

Course Information

ENGL 5360 - Topics in American Literature: Disability in American Literature and Culture

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

Meeting: Mondays, 5:30 pm - 8:15 pm, Hall 203

Student hours: M 3:30 pm - 5:30 pm, Hall 328, and by appointment - please click [here](#) or send me an email.

Course Description

“Disability in American Literature and Culture” will examine representations of disability and disabled people and the question of what makes a normal, healthy body across a range of texts and other forms of artistic and cultural production. Our seminar will cover both medical and social models of disability so as to develop understandings of how literature, art, and other forms of cultural production shape disability and the various and changing meanings of disability. We will address disability in relation to a range of other concerns, including race, gender, aging, sexuality, crime, the environment, and class, and across a range of periods from American history. We will consider both primary sources and scholarship within the growing interdisciplinary field known as Disability Studies.

Learning Objectives. At the end of the course, students will have:

1. Developed expertise in Disability Studies;
2. A rich understanding of how disability has been represented in American literature;
3. Gained experience in interdisciplinary work;
4. Composed a series of written pieces about representations of disability.

Books

Keywords for Disability Studies, edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: New York University Press, 2015) - 9781479839520

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, by Ken Kesey (New York: Berkeley, 1962) - 9780451163967

Their Dogs Came With Them, by Helena María Viramontes (New York: Washington Square Press, 2007) - 9781416588344

Ceremony, by Leslie Marmon Silko (New York: Penguin, 2006) - 9780143104919

Cancer Journals, by Audre Lorde (New York: Penguin, 2020) - 9780143135203

Fledgling, by Octavia E. Butler (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2005) - 9780446696166

Course Design and Assignments

Discussion board posts: By noon on Mondays when we meet, please post a two-part reflection to the Blackboard discussion board. Each post should contain (1) a brief paragraph about your take-aways from the previous class and (2) a brief paragraph about what you'd like to discuss or otherwise get out of the upcoming class based on readings or other relevant material. For the first part, please write about what topics, examples, or questions were especially compelling to you and what is their significance, both in terms of the work you're doing in this class and for the thinking, reading, writing, etc., that you're doing elsewhere. For the second part, please list a topic or a question that you would like to raise in our upcoming meeting. If possible, please include a quotation (and citation) from the reading, and provide sufficient explication of what interests you. Posts will be graded out of 4 points, with two points for each part. I will read these prior to class and will structure our discussion around what you have written, so please be prepared to talk about your post. Although not required, I ask that you read others' posts prior to class.

Reflections: This assignment asks you to reflect on the readings and discussions in a more developed and sustained way than the discussion posts but without the expectations of a formal writing assignment. These reflections are designed to direct your thinking and to get feedback. Prompts will be posted to Blackboard and [here](#). Reflections should be roughly a page to a page and a half in length and they will be graded out of 5 points.

Midterm Essay: Please choose an essay in the *Keywords for Disability Studies* collection and use the ideas in the essay to examine the representation of disability (or able-bodiedness) in a work of your own choosing. You are welcome to select a literary text, a work of visual art, an episode of a tv show or a film, a piece of music, or some sort of public-facing piece that is not artistic. We will have a short workshop during class on February 25, with reflection 2 as a foundation for developing the beginnings of a draft. A draft will be due in class on March 4 and the final copy (roughly four to five pages) will be due to Blackboard by the end of the day on March 8.

Final Project: The final project can be an essay or a sustained investigation in another form of a text or topic from this class. A full description will be posted to Blackboard.