American Literature to 1865
Cultures in Contact: Constructing American Identities

Instructor: Dr. Sharon Talley
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Office Hours: TR 2:00-4:00; W 8:30-9:30
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Required Texts to Buy:
Cabeza de Vaca, Alvar Núñez. The Account: Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s Relación.
Franklin, Benjamin. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. 1791/1828. Mineola: Dover,
1996.

Other Required Readings (available on Blackboard):
American Indian Oral Narrative
Iroquois Creation Story
Aztec Oral Poetry
Yuchi and Hopi Prophecies
Juan Seguín’s Biography
Juan Seguín’s Personal Memoirs
Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Poet” and letter to Whitman
Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia (excerpt from Query XIV)
Others to be determined.

Course Description:
In this course, we will study diverse and complex examples of the U.S. American literary
landscape from its pre-European beginnings to 1865. To unify our study, we will investigate how
eyear American texts use cultural encounters to formulate, reflect, and critique notions of
America and Americans. In particular, the course will explore the relationship of issues such as
race, class, gender, sexuality, faith, and citizenship to shifting ideas about American identity,
values, and culture. Proceeding from the assumption that neither “American” nor “literature” is a
stable term with an unchanging meaning, we will examine the ways in which some texts attempt
to fix ideas about national belonging, “American culture,’’ and “American literature,’’ while
others challenge these same ideas by suggesting alternative ways of being (or not being) American. In addition to studying writers who have long had name recognition (e.g., Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, and Henry David Thoreau), we will also read writings by women, Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans who until recently were missing from the body of works called “American literature.”

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):**

Students who successfully complete ENGL 3354 will be able to:

1. understand the connections between literary works and their social, historical, and cultural contexts;
2. analyze literary texts orally and in writing;
3. recognize the distinctive characteristics of a variety of genres, as well as their significance in early American literature;
4. integrate research with their own insights in analyzing texts and developing arguments.

**Course Evaluation:**

Daily Work and Participation 15%
Exams (2) 30% (15% each)
Panel Discussion 10%
Literary Analysis 15%
Research Paper
  Research Journal (4 entries) 10% (2.5% each)
  Essay 20%

A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, F=below 60

**Course Requirements:**

**Daily Work and Participation (SLOs 1, 2, and 3):** This class is discussion- rather than lecture-based. As a result, it is essential for everyone to keep up with the readings, think critically about them, and come to class prepared to participate in discussion. Class will be interactive, and you should expect to participate in a variety of ways: in-class writings and quizzes, full-class and small-group discussion, online postings, taking responsibility for researching or leading discussion on a specific issue, etc. Daily work cannot be made up for any reason. Some of the daily work will be formally graded and returned to you. We will also do work that is *not* formally graded but that is intended to help you digest the material and prepare for the projects and exams.

**Exams (SLOs 1, 2, and 3):** We will have two exams. Each of the exams will have an in-class and out-of-class section. The purpose of these exams will be to show:

- your critical understanding of key terms and concepts in objective and short answer responses (in-class/25%),
- your ability to analyze critically what we have read and discussed through close readings of key passages (in-class/25%),
- your synthesis of our course concerns by writing that draws connections between the literary texts and their multiple contexts (out-of-class/50%).
The prompts for the essay portions of the exam will be distributed one week before the due date. I do not provide study guides for the exams or post notes online, so it will be important to keep up with the readings and take notes during class.

Panel Discussion (SLOs 1 and 4): As a team, you and two or three other students will plan, research, and present a panel discussion to introduce and contextualize one of the major reading assignments. As part of this assignment, you must: 1) provide a supplemental handout and 2) involve the class in a learning activity that connects your presentation to our reading assignment. In your presentation/discussion, it is important not to focus merely on biographical information about the author. Instead, focus on some combination of historical, cultural, and literary issues relevant to the author and text(s) assigned. Feel free to use a brief video clip or other visual aids to increase your ability to engage the class’s interest in your subject matter. You may refer to notes, but please do not read to us. The presentation and related learning activity should take approximately 30 minutes of class time. At least one week in advance, each panel must provide me with a one-page outline of the group presentation that specifies individual responsibilities and the approach you plan to take in stimulating class participation. At the beginning of the class period immediately following the presentation, each panel member must turn in a completed self-evaluation (no extensions). Class time on September 1 will be devoted to assigning and organizing the panels.

Literary Analysis (SLOs 1 and 2): You will write one literary analysis on a focused topic of your choice that relates to our readings and thematic concerns. This analytical essay, which may be written on any literary text that we read by October 4, should create an argument that is framed by a meaningful, interpretive thesis and organized by a series of key claims or assertions. You should provide textual evidence to support each of these claims, as well as analysis of the evidence. No secondary sources are required for this essay, which should be 3-4 pages in length (typed and double-spaced) and adhere to MLA format and documentation requirements. In evaluating your essay, I will consider the complexity, sophistication and originality of your thesis, the selection and strength of the evidence that you use to support your claims, the clarity and coherence of your interpretive argument, your personal engagement with the text, and your command of writing conventions and surface features (including MLA).

Research Paper (SLOs 1, 2, and 4): For the culminating assignment in this course, you will select an early U.S. American writer who is not on our syllabus. From your preliminary research on or knowledge about this writer, you will select one of his or her literary texts that you wish to read (or re-read) and research to further your understanding of early U.S. American literatures, cultures, and identities. You will then synthesize what you have learned by developing a formal essay that combines your own insights with those from at least six scholarly secondary sources to create a formal argument that is relevant to the text and our course concerns. For success, this argument will require a focused topic, an interpretive thesis, compelling textual evidence, and insightful analysis. The final paper, which should represent your best and most polished writing, should be at least six pages long and prepared in MLA documentation style.

Research Journal: To begin work on this project, you will respond to the following prompts, turning them in at the beginning of class on the dates listed in the schedule. Be sure to keep your first three entries when I return them to you so that you can reflect on them and turn them all in together with the final one.
1. Brainstorm about your selection: What author have you selected? What interests you most about the author and the time period in which he or she wrote? Why did you choose this specific literary text? What do you find most interesting and significant about it so far?

2. Brainstorm about your research: What have you learned from your outside secondary research? How has it helped you to understand the literary text better and decide on what you want to argue about it? Include an annotated bibliography with this entry.

3. Brainstorm about your topic and thesis: What topic will you focus on in your essay? What led you to this choice? In a nutshell, what do you wish to argue about the literary text? What will your key claims be to support your thesis and how will you organize them? Include a tentative outline of your argument with this entry.

4. Reflective overview: How is this research journal a reflection of your learning about early U.S. American literature? Turn in this overview with the three previous entries (stapled together).

Course Policies

Student Communications: From time to time, it may be necessary for me to contact you individually or to contact everyone in the class to communicate important course-related information. Please be aware that University policy requires me to use your Islander e-mail address for this purpose. I will expect you to act responsibly to ensure that you receive and, if appropriate, respond to all such communications in a timely manner.

Attendance: Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion is required for success in this class. You can miss two classes without penalty. For every subsequent class you miss—regardless of the reason—two points will be deducted from your final grade. If you are present for only part of a class, this deduction will be “prorated.” Perfect attendance will result in a two-point increase in your final grade. Do not waste your permitted absences. Save them for times when you are ill, have a family emergency, need to be out of town, have car trouble, etc. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from another student. You are responsible for all work and for keeping up with all assignments announced in your absence.

Laptops, Cell Phones, and Other Electronic Devices: The use of laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices in the classroom is distracting to those around you; therefore, their use is not permitted. All cell phones, texting devices, and laptops must be turned off and in your backpack, bag, or otherwise out of sight during class. If you fail to adhere to this policy, I will ask you to leave class, resulting in your being counted absent for the entire class.

Late Assignments/Make-up Work: I will not accept a late assignment unless you have made arrangements with me before the due date. Work done in class cannot be made up for any reason. Except in the case of unusual circumstances that are discussed with me in advance, you must attend class as a condition of any extension on an assignment. In-class exams can be made up only in cases of documented major illness or emergency of which you notify me in advance of the exam. Any such make-up exams will be in essay form and must be scheduled and taken during my regular office hours within one week of the original exam date.
**Academic Honesty:** I will follow the university’s policy on academic honesty. Plagiarism, which is “the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work” is only one form of academic dishonesty, which also includes falsification (the intentional alteration of information), fabrication (the intentional invention of information), multiple submissions (using the same material for two separate assignments or courses without permission from the instructors), and abuse of academic materials (the intentional destruction of resource materials). Sometimes students commit unintentional plagiarism (not citing sources properly, for example) because they are unaware of the standards that apply. Therefore, if you have questions or doubts about what constitutes a breach of integrity or a violation of policies, it is important that you consult with me.

**Grade Appeal Process:** As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Website at [http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html](http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.html). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

**Resources**

1. **Writing Center:** The Writing Center of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi provides free help for students at any stage of the writing process. Writing Center consultants are trained to work with writers one-on-one to help them find ideas, organize their thoughts, cite sources, and succeed at all aspects of the writing task. The Writing Center works closely with faculty across campus to understand the writing projects they assign and to help students meet the expectations of those assignments. The Writing Center is located in Bell Library 216 in the Tutoring and Learning Center. Both drop-in and scheduled appointments are available. More information is available at [http://falcon.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home/](http://falcon.tamucc.edu/wiki/WC/Home/).

2. **Students with Disabilities and Veterans:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816. If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom, or on campus, please contact Disability Services for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

3. **Academic Advising Center:** If you are majoring, or plan to major, in a field taught in the College of Liberal Arts, and if you have not yet obtained a signed degree plan, you should meet with an Academic Advisor immediately. Degree plans are important and useful in
ensuring successful progress toward graduation. The Academic Advising Center for the College of Liberal Arts is located in Driftwood 203E and can be reached at (361) 825-3466.

Reminder to English Majors
As part of the English undergraduate capstone course (ENGL 4351), all English majors are required to submit a portfolio of writings in different discourse genres that they have completed for their college classes. To help you prepare for this assignment, you should keep a copy of all essays, research papers, literary analyses, creative and report writing, etc., so that you will have an ample selection from which to choose when the portfolio comes due.

Tentative Course Schedule (subject to change):
Note: Except for work done in class, all writing assignments/projects are due at the beginning of class on the dates noted. Readings designed with the notation “(BB)” are on Blackboard. You must bring copies of all reading assignments to class.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading Assignment Due/Class Focus</th>
<th>Writing Assignment Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R 08/25</td>
<td>Course Overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>T 08/30</td>
<td>American Indian Oral Narrative (BB); Iroquois Creation Story (BB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>R 09/01</td>
<td>Organize/Plan Panels</td>
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<td>T 09/06</td>
<td>Aztec Oral Poetry (BB); Yuchi and Hopi Prophecies (BB)</td>
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American Indian Voices: Origins, Premonitions, & Prophecies

- **Date**
- **Reading Assignment Due/Class Focus**
- **Writing Assignment Due**

Cultures in Contact: Voices from the Imperial Frontier

- **Date**
- **Reading Assignment**

Cultures in Contact: An Anglo-American’s Response to the “New” World

- **Date**
- **Reading Assignment**

Cultures in Contact: The Enlightenment, Gender, & the American Dream

- **Date**
- **Reading Assignment**

Cultures in Contact: Voices from the Texas-Mexico Border

- **Date**
- **Reading Assignment**
### Cultures in Contact: Romanticism & New England Transcendentalism

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R 10/27</td>
<td>Emerson, “The Poet” and letter to Whitman (BB); Whitman, <em>Leaves of Grass</em> (Introduction)</td>
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<td>T 11/01</td>
<td>Whitman, <em>Leaves of Grass</em> (“Song of Myself” – Sections 1-19)</td>
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<td>R 11/03</td>
<td>Whitman, <em>Leaves of Grass</em> (“Song of Myself” – Sections 20-52)</td>
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<td>T 11/08</td>
<td>Thoreau, <em>Walden</em> (1-63)</td>
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<td>R 11/10</td>
<td>Thoreau, <em>Walden</em> (64-135)</td>
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<td>R 11/17</td>
<td>IN-CLASS EXAM</td>
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### Cultures in Contact: Slavery & the Civil War

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>T 11/22</td>
<td>Craft, <em>Running a 1000 Miles</em> (Introduction, Preface, and Part I); Jefferson, from <em>Notes on the State of Virginia</em> (BB)</td>
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<tr>
<td>R 11/24</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS</td>
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<tr>
<td>T 11/29</td>
<td>Craft, <em>Running a 1000 Miles</em> (Part II &amp; Supplemental Readings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>R/12/01</td>
<td>Continue discussion of <em>Running a 1000 Miles</em></td>
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<td>T 12/06</td>
<td>Course Wrap-Up</td>
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<td>Complete Research Journal (entries 1-4 stapled together)</td>
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<td>Take-Home Exam Essay</td>
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<td>Research Paper</td>
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