

Critical Writing about Literature

University of Northern Iowa — Spring 2020
English 2120 — Section 03

Time, Place: Tues/Thurs 12:30-1:45, Lang 208
Instructor: Kim Groninga
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Materials Needed:

Texts: • *Literature: A Portable Anthology* (Gardner, 2017)
• *Literary Theory: A Very Short Intro* (Culler, 2011)
• Tickets to *You Can't Take it With You*, Theatre UNI (running March 11 - March 29)

Course Objectives:

By the end of the semester, students will be able to

- analyze and interpret literary texts
- compose original, clear, focused prose about literary texts
- devise arguments about literary texts
- apply at least one literary theory to a literary text

Request: Studying literature is much more meaningful when we bring our fullest selves to the discussion. This can be risky. Please help to create a climate of trust and respect so every member of our class is empowered to add their truest voice to the conversation.

Additional Information —

Attendance: You are required to attend each class meeting and be prepared to work. We will work in groups and do many in-class assignments. You will learn from other students, and they will learn from you. Do not underestimate the knowledge, experience, and skills you bring to the group. If you are not in class, we miss the benefit of your input and you miss the contributions of the rest of us. That said, attendance will be taken at every class period. Work done in class cannot be made up. Each student is allowed two absences. Beyond those two, each absence will result in a 5-point deduction from the student's final grade.

Late Papers: For full credit, all papers and assignments must be turned in before or during class on the day they are due. Late papers and assignments will lose 10 points each class day they are late.

Cell Phones: Cell phones are allowed but must be set to “silent.” Please answer only emergency calls and step into the hallway to do so. No texting in class.

Disability Services: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodation due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodations through the Office of Student Disability Services (ODS). The ODS is located at 103 Student Health Center. Phone: 273-2677.

Academic Honesty: The assignments in this course ask for your original writing. When you use any ideas or wording borrowed from another writer or speaker, you must clearly identify the source of that material, using standard documentation. If you do not use documentation, it will appear that you are plagiarizing or presenting someone else’s work as your own. Evidence of plagiarism will result in immediate loss of credit for that assignment and will be reported to academic affairs. Please see section 3.01 “Student Academic Ethics Policy” in the Student Handbook (available at:<https://policies.uni.edu/301>) for a detailed definition of plagiarism and a complete elaboration of the university policy on academic ethics.

Save all your work from the course until the end of the semester.

How You will Earn your Grade:

Annotated Poem	50 points
Poetry Explication	100 points
Summary/Response <i>Cathedral</i>	50 points
Literary Theory Presentation	100 points
Summary/Response II	50 points
Critical Essay on Prose	100 points
Participation/Engagement	50 points
Quizzes & Other Assignments (TBA) (Quizzes cannot be made up)	10-20 points/each

FINAL GRADES will be based on percentage of points earned and will be assigned letter grades as follows:	
A	94% and above
A-	90-93%
B+	88-89%
B	84-87%
B-	80-83%
C+	78-79%
C	74-77%
C-	70-73%
D+	68-69%
D	64-67%
D-	60-63%
F	59% and below

Course Schedule (tentative)

Week One (January 14 & 16)

Tue: _____

Thu: Read: *Dropping Babies*, Schraffenberger (online)

Week Two (January 21 & 23)

Tue: Go over syllabus, Choose poems for week four, Sign up for presentations, Handout NARs

Thu: Read & Annotate: The Role of Good Reading (anthology 1218-1232)

Poetry

Week Three (January 28 & 30)

Tue: review poetic craft, discuss poems, choose poems, assign explication

Thu: Read and Annotate: *Writing about Poems* (anthology, pages 1289-1300)

Read: *Stretched: The Hatchery* by Virgil Suárez, Groninga (handout)

Week Four (February 4 & 6)

Tue: read poems: _____

Thu: read poems: _____

Week Five (February 11 & 13)

Tue: Annotated Copy of Poem Due, Peer Reviews of Poetry Explication Papers (bring two printed copies)

Thu: Poetry Explication Due, Poetry Reading*

**Up to 10 points extra credit available for those who participate by giving a reading of their poem.*

This is the only extra credit opportunity of the semester.

Literary Theories (or Schools of Criticism)

Week Six (February 18 & 20)

Tue: Read: *Cathedral* (anthology pages 274-286) Summary /Response Due

Read & Annotate: *What is Theory?* and *What is Literature, and does it matter?*

(Culler, chapters 1 and 2)

Thu: Presentations—
Deconstruction: _____

Formalism/New Criticism: _____

Week Seven (February 25 & 27)

Tue: Presentations—
Feminist and Gender Criticism: _____

Ecocriticism: _____

Thu: Presentations—
Marxist Criticism: _____

Queer Theory: _____

Week Eight (March 3 & 5)

Tue: Presentations—
Psychoanalytic Criticism: _____

Reader-Response: _____

Thu: Presentations—
Historical Criticism and New Historicism: _____

Postcolonial Criticism: _____

**it is time to see *You Can't Take It With You*
Theatre UNI (running March 11-March 29)

political speeches

Week Nine (March 10 & 12)

Tue: *The Great Dictator* speech, Charlie Chaplin (read/view/analyze in class)
King George VI (Britain enters WWII) speech from *The King's Speech* (read/view/analyze in class)

Thu: Read: Obama's first inaugural address (online)

Spring Break (March 16-20)

drama

Week Ten (March 24 & 26)

Tue: Read: *The Importance of Being Earnest* (anthology pages 889-938)

Thu: (continue with *Earnest*)

Week Eleven (March 31 & April 2)

Tue: Read (& see!): *You Can't Take It With You*, Theatre UNI, Guest Speaker(s)

Thu: (continue with *You Can't...*) Discuss final essay assignment

Nonfiction

Week Twelve (April 7 & 9)

Tue: Skim-read *Writing a Literary Research Paper* (anthology, pages 1312-1346)

Thu: Summary/Response II due • Read *Joyas Voladoras*, Brian Doyle (handout)

Week Thirteen (April 14 & 16)

Tue: Read *On Patriotism*, Taylor Brorby (*North American Review*, handout, pages 57-60)

Thu: Read *The Legs on Which I Move*, Sophronia Scott (*North American Review*, pages 62-64)

Fiction

Week Fourteen (April 21 & 23)

Tue: Read *A Wagner Matinee*, Willa Cather (anthology, pages 78-84) and
Why I Live at the P.O., Eudora Welty (anthology, 190-200)

Thu: Read *How to Date a Brownie, Blackgirl, White, or Halfie*, Junot Diaz (anthology, 402-404)

Week Fifteen (April 28 & 30)

Tue: workshop final papers

Thu: workshop final papers

Finals Week: May 4-8, 2020

Critical Essay due at beginning of final exam time.

Annotated Copy of Poem for Explication Essay (50 points)

Students must submit a copy of their poem which is marked with the annotations they created while analyzing the poem for their explication paper.

Poetry Explication (100 points)

Write an essay about a single poem (chosen from the anthology) which presents a detailed but concise interpretation of the poem. Please do NOT read or refer to outside sources containing others' interpretations of the poem. Instead, choose a poem, decide what you think the poem means and why. Ask yourself how the poet's use of craft (diction, alliteration, structure, rhyme, etc...) enhances meaning. Include a works cited page listing the poem in appropriate MLA style. Also include an appendix with a typed copy of the poem, lines numbered. Essays will be evaluated on how engaging they are to a reader, clarity of expression, and GUM (grammar, usage, mechanics). How to begin: Choose a poem. Type or write it on a sheet of paper and carry it around with you. Share it with people. Memorize it. Scribble your insights on it. Draw pictures about it. Speak it out loud. Imagine what music it sounds like. Choose a line and use it as a mantra. When you're ready, write. (Then: revise, edit, polish, proofread.) Please note: Your poem must be one we have not discussed in class.

Summary/Response *Cathedral* (50 points)

Students should write a 2- to 3-page, double-spaced summary of and response to the short story *Cathedral* by Raymond Carver. Students should provide a work cited page which includes the story and should use MLA style for all formatting and source documentation throughout the paper. Students should use the entire writing process to ensure their paper is articulate, polished, and without errors. (Before beginning writing, please review the requirements of a Summary/Response paper in the anthology on pages 1263-1265.)

Literary Theory/School of Criticism Presentation (100 points)

For this assignment, you must give a 20- to 25-minute instructive presentation on your chosen theory. During your presentation, you must cover the basic precepts of that theory in such a way that helps your classmates understand the theory and how it is applied. Some basic information can be gleaned from both of our textbooks: Chapter 9 in the anthology has brief sections on most theories and the Appendix (p135) in the Culler text discusses many of them as well. Additional information should be gathered from outside sources. Further, you must apply your theory, or school of criticism, to Carver's short story *Cathedral*. Some audio or visual component should be included in your presentation, and it should also include an interactive element. Presentations will be evaluated based on clarity, focus, organization, information, and interest.

Summary/Response II (50 points)

Students should write a 2- to 3-page, double-spaced summary of and response to the short story or nonfiction piece they are using as the primary source for their Critical Essay. Students should

provide a work cited page which includes their piece and should use MLA style for all formatting and source documentation throughout the paper. Students should use the entire writing process to ensure their paper is articulate, polished, and without errors.

Critical Essay on Prose (100 points)

Write an essay applying one of the Literary Theories/Schools of Criticism discussed in class to a short story from the anthology or a short piece of nonfiction found online or elsewhere and approved in advance by Kim. Papers should incorporate at least four sources: a primary source (the literature itself) and three or more secondary sources (biographical and historical sources and critical essays). Use MLA for basic formatting and all source documentation. Essays will be evaluated on engaging the reader, clarity of expression, and GUM (grammar, usage, mechanics). Please note: Your prose piece must be one we have not discussed in class.