification, or support; for example, a C paper will include statements like “I will analyze the importance of X” or “Y is a significant moment in the text” with little or no follow-up.

A D essay either contains more than one of the large problems cited in the “C” description or finds another way to convince its reader that the author has not spent nearly enough time on the thinking or writing in the essay. It is insufficient in multiple areas, usually lacking an argument, focusing on summary rather than analysis, and without a clear articulation of distinct ideas in each paragraph across the paper. D papers often contain numerous factual errors, unsupported assertions, digressions completely inappropriate to the topic, illogical or incomprehensible interpretations, or numerous and distracting problems in organization, grammar, spelling, etc.

An F essay misses the mark on all criteria (originality, articulateness, persuasiveness, organization, the absence of writing mistakes) or is handed in very late.

Some other factors:

A paper that lacks an identifiable thesis or argument will earn *at best* a C-

A paper that lacks evidence in the form of direct textual quotation (or contains only minimal textual evidence) will earn *at best* a C-

A paper that contains no argument or analysis but instead is largely summary, description, or observations without a unifying thesis will earn *at best* a C-

A paper that adheres slavishly to the five paragraph structure or is otherwise not organized logically based on its content and argument will earn *at best* a C-

A paper that contains numerous errors in spelling, syntax, word usage, formatting, citation, etc. will earn a *minimum* penalty of one full letter grade (from an A to a B, from a B- to a C-, etc)

Please note that these factors are solely negative, and if your paper does not fall under one of these flaws that does *not* guarantee a higher grade. For example, if you have an abundance of textual evidence that does not mean you will necessarily get a grade any higher than a C-

Class Participation

While it is difficult to quantify the success of a student's contributions to class discussion (at our best we all of course contribute differently), here are the general standards I will use to grade participation:

A range: Participation at this level is marked by its active nature, its consistency, and its quality. When **A** participants read an assignment, they *prepare* to participate in a class discussion; they read the assignments fully, carefully and critically enough to be ready not just to respond to my questions but also to initiate discussion with comments and questions of their own. Such participants will also come to class ready to make and argue assertions about the reading and to think out loud about a text's relation to its contexts; they will attend to the comments of others in class, agree, elaborate or civilly disagree with them, bring our attention to passages from the reading to make their point and at times connect such thinking with earlier readings or previous class discussions. In short, students who by their engagement in class discussion throughout the semester show themselves to be true students of the course material –persistently conscientious and inquiring – will get an **A** for their efforts. They will also make the course a lot better. (By the way, substituting quantity of participation for quality will not work.)

B range: Students who come to every class, have almost always done all the reading, and consistently respond to the questions of others in a way that demonstrates their command of the reading will earn a **B** participation grade. What separates this effort from an **A** one is not so much quantity (teachers are remarkably good at detecting bs) as the level of preparation – one's reading and thinking – that has gone on before one gets to class, especially the kind that enables students to *initiate* discussion. But you can't get a **B** participation grade by just showing up, either, or by talking every once and a while.

C range: A **C** participant comes to almost all the classes, usually has done most of the reading most of the time, but not with the energy necessary to demonstrate through participation their ongoing engagement with the material. Such a discussant contributes infrequently, maybe one time every other class.

D range: Automatic pilot mode. You were physically there most of the time, spoke a few times all semester maybe, but that was it.

F: Not coming to class is the traditional route.

Please Note: Students who are reluctant to talk in class can partially compensate for their silence by e-mailing me comments and questions about the reading *before* the class discussion of it. If you define yourself as “shy,” though, please don't convert this definition into permission not to talk. People get “writer's block” but still must hand papers in on time; others have “test anxiety” and take tests. In this class, participating in discussions is an obligation as important as test and papers, so keeping mum isn't really an option for those who expect to succeed.