

Course Information

ENGL 3364 – Nineteenth-Century American Literature

Instructor: James Finley – james.finley@tamusa.edu

Meeting: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 am – 10:45 am, CAB 218

Student hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Hall 328, and by appointment (phone, Zoom, or in person). To schedule a meeting with me, please send me an email.

Course Description and Objectives

This course covers canonical and noncanonical American writers from the nineteenth century. We will explore the cultural background of American literary production and focus on representative works, including poetry and nonfiction prose.

The work we will do this semester will ask you to consider texts, issues, and eras not in isolation but rather as part of contested, and often rowdy, debates about what is America, who is an American, and what makes up its literature? The course, therefore, provides students with the contexts and documents necessary to understand the aesthetic, cultural, and political debates that shaped nineteenth-century American culture, many of which still resonate today.

So as to consider how literature shapes debates about the past, present, and future of America, as an idea, place, nation, collection of cultures, and site of struggle, I will ask you to focus on a “keyword” of your choosing and trace how its meaning appears and changes across the semester. We will work on a range of exercises and activities that will build toward a final project about your keyword.

Required Text: *Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. B: 1820 – 1865*, 10th ed. (2022) – ISBN: 9780393696790

Course Expectations. Please do your best (and let me know how I can help you) to:

1. thoroughly complete all assignments;
2. attend class and participate constructively and thoughtfully;
3. communicate with me via email or in student hours (in person or by phone) about your ideas, questions, and concerns;
4. demonstrate in discussions, reading notes, reflections, presentations, and the semester project your engagement with the readings and material covered;
5. treat our class as an intellectual community, where all feel welcome to share their reactions, think out loud, change their minds, ask questions, and have an academically engaging experience.

Course Objectives:

1. become familiar with some important works, genres, forms, and concerns of nineteenth-century American literature;
2. learn about the cultural contexts in which nineteenth-century American literature was written and received;
3. develop your ability to analyze literature;
4. develop your written communication skills;

5. develop your own arguments about how and why nineteenth-century American literature matters.

Assignments and Assessment Methods:

Participation - We will do a lot of work in class, and for this reason participation will be an important part of the grade. Participation includes attendance and being present for class, bringing necessary materials, and engaging with the work in a productive manner. We will talk more about what this entails during the first week of class. **Points** – 3 points per class, 75 total, with a chance of extra credit up to 81. 25% of final grade.

Conferences - Twice during the semester we will not meet as a class so that you and I can have individual conversations (roughly 20 minutes). I will circulate sign-up sheets in advance and will explain in greater depth how to prepare for these conversations.

Reading Notes - Prior to each class with a reading assignment, please upload to Blackboard and save for future reference a document that includes any quotations (of phrases, sentences, or passages) where your keyword or references to your keyword appear. Please also draft and revise (at least) two paragraphs in response, one of analysis and one of synthesis. Please use (and modify) [this template](#). Please be prepared to share your responses in class and please save your notes for use in subsequent reflections and the final project. **Points** – 5 points per entry (one for quotations and two for each response section). 25% of final grade.

Reflections - At various points in the semester, I will ask you to draft and revise a reflection, roughly 1 – 2 pages, that will provide an opportunity to push your thinking forward on your final project and to receive feedback. Detailed prompts for each reflection are available [here](#) and on Blackboard. **Points** – 8 points per reflection. 25% of final grade.

Keywords Project - After keeping track of and reflecting upon examples of your keyword in the semester's readings, please draft and revise an essay that answers the questions: *what did your keyword mean in the nineteenth century and how was it used in the literature we read this semester?* Your essay should be between five and seven pages, with quotations and analysis, and a multi-part thesis that accounts for various usages, forms, contexts, etc. Further details can be found [here](#) and on Blackboard. 25% of final grade

Class Schedule (subject to change)

[R] indicates reading assignment

[B] indicates background and contextual materials – with links to slides

[A] indicates assignment due

Date	Readings and Assignments
Week 1 M 08/24	• Introduction to the class • Introductory survey [B] What is a keyword?
W 08/26	• Introduction to the class, continued [B] Print culture in the early nineteenth-century, Romance, and American Literary Nationalism [B] Washington Irving, backgrounds and contexts
F 08/28	[A] Reflection 1