

University of Minnesota/North High School
EngL 1001W: Introduction to Literature, 4 credits
2009-2010 Syllabus

Mr. Dan Cahill
dcahill@isd622.org
(651) 748-6110
Class Meeting: M-F, N127, 1st or 3rd hour
Office Hours: TWR 7-8am

Texts: *House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros; *A Place Where the Sea Remembers*, Sandra Benitez; *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien; *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe; *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison; *As I Lay Dying*, William Faulkner; *Solar Storms*; Linda Hogan.

Course Description:

Intro to Literature is a University of Minnesota course traditionally taken by freshman. The course aims to introduce students to reading literature at a collegiate level. These are mature texts: they investigate controversial themes and topics, and occasionally contain passages some students find offensive or unpleasant. Our responses to these texts should be mature as well; through discussion and journal responses we will utilize literary theory to interrogate the texts and the meanings they encode. Unlike many high school literature classes, students will be expected to understand the text at a literal level independently; class time will be devoted to developing techniques for reading novels that are divergent rather than convergent, and an emphasis will be placed on creative and independent thinking. Upon successful completion of this course, students will receive four semester credits from the University of Minnesota, School of Continuing Education. Credits are paid for by ISD #622. These credits may be transferred to other colleges or universities via an official University of Minnesota transcript. Students also receive 1 elective English credit towards graduation at North High School.

Goals/Objectives:

By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze literary texts to recognize subtext and layers of meaning
- Apply critical theory to textual readings
- Interrogate the relationship between literary texts and other representations of the world around us
- Articulate clearly the meaning they draw from literary texts in essay form
- Engage peers in productive and collaborative discussion of literature

To achieve these goals, students will:

- Read 7-8 novels, plays or books of poetry
- Respond to these texts in a reading journal (see handouts)
- Engage their classmates in discussion
- Produce a number of final, polished pieces of writing
- Reflect on their subconscious assumptions about literature, race, gender, and the nature of meaning

Required and Recommended Materials

- Post-it Notes
- A copy of Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*
- Notebooks or loose-leaf paper for in-class note-taking
- Access to a word processing program and the Internet on a regular basis
- Recommended: Students are encouraged to purchase their own copies of the class texts.

Teaching Philosophy

My favorite thing about being an English teacher is that I am always rereading books. Reading is great, but when you reread the best books they are always different; you recognize different things, make different inferences, find new patterns you didn't see before. That understanding, that a text is not a fixed point but something that grows with the reader, is central to my approach to teaching. I hope that my students come to see literature as having a plethora of possible interpretations, and that their job is to find as many as they can and evaluate the viability of each. My role, then, is twofold: one, I need to model the way I would like them to read, to make transparent the process of interpretation. This might mean sharing when I get confused or making qualified (rather than definitive) statements about the text. Second, I need to evaluate the readings students create. A multitude of readings does not mean that "anything goes;" refining and pushing back on the student opinion is necessary for their critical faculties to be at their strongest.

Class Format

This class will meet three to four days a week. A few classes will be lectures about critical theory, but the vast majority will be small or large group discussion. As a member of this class you are expected to be above-average in terms of work ethic and preparation, and so your preparation for these discussions should be thorough. Generally, you should have completed the book and attained a fairly thorough understanding if it before the first time we discuss it in class. You will also work on a reading journal throughout the class. As a rule of thumb, the University of Minnesota suggests that for each hour of class time, students should spend two hours in preparation. Assignments will follow that general guideline.

Critical perspectives

In this course, we will examine literature through many "lenses" or perspectives, including feminist, psychoanalytic, cultural materialist, post-colonial, and post-structural, among others. Each of these perspectives are based on theories about the relationship among people, our world, and the texts we use to describe them. This means that we will not just read the stories to see "what happened" or "who did what to whom," but we will attempt to read and discuss stories as they relate to the ideas and issues that create the worlds in which we live.

Your grade will be based on:

Reading Notebook (40%)

Your Reading Notebook will be the cornerstone of all the work you do in this class. While we discuss the texts in class, you will be extending and enriching your understanding by completing a Reading Notebook. Traditionally this was written by hand in an actual notebook, but for you these assignments will be word processed. You will complete an entry about every other day in a variety of formats, and will complete each text by producing a longer piece of literary analysis. You will hand the resulting

entries in at Turnitin.com. Aside from reading the texts, this is where you will be doing most of your outside work, and your other grades will stem from it.

Class Participation (30%)

One of the ways in which this class may differ from your prior experiences with literature is that we will approach reading and meaning-making as a collaborative, social activity. Whenever we read, we are not simply receiving information from an author, but collaborating with the author to make meaning. In addition, we draw on our experience as a member of a community (or communities) to make conclusions. In class, we will make obvious the social nature of reading by sharing our ideas together. Students who earn the most participation points will not simply be the ones who talk a lot, but whose comments are thoughtful, designed to encourage their classmates' participation, and demonstrate that the sharing of ideas should be cooperative rather than competitive. Your Reading Notebooks will be invaluable resources during class time, so keep them handy. Furthermore, when we begin to discuss a book, your ability to participate will be influenced by your completion of the reading, and so we will begin each unit with a short quiz to check your reading.

Formal Writing/Group Project (30%)

At the conclusion of the semester, you will take one of your analytical entries in your Reading Notebook, improve it, and hand it in as an example of your best writing. In addition, you will complete a small group project on a choice novel to conclude the class. More detailed information on these assignments will be forthcoming.

Grading scale

The University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts guidelines will be used to determine grades:

- A You completed the assignments, fulfilled all requirements, added material or developed new insights, and truly distinguished yourself through the use of particularly creative or inventive approaches.
- B You completed the assignments, fulfilled all requirements and went beyond by contributing additional material or developing new insights
- C You completed the assignments and fulfilled the requirements
Note: a "C" grade is the normal grade for this course. Anything above a "C" reflects significant extra effort and skill and is considered an honors grade.
- D You fulfilled some of the requirements of the assignments, but not all of them
- N You did not fulfill most of the requirements of the assignments

Schedule

For each text there are two dates. The first date is the day we will begin the text in class: you should be prepared for discussion. Your reading notebooks for that text will be due at 8:15am on the second date.

9/8 – 9/14: Introduction

9/14 -9/21 *A House on Mango Street*

9/21-9/28 *A Place Where the Sea Remembers*

9/28 – 10/12 *The Bluest Eye*

10/12 – 10/26 *As I Lay Dying*

10/26 – 11/9 *Things Fall Apart*

11/9 – 11/16 *Then, Suddenly*

11/16-11/30 *Solar Storms*

11/30 – 12/14 *The Things They Carried*

These are your due dates for the choice novel group work and your finished paper.
12/21 Choice Novel Presentation
12/23 – Finished Paper

Class Website

The class website is at <http://north.isd622.org/cahillcisliterature>. On it you will find copies of this and other assignments, helpful resources, and links to important websites.

Inclusivity Statement

You are a diverse group of students, even if on the surface you may appear more or less homogeneous. Diversity is a strength in our society. In this class, you will be expected to maintain an open mind to the differences around you, and you are encouraged to place a positive value on those differences. Racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and other forms of bigotry are inherent in our culture. We need to learn how to recognize and address statements of these attitudes so that our classroom can be as inclusive as possible. Students are encouraged to acknowledge diversity by listening actively to one another. It is especially important that you listen to students whose opinions differ from your own, arguing with the opinions while remaining respectful of the individual. All of us learn in different ways and with varying degrees of success. If you know of any factors in your life which hinder your abilities to learn up to your potential in this course, please notify me at once. If these factors are recognized disabilities under the ADA, please provide me with appropriate notification. If they fall outside official categories, stop by and discuss them with me so that we may arrive at a satisfactory program of study/performance for you in this course.

Disability Services

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disability conditions (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, or systemic) that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services and their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. Disability Services is located in Suite #180 McNamara Alumni Center, 200 Oak Street. Staff can be reached by calling 612/626-1333 voice or TTY. For further information, visit their web site: <http://ds.umn.edu/>.

Attendance Policy

(From the U of M English Department): "Students should attend every class meeting, on time and prepared, and should remain in class for the duration of the period. If the student misses the equivalent of one week of class (four periods), his or her grade may be lowered. Once a student misses the equivalent of three weeks, he or she may fail the course. Students are responsible for all material and assignments missed because of absence or illness. Please avoid making school appointments or lessons during this class."

Unlike your other classes, this course follows policies set down by the University of Minnesota. Even if you miss class and are excused by North High School, *this will not be considered excused by the University*. Missing class to attend a school activity (e.g. an athletic competition or a choir concert), to see a doctor or dentist, or to visit a college *will count against the four absences*. If you will be missing a number of classes and are uncomfortable with the grade loss you will want to consider dropping this class.

Scholastic Dishonesty

Students are responsible for maintaining scholastic honesty in their work at all times. Students engaged in scholastic dishonesty will be penalized according to the policies of North High School, which would include referral to their Assistant Principal and a note on their permanent record. In addition their name may be reported to University of Minnesota Student Judicial Affairs. The student will lose credit for the particular assignment and risks losing credit for the class.

The University's College of Liberal Arts defines scholastic dishonesty as "any act that violates the rights of another student with respect to academic work or that involves misrepresentation of a student's own work. Scholastic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) cheating on assignments or examinations, plagiarizing (misrepresenting as one's own anything done by another), submitting the same or substantially similar papers (or creative work) for more than one course without consent of all instructors concerned, depriving another of necessary course materials, and sabotaging another's work." Scholastic dishonesty also includes fabrication, cheating and academic misconduct.

Academic Dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course is grounds for course failure and may result in reporting to the Student Judicial Affairs Office. For more information, visit <http://advisingtools.class.umn.edu/Multimedia/>. Open the link to the CLA Student Handbook. Scholastic dishonesty defined at: <http://advisingtools.class.umn.edu/cgep/studentconduct.html>.

Quantity of Work per Credit

The University Senate prescribes the quantity of work needed to earn a credit as three hours per credit per week or approximately 45 hours per credit per semester. The manner in which the course is taught determines how much of the work will be in the classroom, laboratory, library, or independent study and research. A student should expect to spend about 9 hours a week, *including class time*, on a 3-credit course.

Insider Information

In addition to academic gifts and work ethic, another important skill of successful college students is trying to determine the instructor's quirks, hidden agendas, and classroom systems. In order to save you time and energy in reading me correctly, I will tell you things about myself that could possibly influence grading and relating to one another in the classroom.

- I take my profession and my subject matter very seriously. I appreciate when students approach literary studies expecting and embracing the same type of rigor they would in any other high-level class. I am aware that some people question the academic or "real-life" value of literary studies. I am always confused by people who raise these questions during class in very rude ways – do you want me to hate you? On the other hand, if you do have serious questions about the "why?'s" behind all this, I would be happy to discuss them outside of class.
- I appreciate students who treat each other with kindness and respect. I don't expect you all to be friends, but I do expect that by this time you have left the mean and spiteful behavior of middle school behind.
- I appreciate students who understand that actions have consequences and are willing to accept them. I don't expect you to be perfect, but I do hope that you will accept the problems you have created. Try saying "I know the assignment is due today, but I don't have it. What are the consequences?" It is human nature to shift blame and avoid responsibility, but as you grow older you will appreciate people who are forthright about their mistakes.
- I appreciate students who think ahead, and who can plan for problems before they arise. If an assignment is due on Friday, and you come in on Friday with some excuse, you should be

prepared for consequences. If, however, you tell me on Thursday (or even better, on Monday) that you will have trouble being finished by Friday, I am much more likely to be sympathetic (of course, the best thing to do is to get things done ahead of time).

- I appreciate students who approach discussions as a chance to learn from their classmates, not “beat” them. It is far better to be tentative and thoughtful about what you think (and willing to change your mind) than it is to always be arguing a position. We’re trying to solve problems together, not have a debate. If you insist on having a debate, I may tell you to shut up.
- That said, I appreciate students who get passionate and involved in discussion. You’ll find it’s more fun when you care about what is being said. The key is to discuss ideas, and not people.
- I think the most important skill for you to learn is to use the text to support your assertions. Cite quotations and passages in all your writing and, in discussion, refer to specific passages and direct the rest of us to them. We want to talk about the book, not our memory of the book. I know this can be tedious to always be flipping through the book, but people who are in the habit of having facts to support their ideas are in short supply in our world.
- I do not enjoy reading student work that is jotted down in a last-minute, got-to-get-something-put-together-so-that-I-don’t-get-a-zero kind of way. Grading takes time, and time is something I value. Show me that you also value my time and yours by always putting thought into your assignments.
- My favorite thing about student writing is creativity and fresh insights. I expect to learn from you, and will reward those students who give me something to think about.
- I like e-mail; you can communicate with me that way whenever you like: dcahill@isd622.org