

## Interpretation of Literature (ENGL:1200) Reading and Writing Out of Place

### Course Description

“Place” can mean many things. It can be a specific location, a feeling of belonging, or a combination of the two. You might be allowed or accepted in one place, but feel “out-of-place” or “placeless” in another, such as when among unfamiliar people and surroundings. On a less personal and more systemic level, people are often excluded—by law, convention, discrimination, economics—from certain places based on race, sexual orientation, gender, class, age, nationality, and/or beliefs (among plenty of other factors). Events and stories “take place,” yet we shape places, and places shape us.

In literature, for example, the setting of a story or poem can dictate the actions and thoughts of characters. It can also give shape and tone to the plot that unfolds. (Look no further than the hackneyed opening phrase “It was a dark and stormy night” that marks a story at once as spooky and clichéd.) In this course we will explore themes of place in our reading and ask questions that complicate them. How do we share places with others? How is “placelessness” felt and experienced? Why are some persons granted a “place” in society while others are denied one? How can we, as critical readers of literature and the world, be aware of how place informs and conditions our lives and behavior? How can we then strive to create better places for all?

This course will include texts from across genres—including novels, short stories, poetry, and creative non-fiction—and throughout history. As a result, we will have the opportunity to think about how place and placelessness can be communicated in different forms at different moments, how places have histories of their own and change over time, and how these questions relate to our own place(s) in the world. By allowing you to use and refine your skills of reading, speaking, and writing to respond critically and sensitively to literary texts, you will be able to see yourselves as readers, recognizing the influence of individual differences (such as gender, ethnicity, geography) and experiences on interpretation. Class discussions and additional reading assignments will also prompt you to consider the connections between individual texts and their broader cultural contexts. In addition to this interpretive work, we’ll take time to appreciate the joy of these stories, including the humorous situations, detailed settings, and the simple fun of reading about interesting characters in and out of place.

### Course Objectives:

- Make connections between and across texts of varying genre and historical context.
- Develop discussion skills by engaging consistently in critical conversation about texts and their relation to the world.
- Write reflectively and analytically through a mix of journaling, informal prompt responses,



René Magritte, *Man with a Newspaper* (1928)

and formal graded assignments.

- Examine and critically assess the role of place in shaping the lives, actions, and relationships of people who vary in race, gender, and class, and the role of people in shaping physical and social places.

### **Workload expectations**

The University of Iowa expects a 3-hour credit course to entail at least 6 hours of outside preparation per week by students. Sample description: For each semester hour credit in this course, students should expect to spend two hours per week preparing for class sessions. This is a three credit hour course, so your average out-of-class preparation per week is six hours. This will fluctuate throughout the semester; some weeks will be a bit lighter and others more intense. Note also that these are standard departmental guidelines, and the number of hours you dedicate to reading for class will vary depending on your own reading speed and the text assigned. Sometimes (most times) reading slowly is better than speeding through!

### **List of all required texts**

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Beacon Press, 2004. ISBN: 978-0807083697

Cather, Willa. *My Antonia*. Penguin. ISBN: 978-0140187649

Steinbeck, John. *Cannery Row*. Penguin Centennial Edition, 2002. ISBN: 978-0142000687

All required texts are available through the University Book Store (HawkShop), though you may be able to find more affordable copies through an online retailer. If purchasing your books through an alternative retailer, try to acquire a copy of the same edition/publisher as those listed above. All other course readings available on ICON and should be **printed out, annotated, and brought to class**.

### **Other required materials (to be brought to every class):**

1 notebook (composition or spiral bound)

Writing utensil

### **Grading Scheme:**

Engaged and Respectful Participation: 15%

Small Writing Assignment: 5%

Major Writing Assignment 1: 15 %

Major Writing Assignment 2: 20%

Midterm: 15 %

Final: 15%

Notebooks: 15%

Final Portfolio: required to pass the class

### **Accessing Grades:**

Grades for major assignments will be posted on ICON under “Grades” approximately two weeks after the due date. Your participation grades will be posted once at midterm and once at the end of the semester. Informal assignments will be mostly recorded in your class notebook, which will be collected at least twice during the semester. Your notebook grade will be posted once at the midterm and once at the end of the semester. **Note that a missed assignment is marked as a zero, so it’s important to complete all homework assignments and attend every class to avoid bringing down your grade.**

My detailed grading policy is as follows:

*A grade of C:* You can earn a C by attending class regularly and punctually, completing with competence all of the work assigned and participating regularly in class activities. This requires 1) adequately meeting all criteria for assignments, and 2) completing reading assignments on time and being prepared to share your opinions on the texts in class and during discussions.

*A grade of B:* You can earn a B by fulfilling all of the C requirements while demonstrating a significantly higher level of effort and competence on all work assigned for the class. To earn a B you must show an interest in energetically, creatively, and critically engaging with the material and assignments. B work typically reflects independent thinking. The B student is self-reflexive and often asks questions such as “How can I make my work better? How can I revise this? How can I make my work unique and interesting? How can I help the class have productive and energetic discussions?”

*A grade of A:* To receive an A in the course, you must surpass the requirements for B work as well as demonstrate high-level critical thinking and original analysis. A students interrogate all sides of issues enthusiastically in order to clarify their own opinions. A students don't skip class, fail to honor deadlines for any reason, or show up unprepared to discuss the reading. A students will, instead, be willing to make intellectual discoveries and demonstrate an effort to inquire further into commonly understood issues.

*A grade of D:* You can earn a D by not fulfilling your responsibilities outlined under “Grade of C” criteria, and/or failing to show respect for or interest in your fellow students’ presentations of ideas. A D student is a student who has many excuses but few completed assignments. For example, D students often fail to turn in reading responses or other informal work. D students are generally disinterested students who refuse to take an active role in making the class energetic and productive.

### **Statement on arithmetic rounding of grades**

Grades are calculated on ICON by computing the grades of individual assignments as weighted according to the scheme above. Results will not be rounded up arithmetically. Hence, for example, 79.99 is a C+, not B-.

### **Assignment Details**

The requirements and expectations of each writing assignment will be distributed via a printed assignment sheet (in class) and in an online digital copy (on the ICON modules page). You are highly encouraged to bring questions about assignments and drafts of your work to me (and the Writing Center, if you so choose) at any point in your composition process.

### **Notebooks**

Throughout the semester you will keep a reading journal by responding to prompts posted on ICON and by completing in-class writing activities. I will collect notebooks twice during the semester. Each entry will be graded by a system of checkmarks and collated for a midterm and final notebook grade, each of which will count as 7.5 points toward the 15% journal grade included in the above schema. The grading system is as follows:

- ✓+: Response demonstrates thoughtful consideration of and reflection on the prompt and exceeds the bare minimum requirements
- ✓: Response adequately addresses and meets the criteria of the prompt
- ✓-: Response does not address or respond in full to the prompt, and/or lacks in critical thought that moves beyond summary or surface level engagement with the text
- X: Missing entry

I encourage you to meet with me throughout the semester to check in about your notebook entries and confer with me about how to continue improving them.

### **Discussing Graded Work**

I want to ensure that our conversations about graded assignments will be relevant and useful to you; to that end, I ask that you contact me **no sooner than 24 hours and no later than 7 days** after receiving a grade. This ensures that you have time to reflect on the work turned in and the grade received before contacting me, and that our discussion about it is not too long after the fact to be unhelpful or lacking in clarity.

### **Attendance policy**

Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on time. That said, I understand that occasionally, everyone needs to miss class. Therefore, I will allow each student **three absences** without penalty to his or her participation grade. You do not need to provide any excuse for these absences, though if you know ahead of time you will be missing class, an email is always appreciated.

Each unexcused absence beyond the permitted three will lower your final participation grade by **1/3 of a letter grade**. So, with one additional absence, an “A” becomes an “A-”, a “B-” becomes a “C+”. With two additional absences, an “A” becomes a “B+”, an “B-” becomes a “C”, etc.

There may also be other circumstances in which a student must miss class (e.g. illness, religious obligations, family obligations, athletics or other university activities, etc.) These absences should be documented properly with the University (this requires a form, available from the registrar.) These excused absences **will** count towards the aforementioned three, though you will not be penalized for excused absences accrued beyond the allowed three. For example, if you miss three classes to go to a debate tournament, and then decide to skip a fourth class later in the semester, it will lower your final grade. However, if you need to miss a fourth class for a family or medical emergency, and document it properly with the University, it will not lower your final grade.

Please note that an absence is not the same as an extension, and I still expect you to turn in via Canvas any written assignments due that day. Any quizzes or exams missed due to absence cannot be made up, and will count as a 0.

For information on excused and unexcused absences, see <http://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences>

### **Late Assignment Policy**

You are responsible for submitting all assignments on time and in the correct format as dictated by the assignment. If submitting online to an ICON dropbox, this means submitting a Word document (.doc or .docx) and not a PDF. I cannot accept major essays submitted via email. Late work will be

**docked 1 letter grade** for every day late, beginning as soon as the original due date has passed. A “C+” paper that is one day late, for example, will be docked 1 letter grade down to a “D+”. Late major work submitted over four or more days after the due date will receive an automatic F.

If you miss class, you are still responsible for submitting work on time via ICON or email. **If the due date for one of these essays is nearing and you do not feel capable of turning in a completed assignment, please set up a meeting with me to discuss potential solutions.** If you are in class on the day class notebooks are collected, you must turn yours in to me; if you are absent, you must turn it in beforehand to avoid late penalties. Otherwise, you may turn it in during our next class meeting, or may leave it in my mailbox in EPB 310.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

**I expect that you will turn off/silence and put away all of your electronic devices (cell phones, iPads, iPods, etc.) before class begins. This includes laptops and e-readers unless otherwise specified or approved by me ahead of time.** Inappropriate use of electronics during class time will negatively affect your participation grade. If, for any reason, you have a particular need (including SDS accommodations) for iPads, cell phones, or laptops during class time, please come talk to me during office hours. There will be class periods, activities, and peer review sessions for which I allow and often encourage technology use. I will notify you of these moments as necessary.

## CALENDAR OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

*This is a tentative calendar and is subject to change. Updates will be posted to ICON and/or shared in class. Students are responsible for tracking course activities, readings, and assignments. Note midterm dates and significant deadlines, such as the last day to drop. The master calendar, which includes university holidays and other important deadlines, can be found here: <https://registrar.uiowa.edu/academic-calendar>*

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| Week 1: January 14-18   |
| <b>Unit 1: Zoom In, Zoom Out: The Skills of Close Reading</b><br>T, 1/15: Introductions to the course, readings, and each other; Alice Walker, “The Flowers” (read in class)<br>Th, 1/17: The Skills of Close Reading: Leslie Marmon Silko, “Storyteller” (ICON); Assign Small Paper                                |
| Week 2: January 21-25 (1/21 is the last day to drop the class without a ‘W’)  |
| <b>Monday, January 21 is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (University Holiday); No Class</b><br>T, 1/22: Octavia Butler, <i>Kindred</i> prologue; “The River”; “The Fire” (pp. 9-51)<br>Th, 1/24: <i>Kindred</i> : “The Fall” (pp. 52-107);  |
| Week 3: January 28-February 1 (1/28 is last day to drop in order to reduce fees & tuition)  |
| T, 1/29: <i>Kindred</i> , “The Fight” (first half, pp. 108-154)<br>Th, 1/31: <i>Kindred</i> , “The Fight” (second half, pp. 154-188); John Donne, “Meditation XVII” (ICON)  |
| Week 4: February 4-8  |
| T, 2/5: <i>Kindred</i> : “The Storm” (pp. 189-239)<br>Th, 2/7: <i>Kindred</i> : “The Rope”; “Epilogue” (pp. 240-264)  |
| Week 5: February 11-15 (9/16 is the last day to Withdraw from the class without paying full tuition)  |
| <b>Unit 2: Creative Non-Fiction</b><br>T, 2/12: <u>MediaSpace</u> : Eula Biss, “Is This Kansas?” (ICON), Claudia Rankine, “Hurricane Katrina” (ICON)<br>Th, 2/14: <u>Art and Life</u> : Zadie Smith, “Joy”; Kiese Laymon, “Da Art of Storytelling”; Rebecca Solnit, “Blue of Distance” (ICON)                       |
| Week 6: February 18-22 (continued on next page)   |
| T, 2/19: <u>Rural and Urban</u> : Henry David Thoreau, “Where I Lived and What I Lived For”; Wendell Berry, “Damage”; Joan Didion, “Goodbye to All That”<br><br>Th, 2/21: <u>Placemats</u> : Jonathan Safran Foer, “Against Meat”; David Foster Wallace, “Consider the Lobster” (Both on ICON); Midterm Exam Review |
| Week 7: February 25-March 1   |
| T, 2/26: MIDTERM EXAM<br>Th, 2/28: <u>Placemaking</u> : Inara Verzemniek, “Homer Dill’s Undead” (ICON); Visit to the UI Museum of Natural History; Assign Major Essay 1   |

Week 8: March 4-8

**Unit 3: Poetry**

T, 3/5: Poetry in Place: Emily Dickinson, “I dwell in Possibility”; William Wordsworth, “The World Is Too Much With Us”; Ezra Pound, “In the Station of the Metro”; Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”; (ICON)

Th, 3/7: Poetry, Place, and Race:

Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America”; Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” and “Harlem”; Claudia Rankine, selection from *Citizen* (all on ICON)

Week 9: March 11-15

T, 3/12: Reading TBD; Essay 1 Rough Draft Workshop

Th, 3/14: Lorine Niedecker, “A Paean to Place”

Week 10: March 18-22 (SPRING BREAK)

Get a head start on the last readings of the semester, if you like—especially if you think you might want to include one of them in your final paper.

Week 11: March 25-29

**Unit 4: Fiction’s Forms**

Lost Places, Lost in Place

T, 3/26: Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*: Ch. 1-9;

Th, 3/28: Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*: Ch. 10-17; Walt Whitman, “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer”

**Major Essay 1 Due**; Assign Major Essay 2

Week 12: April 1-5 (4/1 is the last day to drop a class without Dean’s approval)

Friends in Low Places

T, 4/2: Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*: Ch. 18-25;

Th, 4/4: Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*: Ch. 26-32;

Week 13: April 8-12

T, 4/9: Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, pp.1-57 (Book I, Ch. I-IX); Major Essay 2 Rough Draft Workshop

Th, 4/11: Cather, *My Ántonia*, pp. 58-111 (Book I, Ch. X-XIX)

Week 14: April 15-19 (4/15 is the last day to withdraw from a course without the Dean’s approval)

T, 4/16: Cather, *My Ántonia*, pp.114-164 (Book II, Ch. I-XI)

Th, 4/18: Cather, *My Ántonia*, pp.164-219 (end of Book II, plus Book III)

Week 15: April 22-26

T, 4/23: Cather, *My Ántonia*, pp. 220-273 (Books IV and V);

Th, 4/25: The Workplace: Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”; **Major Essay #2 Due**

Week 16: April 29-May 3

(Y)our Place

T, 4/30: Reading TBD

Th, 5/2: Reading TBD

**FRIDAY, 5/3: Final Portfolios DUE to ICON (required to pass this class)**

**Classes Close on May 3**

Final Exam Week: May 6-10

**Exact Time and Location TBA by Registrar.** Students are responsible for being available during that time once it is announced. Students should not make travel plans until knowing this final exam information.