SYLLABUS
MENG 6240 Seminar in American Literature:
Masterpieces of American Literature

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Classroom: EH 218
Time: Thursday 5:30 to 8:10
CRN 20099

Texts:

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter
Barnes and Nobel Classics, ISBN 13:9781593082079

Edgar Lee Master’s Spoon River Anthology
CreateSpace Publishing

Sherwood Anderson’s Winesburg Ohio
Penguin Publishing Group

Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby
Charles Scribner’s & Sons
ISBN 13: 97680743273565

Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises
Charles Scribner’s & Sons
ISBN 13: 9780743297332

Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird
HarperCollins Publishers

William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury
Vintage Publisher

Description of Course:

MENG 6240 is a master’s level course designed to introduce you to a few of the major novelists of American literature. To deal with all of the outstanding works of American literature in the genres of the novel, short story, nonfiction, poems and plays would take years rather than the few short months that we have together. One of my mentors from Vanderbilt’s Peabody College once told me, “Your university work in English is not exhaustive. It’s just the beginning of a lifetime of reading and study.”

The works that I have chosen for us to examine this semester are some of my favorite novels, short stories and poems. They are representative of the large and varied range of American literature from the early years of the 19th century in New England to the Contemporary American South. These works of literature are rich and diverse and will take us to places both
common and extraordinary. They will help us see, explore, and examine the many dimensions of human existence: love, courage, happiness, death, despair, ambition, conflict, destiny, and the search for meaning and purpose in life.

To know these works of literature intimately is to know the American landscape and the fashioning of the American spirit. It is to see the struggles and travails that this nation has gone through in the past two hundred years from the settling of New England and the opening of the great American plains to the affluence of the "Roaring Twenties" in New York. It is to witness the heartbreak of characters trapped in the provincial towns of the Mid-west and to witness the racial prejudices of the American South. The study of these novels will take us on a vast pilgrimage across the American continent and through two centuries, and leave us with a certain knowledge that we have experienced some of the great moments and struggles of our native land and peoples, and it will let us glimpse into--as William Faulkner said in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in literature--"the old verities and truths of the heart."

Course Objectives for MENG 6240:

1. To understand how American writers express their social, moral, and cultural concerns and their intellectual and psychological insights in a work of literature.
2. To develop your analytical skills and critical thinking through reading, discussion, and written assignments.
3. To be aware of the major literary criticism associated with each of the novels in the course.
4. To help you learn how to vividly recreate and enter into the worlds that are presented to them in the novels.
5. To conduct classroom discussions that closely examining the language and structure of these American novels.
6. To demonstrate how to respond both analytically and creatively to a text.
7. To increase your enjoyment and understanding of literature.
8. To help you understand the stylistics contributions at work in a literary masterpieces; that is, to see how setting, character, point of view, conflict and structure artfully create realistic worlds for the reader to experience and study.
9. To see how the insights and experiences provided for us in American literature can broaden our understanding of the American experience and our own personal lives.

Attendance Policy:

It is very important that you attend each class session. You are allowed only one absence during the semester for illnesses or to take care of personal matters. One absence is equivalent to three in a regular class that meets three times a week. More than two absences will seriously affect your grade. A person with four absences (which is equal to 12 absences in a regular class) will be asked to drop the class. (Four tardies will equal one absence).

If you are late to class, please put your name on a slip of paper with the day's date and hand it to me after class, so I can give you credit for attendance on that day. Whenever you are absent, please ask a classmate for the assignment so that you can come prepared for the work of the day.
Evaluation:

Grades will be based on the quality of your reading and writing, regular attendance, completion of all reading and writing assignments, class participation, and class projects. Each student will choose a specific “contracted” amount of work to earn a designated grade. The student can inform the instructor either at the beginning of the term or at the mid term (8th) week what contract he or she has chosen. The contracted grade assumes competent, quality graduate level work on each part of the contracted assignments. If a contracted assignment is less than graduate school quality, the student will be asked to rework and resubmit the work or accept a lower contracted grade.

Grade Criteria:

1. To contract for a “B-” grade:
   A. Each student must have regular attendance.
   B. Participate in class discussions.
   C. Complete all the reading assignments when they are due.
   D. Submit for evaluation a Reading Response Journal that contains all the daily class writing assignments and all the homework assignments. (The Journal is described in detail later in the syllabus).

2. To contract for a “B” grade:
   A. Each student must have regular attendance
   B. Participate in class and group discussions
   C. Complete all the reading assignments when they are due.
   D. Submit for evaluation a Reading Response Journal that contains all the daily class writing assignments and all the homework assignments.
   E. Present to the class a Mid-Term Project. You may choose any one of the following options: A Personal Response Essay, A Critical Analysis Essay, A Creative Writing Project, or A Dramatic Reading Performance (The Mid-Term Projects are described later in the syllabus).

3. To contract for a “B+” grade:
   A. Each student must have regular attendance
   B. Participate in class and group discussions
   C. Complete all the reading assignments when they are due.
   D. Submit for evaluation a Reading Response Journal that contains all the daily class writing assignments and all the homework assignments.
   E. Present to the class a Mid-Term Project.
   F. Extended Reading Assignment: Present to the Instructor in a 15 minute personal interview your response and analysis of additional readings in American Literature. This could be a major novel (or a series of poems, essays, or plays) that we mentioned in class but did not read as a group. For example, if you develop an interest in the works of William Faulkner, based on our reading of the The Sound and the Fury, you could read Absalom Absalom or The Hamlet and
present your analysis and response to the Instructor in a 15-minute conversation. The novel must be read in this current semester. For a list of authors, see the "Bibliography of American Writers" handout.

4. To Contract for an “A” grade.
   A. Each student must have regular attendance
   B. Participate in class and group discussions
   C. Complete all the reading assignments when they are due.
   D. Submit for evaluation a Reading Response Journal that contains all the daily class writing assignments and all the homework assignments.
   E. Present to the class a Mid Term Project.
   F. Write a 10 to15-page research paper. The types of research are described later in this syllabus.
   G. Note: The person contracting for an “A” grade does not have to complete item “3F”, the personal interview and outside reading of an additional novel.

Reading Response Journals:

Students write quite a lot in MENG 6240 to help them clarify their responses to the literature they are reading and to assist them in understanding the structure and meaning of these American Masterpieces. All students should keep these writings in a Reading Response Journal, which becomes a history of your interactions with various literary texts. Samples of your journal will be collected periodically and you will often be asked to read responses from your journal to both small groups and sometimes to the entire class. Journals will be taken up for evaluation during the last week of the semester. The Reading Response Journal measures Course Objectives 2, 4, 5, 7 and Program Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3. Journal entries may take a variety of forms:

I. Personal Literary Analysis
   1. Make comments about the author’s style and structure of the novel:
   2. Analyze a character, a relationship, or a conflict in the novel.
      a. Examine the personality and state of mind of one or more characters. Note the character’s way of thinking, actions, contradictions, values, motives, and relations with other characters. Also note any changes or development of the character from the beginning to the end of the novel.
   3. You may comment on interesting passages in the assigned text. Answer the question “What’s happening in this scene: literally and figuratively. What does the passage tell us about the characters and their situations? Be sure to include the page number of the quoted passage in parenthesis, for example, (Hawthorne 55-56).
   4. Look closely at key moments in the structure of the novel: the opening, foreshadowing, points of suspense or tension, the climax, and the ending to see how they contribute to the meaning of the novel.
   5. Analyze how the story is told, who tells it, and how much this narrator knows. Is the narrator a character or just a disembodied voice? How does the narrator shape the story?
How would the work be changed with a different narrator?
6. Find patterns of related words or images by rereading the novel watching for unusual words and images that evoke particular feelings or moods, words that form patterns of repetition, contradictions or tensions that contribute to the meaning of the novel.
7. Analyze the setting. Consider the place and time of the events and whether the setting causes, reflects, or contradicts the characters' actions and values. Imagine how a setting might alter the story's meaning.
8. Determine and articulate the main themes expressed in the piece of literature.
   a. (Strategies from Axelrod and Cooper's *St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, 352).

II. Reporting on Professional Literary Criticism:
1. Survey, summarize and comment on professional literary criticism about the author or novel being studied. What are academic critics saying? What aspects of the novel are they exploring and what are they discovering?

III. Reader Response:
1. Describe personal connections between your life and the literary work that we are studying, reporting on people that you have known, personal experiences similar to those portrayed in the literary work, and your insights and reflections on the similarities and differences between your life and the literary work.
2. Describe likes and dislikes concerning characters, conflicts, themes, and the author's style of narration or the author's implied values.

IV. Quick Study Research
1. Report on background information about the author's life, the times, and the work. Search the novel for specific historical, political, economic, social, or religious references. How does the culture of the time contribute to the personalities and events of the novel?
2. For example, while we are studying Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, a student might be interested in researching and reporting on biographical and cultural research: for example, Fitzgerald's relationship with his wife, Zelda, other writers of the time, like Hemingway, his editor Max Perkins at Scribner's, the Jazz age and Roaring Twenties in New York and Long Island, and any other issues that would enhance our reading of the novel.

V. Creative Responses
1. Imagined letters written to an author or to a character.
2. Write a prequel or a sequel to a story.
3. Add a scene to the story or novel.
4. Create a dialogue between characters from different works.
5. Write a scene or key event from another point of view first person to third person, or vice versa, or from a different character's point of view.
6. Create a new multi-genre situation for the text, such as a newspaper account, biography or obituary for a character, eyewitness report, or psychological case study.
7. Write a poem in response to a story or story in response to a poem.
8. Turn a scene from a story or novel into a film script or drama with both dialogue from the
story and your own invented dialogue. With stage directions, explaining how the actors are to move, talk, and react to each other. Which popular actors would you use for your film or stage play?

**Mid Term Options:**

Choose one of the following options for your Mid Term Project that will be presented to the class. All presentations should be around 15 minutes long. Please time your readings and presentations to conform to this requirement. The Mid-Term Options measure achievements in Course Objectives 2, 6, 7, 9 and Program Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 4. **Note:** The Instructor must approve the mid-term project in advance. Students generally submit a one-page proposal several weeks in advance of the due date for approval and suggestions.

I. **Reader Response Essay**
   a. Write a five page personal essay in response to one of the American masterpieces that we have worked with this semester. The essay should be typed and well written, with few if any mechanical errors. The personal response essay can deal with any of the elements of a story: character, plot, setting, and theme, but it must relate those insights and analyses with some person or some event in your own life. This type of essay gives you a chance to explore the connections between your life and the world of literature. The story can help you to clarify some aspect of your life, and, conversely, your personal connection with the story can deepen your understanding of the literary work.

II. **Critical Analysis paper**
   a. Write an extended personal analysis of any of the texts that we have studied up to this point in the semester. The analysis can look at any of the following elements: setting, style, point of view, conflict, character, and theme. However, the analysis should be personal and not dependent on professional literary criticism. The final paper of the term is a research project that will involve a survey of scholarly research.
   b. Write a 5 page (approximate 1500 words) analytical paper in which you place side-by-side two novels that we have worked with this semester, tracing either a common theme or how the stories make different statements about a similar subject. For example, Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* both deal with the influence of American culture on the lives of its citizens. It might be interesting to try to see what each novel says about the similarities and differences that these cultures (the world of puritan New England and Jazz Age New York) have on the main characters and the final meaning of the novels. Comparing and contrasting novels is a useful way to illuminate the significance of each work.

III. **Creative Writing Option**
   a. Write a short story or play inspired by our readings and discussions of American Literature and read or perform it for the class. Be prepared to answer a few questions
about what prompted the story and what ideas you were trying to express in the story.

b. Write 4 to 6 new poems that you have written in response to our class. Read and share them with the class. Before you read each poem you might preface it by explaining the occasion or circumstance that prompted the writing and hint at what you were trying to express in the poem. This usually helps orient the listener, helping him or her appreciate the full impact and meaning of your poem. The poem ultimately expresses itself, but a little help in understanding the context or direction that the poem will take usually assist the reader in bring the poem to life.

IV. Dramatic Reading or Performance

a. By yourself or with a few other students convert one of the novels that we have read this semester into a scene or short play. Act out the scene or play for the class and provide a stage director (narrator) who will set up the scene and explain to the audience the overall context of the enacted scene. Sometimes in reader's theater the author can be a character in the play. The author narrator does not interact with the players, but speaks directly to the audience before, during, or after the scenes enactment.

b. Dramatically read a series of poems that you have chosen from American poets, explaining what they mean to you and why they are significant. You might group the poems according to themes: love, courage, disappointment, growing up, etc. or you might read a series of poems by one poet, explaining how the poems express important concerns in the life of the writer or in your own life.

End of Term Final Research Project:

1. The research paper is only required for student’s contracting for an “A” grade. The paper should be 10 to 15 pages long and follow the conventions of the MLA style format. Note: The Instructor must approve the research topic in advance. Students generally submit a one-page proposal several weeks in advance of the due date for approval and suggestions. The End of Term Final Research Project measures Course Objectives 1,3,5, 8 and Program Learning Outcomes 1, 3, 5, and 6. The options for topics are listed below:

   1) Some aspect of American life (For example, a study of race relations in the South as exemplified in the works of William Faulkner or a study of Ernest Hemingway’s reportage of European Wars in the Twentieth Century and how those experiences influenced his novels.

   2) What literary critics and historians have said about one of the novels that we have studied this term, along with your own in depth interpretation, analysis, and evaluation.

   a. “A critical paper is usually a discussion and elaboration of a single theme or a controlling idea, supported by a close reading of the texts; the paper is developed with numerous and repeated references to the primary texts in support of your arguments. It requires library research and the inclusion of relevant scholarly commentary” (PAL: A Writing Guide, Appendix D).

   3) An examination of the life and writings of any American writer that we
have mentioned in class or an author from the "Bibliography of American Writers" handout. The researcher should choose an author and do several of the following:
   a. Tell us about their life and writing.
   b. Read several of their stories, novels, plays, or poems and, perhaps, a biography or critical analysis of their life's work.
   c. Show how the novel that we read in class fits into the body of their work.
   d. Look for major themes, patterns, subjects or interest in the author's works.
   e. Point out correspondences between the author's life experiences and their literary works.

4) Comparing the life and writings of two American writers, like William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway.
5) Placing an author into a literary movement like transcendentalism, realism, naturalism or modernism to see how the writer compares to other participants from the same school.

General Critical Sources on American Literature:

Donoghue, Denis, Reading America: Essays on American Literature (1987).
Hobson, Fred C., Tell about the South (1983).
Lawrence, D. H., Studies in Classic American Literature (1928).
Marx, Leo, Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (1967).
Matthiessen, F. O., American Renaissance (1941; repr. 1968).

Class Assignments:
Specific reading and writing assignments will be given out at the end of each class session. **Always** do the reading and writing before class and come prepared to share your reactions to the assignments.

**Tentative Schedule**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Sept 3</td>
<td>Introduction to American Masterpieces</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Sept 10</td>
<td>Hawthorn’s <em>The Scarlet Letter</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Sept 17</td>
<td>Hawthorn’s <em>The Scarlet Letter</em></td>
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<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Sept 24</td>
<td>Edgar Lee Masters <em>Spoon River Anthology</em></td>
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<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Sherwood Anderson <em>Winesburg Ohio</em></td>
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<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Oct 8</td>
<td>Fitzgerald’s <em>The Great Gatsby</em></td>
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<td>Week Seven</td>
<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>Fitzgerald’s <em>The Great Gatsby</em></td>
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<td>Week Eight</td>
<td>Oct 22</td>
<td>Mid Term Projects</td>
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<td>Week Nine</td>
<td>Oct 29</td>
<td>Hemingway’s <em>The Sun Also Rises</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Ten</td>
<td>Nov 5</td>
<td>Hemingway’s <em>The Sun Also Rises</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Eleven</td>
<td>Nov 12</td>
<td>Harper Lee’s <em>To Kill a Mockingbird</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Twelve</td>
<td>Nov 19</td>
<td>Harper Lee’s <em>To Kill a Mockingbird</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Nov 26</td>
<td>No Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Thirteen</td>
<td>Dec 3</td>
<td>Faulkner’s <em>The Sound and the Fury</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Fourteen</td>
<td>Dec 10</td>
<td>Faulkner’s <em>The Sound and the Fury</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Finals Week</td>
<td>Dec 17</td>
<td>Research Papers Presentations</td>
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**General Learning Outcomes for Masters of Arts in English:**

- Learning Outcome 1: Gather, analyze, and communicate information effectively as well as think creatively and critically.
- Learning Outcome 2: Cultivated skills in close reading, critical thinking, logical argument from evidence presented, creative expression, and persuasive writing.
- Learning Outcome 3: Apply various theoretical perspectives and literary terminology to interpretations of literary texts to showcase an understanding of theoretical perspectives.
- Learning Outcome 4: Acknowledge and articulate the significance of key primary text(s) in one specific literary genre, period, culture or style.
- Learning Outcome 5: Demonstrate knowledge of an interaction with current scholarly criticism.
- Learning Outcome 6: Ability to employ academic conventions and protocols for written or multimodal presentations, including the application of appropriate conventions, citation formats and style manuals.
Weber State University Policy for Students:

As specified in PPM 6-22 IV D, cheating and plagiarism violate the Student Code. Plagiarism is “the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person’s or group’s ideas or work.” Students found guilty of cheating or plagiarism are subject to failure of a specific assignment, or, in more serious cases, failure of the entire course.

Core Beliefs: According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “determine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student’s core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student’s beliefs.”

Disability Accommodation: PPM 3-34 notes: “When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the quarter [semester] in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.”

Emergency Closure: If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class . . . . [via e-mail and WSU Canvass].