



Core Knowledge American Literature Syllabus

Summary

This course will survey American literature from the mid-Eighteenth Century to the post-World War II period. It is designed to prepare aspiring teachers to teach American literature in elementary and middle schools, and conceived with particular reference to the Core Knowledge curriculum for grades K-8. Readings will include poems, novels, essays, autobiographies, short stories, social commentaries, political tracts, and philosophy, originating in different regions and social settings across the country. Some works are chosen from their historical importance, others for their thematic insight, others for their aesthetic virtues. Taken together, they form a rich collection of imaginative and critical writing, composed by former slaves and United States Presidents, by immigrants and expatriates, by Harvard professors and unknown spinsters. Our goal will be to analyze these works as diverse representations of American experience, ideas, and values. As it is created, literature in its widest sense can function as moral instruction, political polemic, personal expression, and casual entertainment. Broaching the literature carefully requires that we be attuned to its varied purposes, and skillful in detailing the ways in which it accomplishes them. This means that much classroom discussion will involve close textual commentary upon the assigned works. As we proceed to study the literature of the past, however, the material begins to form a tradition, and familiarity with that tradition is one of the prerequisites of liberal education. As the course progresses, then, we will develop a larger sense of the progress of American writing, and discern continuities and discontinuities from one age to the next. By the end of the course, students will have acquired a basic knowledge of American literary history, combining a trained eye for authorial styles and a flexible talent for textual interpretation with a solid understanding of historical contexts.

Requirements

There will be three major exams during the semester, two midterms and a comprehensive reading exam. The midterms will be made up of two parts: three passages to be given short explications in terms of form and content; and two general questions asking students to apply certain themes and ideas to a selection of literature. The reading exam will be a long list of short passages that the students will have to identify by author, giving stylistic and thematic reasons for the identification.

The first midterm will be given in Week 6, the second in Week 13. The reading exam will be given during finals week.

There will be three 7-10 page papers due during the semester. The first paper will take a short passage selected by the student and perform a detailed explication of the language and meaning of it. This paper will not require a thesis or a research component. Instead, it will test the students' capacity to analyze literature in a focused, concrete way. The second paper will examine one or two authors on the syllabus in terms of a literary genre or tradition. Following a general exposition of the genre or tradition, works will be taken as illustrations of regionalism, realism, etc. Research will focus upon literary history and intertextual relations. The third paper will be a historical examination of a work selected by the student. The meaning of the work will be related to historical events and circumstances, to social conditions and political concerns, and concentrate upon their representation in the literature. Research will be extensive, exploring biographical and historical studies, as well as literary studies.

Texts

We recommend The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 2 vols., 5th edition, edited by Nina Baym et al (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998). The readings to follow are based on the offerings provided in these volumes. There are many other anthologies of American literature, but the Norton is consistently in print and the selections are good. Other texts such as The American Tradition in Literature have an uneven publication history, and some popular anthologies like The Heath Anthology of American Literature are somewhat tendentious in their presentations of the material.

Some of the readings, however, are not provided in the Norton Anthology. They are listed as handouts and noted on the syllabus. Additionally, there is a category of "Supplemental readings." These are not required, but rather intended as directions for further study in backgrounds and textual interpretations.

Use of this Syllabus

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Readings

WEEK 1--Day 1: Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography

Textual issues:

-----Frequently, Franklin interprets the course of his life as a moral tale. He inserts into his narrative pieces of moral instruction, aphorisms about hard work and the evils of wastefulness, decisions to minimize drink, conserve his money, and be entrepreneurial. Examine this dual-level structure of concrete events and moral commentary. (Weber is useful here.)

-----It is worth having students take the time to draw up a two-sided list of vices and virtues in the Autobiography. Then, ask how and where Franklin himself, according to his own words, lives up to his own moral code. Consider Franklin's own habit of list-making, of creating designs and plans for his life.

-----In many ways, Franklin's Autobiography is the first American rags-to-riches tale. He begins as an impoverished runaway, landing in Philadelphia with nothing but a few pennies. He ends as the most famous American in the world, revered as a scientist, a philosopher, a citizen, and a wit. Explore his career as a success story, and detail the lessons he learns along the way and the secret of his advancement.

-----Religious belief is a complicated issue in the narrative. At one point he enters a Quaker service, and is confused by the rituals. At another point he makes a deal with a friend, each promising to contact the other, after one of them dies, from the beyond, in order to verify the immortality of the soul. Have students ponder what comes of these moments. Franklin seems determined to keep the question of whether he believes in God open.

Contextual issues:

-----Much of the Autobiography takes place in labor settings, such as in the printing shop. Franklin himself has violated the law in fleeing a man to whom he owed several years of servitude. Taking the Autobiography as representative, explore the nature of labor relations in pre-Revolutionary America.

-----In the course of his life, Franklin promoted numerous civic organizations and services in the Colonies. These included a local fire department, a lending library, and local media. It seems that at the same time that Franklin pursues a cupiditous, self-centered ambition, he also understands the importance of civic duty. Have students debate whether this is a workable model of American citizenship.

-----Many other figures in U.S. literature seem to follow the life or career patterns of Franklin. The orphan or the runaway is something of a fundamental figure, and includes Melville's Ishmael, Henry James's Christopher Newman (in The American), Huck Finn, and Gatsby. Anticipate this motif for the students, and raise the figure of the young man on his own as a suitable American hero.

Supplemental readings:

- Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism [in the opening section, Weber cites Franklin as the perfect example of the gospel of work joined to capitalist success]
- D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature [in a chapter on Franklin, Lawrence derides the petty materialist concerns of a clever colonist]
- Carl Van Doren, Benjamin Franklin [still the best biography, though it dates from the 1930s]

-----Day 2: Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence; letter to Peter Carr

Textual issues:

-----The structure of the Declaration falls into 3 discrete parts: the opening statement of principles, the list of grievances, and concluding remarks. Detail where each part begins and ends, and show how Jefferson facilitates those transitions.

-----One of the reasons Jefferson was chosen to compose the Declaration by the other delegates was that many admired his prose style. Take some of his sentences, especially from the opening--such as “We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .”--and discuss what makes them eloquent. Examine the diction, the syntax, the parallelism, etc.

-----It is important to catalogue the specific grievances against George III, so that students understand that the causes of revolt were not just abstract (as the opening may imply), but concrete. Enumerate just exactly what George III’s actions were, and why they offended the colonists.

-----The “moral sense,” as expressed in the letter to Carr, is one of Jefferson’s most deeply held ideas. Indeed, it is the basis for the equality of all persons. Discuss what the moral sense is, why according to Jefferson it isn’t teachable (on this issue the illustration of the plowman and the professor is perfect), and how it relates to social and political matters.

Contextual issues:

-----The ideals expressed in the Declaration’s opening section--on natural rights, tyranny, and equality--have served to inspire everyone from French Revolutionaries in 1789 to U.S. Civil Rights leaders in 1965. Discuss how they serve the enemies of monarchy, fascism, racism, and imperialism.

-----Many people in Great Britain were convinced of the justice of the American cause and impressed by the Declaration, particularly because Jefferson took many of his ideas about rights and government from British sources like John Locke and Adam Smith. (See the readings by Garry Wills on this.) Put your self in the position of a London merchant reading the Declaration. How might you feel about it?

----Jefferson's letter to Carr mentions the United States' geopolitical position in the New World, especially in relation to Spain and France, which at the time still maintained areas in Florida and west of the Mississippi, respectively. Jefferson's advice to his nephew asks him to keep that in mind. Discuss this position and how it influences Americans to educate themselves.

Supplemental readings:

- Daniel Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson [an intellectual history written 50 years ago by a distinguished historian]
- Gary Wills, Inventing America [a readable account of the philosophical backgrounds of the Declaration]
- Joanne Freeman, Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic [a new study that avoids hagiography and psychohistory]

-----Day 3: Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle," "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"; Nathaniel Hawthorne, "My Kinsman, Major Molyneux," "Young Goodman Brown," "The Minister's Black Veil."

Textual issues:

-----"Rip van Winkle" and "My Kinsman" offer perspectives on the actions and effects of the American Revolution. In Irving, village life along the Hudson River is shown a year before and twenty years after the Revolution began. Hawthorne's story focuses on one early act of rebellion. Consider the portrayals of people in both stories, and how the actions of the Revolution change them.

-----When Rip returns to the village after his twenty year nap, it is 1796 and a boisterous election is taking place. Rip is disoriented, and when people ask him what his political sympathies are, he falters, then declares himself a subject of George III. Consider this scene as an identity crisis, one forced on individuals by the upheavals of revolution. One could draw a parallel with "Sleepy Hollow," in that the story turns upon an outsider coming to a Catskill village and aiming to marry its prized maiden. Though both stories are played for humor, they have serious subtexts.

-----Hawthorne portrays the Revolutionaries as calculating, moblike, savage, and humiliating, a far cry from the standard picture of brave, forthright Minutemen. Ponder why the crowd not only must reject the authority of the Crown, as embodied by Major Molyneux, but must shame and mock the Major, too.

-----After failing to locate his kinsman, and becoming more incensed at the stalling tactics of the villagers, Robin finally sees his kinsman in the grotesque parade, tarred and feathered. At that point, he wells up with maniacal laughter. As with the Irving story, examine this moment as a psychological one, an identity crisis in which a young man

searching for a father figure is instead treated as the dupe of revelry.

-----At the very end of the story, the morning after the shocking encounter, the ringleader finds Robin grieving alone. He says to Robin that instead of returning to the country, he might stay in the town, and make his way along in the world without the help of his kinsman. Consider this moment as a political statement, that Robin joining the townsfolk might be interpreted as a form of personal maturity. But don't lose sight of the vision of the night before, when maturity appeared to be the bizarre and cruel actions of a crazed mob.

-----Consider Hawthorne's other stories as moral tales. This requires judging the justness of the character's actions. Goodman Brown leaves his wife Faith and tests his moral mettle in the wilderness. Is this the right thing to do? The minister appears one day wearing a black crepe over his eyes. Is this moral behavior? (See Colacurcio on this.)

-----Consider Hawthorne's stories as revelatory, both internally and externally. Internally, can we say that the characters discover something about human behavior? Brown witnesses a grotesque ritual in the forest, and he returns to the village a suspicious, anxious, and horrified man. Discuss whether there is some way that his vision is correct? The same could be done with the minister.

Contextual issues:

-----The Revolution is understood as a glorious moment in Western history, but "Rip Van Winkle" and "My Kinsman, Major Molyneux" suggest that it involved difficult social and psychological upheavals for those who experienced it. (See Pease on this issue.) Consider, especially, the plight of people living in the colonies who wanted to remain loyal to the British government.

-----After the Revolution, citizens found themselves with new rights and political identities. Democracy was a new form of citizenship. Relate the events of "Rip Van Winkle" and "My Kinsman, Major Molyneux" to the difficulty of learning to act without monarchical authority.

-----It may be that we see in these two stories an incipient division between conservatives and liberals. Hawthorne seems to mistrust the powers of the people, and Irving finds life in the post-Revolutionary village troubling and contentious. Their vision represents a constraint upon mass political action. Generalize from this and discuss the extent to which governing powers should be entrusted to citizens. Recall the difference between a representative system and a republican system.

Supplemental readings:

-----Edmund Burke, "Speech on Conciliation with the American Colonies" [a rather longish speech--70 pages--but a sampling will give a good sense of British support for the colonists]

-----Simon Schama, Dead Certainties [an offbeat narrative history of different events in 18th and 19th Century America]

-----Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution [a sound, non-

ideological study]

-----Donald Pease, Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Contexts
[the Introduction]

-----Michael Colacurcio, The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales
[densely historical, but the best study of the tales]

-----David Levin, Forms of Uncertainty [good reading of "Young Goodman Brown"]

WEEK 2--Day 1: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Introduction" to Nature, "Self-Reliance," "Divinity School Address," "The American Scholar,"

Textual issues:

-----Examine the structure and style of these essays. Many do not follow a coherent pattern, or have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Some of the sentences read like aphorisms. Enumerate such things as aspects of an "Emersonian style," and necessary to the "self-reliance" that Emerson counsels as the greatest goal of human existence. Remind students that these essays are some of the most influential writings in American literature, and affected virtually every writer who came after.

-----Many of Emerson's essays were first delivered as lectures. For example, Walt Whitman heard "The Poet" before he read it. Have students read some paragraphs out loud, and compare their effect with reading them silently.

-----The "Introduction" to Nature lays out what Emerson considers the great problem with American culture in his time, namely, its retrospection ("Our age is retrospective"). His generation, he says, is derivative, still living in the shadows of "the fathers," by which he probably means the Founding Fathers. Place this habit next to his exhortation to "enjoy an original relation to the universe." Discuss whether this is a blanket denial of the past, or whether Emerson is advocating a more creative relationship to it. (Obviously, the latter is the case, while the former is an interpretation that is likely to appeal to the adolescent student.)

-----The opening paragraphs of "Self-Reliance" are celebrated as quintessential expressions of an American outlook on things. They pose a basic social antagonism: self-reliance vs. conformity. Emerson favors the former, but too many Americans, he thinks, adopt the latter. Explore Emerson's diagnosis of conformity, and why it is so prevalent in society. Why do people conform?

Contextual issues:

-----After Emerson delivered the "Divinity School Address," it was denounced as "the latest form of infidelity," and he was banned from the grounds of the Harvard Divinity School. This is because he interpreted Christ as a prophet rather than as a being of exclusive divinity and a redeemer of man. Christ showed, Emerson says, what all men might achieve if they have confidence in their own divinity. Discuss the heretical implications of this view.

-----By the 1840s, Emerson was revered as "the Sage of Concord," and writers and

admirers flocked to the town to converse with him. He appealed to radicals and conservatives, abolitionists and slaveholders, men and women. How can his writings serve different political interests and social outlooks?

-----One of the great disappointments of Emerson's life was when Daniel Webster, Senator from Massachusetts, did not oppose the Fugitive Slave Act. The Act said that it was illegal for Northerners to aid or conceal runaway slaves. Apart from his abolitionist sentiments, why would Emerson be outraged by such a law?

Supplemental readings:

-----correspondence of Emerson and Thomas Carlyle, included in the anthology [a fascinating and entertaining exchange between the two most prominent cultural commentators in the U.S. and Great Britain]

-----F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance [chapters on Emerson]

-----Stephen Whicher, Freedom and Fate [a scholarly but readable account of Emerson's ideas]

-----Robert Richardson, Emerson: The Mind on Fire [excellent recent biography]

-----Day 2: Henry Thoreau, Walden (the first two chapters, "Economy" and "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"); "Resistance to Civil Government"

Textual issues:

-----Walden is a generic hybrid: part-autobiography, part-almanac, part-practical guide to living, part-moral treatise. Discuss Thoreau's fusion of these genres into a unique version of his life and thoughts while living at Walden Pond.

-----Isolate Thoreau's concept of "necessaries of life" (from the opening sections) and explore how they serve him as a guidepost for living. Outline for students what the four "necessaries" are.

-----Thoreau inserts many parables into his narrative, such as the artist of Kooroo, the Indian basket maker, and his visit to the tailor to have a coat made. These stories serve as lessons in the conduct of life, particularly in how one acts as a consumer. Discuss what kind of consumption Thoreau favors.

-----The story begins with a chapter on "Economy," complete with charts showing expenditures and a schedule of labor during the year. Only then, after explaining his home economics during the year, does Thoreau begin to philosophize, in "Where I Lived and What I Lived For." Discuss the implications of this order, specifically, that material needs must be satisfied before reflection can begin.

Contextual issues:

-----In the years preceding Walden, the United States suffered many financial panics

and economic disasters. One of Thoreau's points is to show readers how they can avoid the dangers of debt and poor investment. Relate his lessons to fluctuating currencies, inflation, stock market collapses, etc.

-----Also in the years preceding Walden, the United States prosecuted the Mexican War, which Thoreau opposed by refusing to pay his taxes and ending up in jail. Discuss Walden as a document of civil disobedience.

-----The previous point leads into Thoreau's famous "Resistance to Civil Government," an essay that influenced Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and other advocates of non-violent resistance. Explain to students the nature of Thoreau's protest, and the fact that he preferred going to jail and remaining there to paying his taxes (which he felt would go to buy guns for the war in Mexico). Remind students that he did not want to have anyone pay his tax for him and secure his release, as Emerson's aunt did. Discuss what kind of strategy this is, and how it can be effective against something as powerful as a government.

Supplemental readings:

-----Walter Harding, ed. Thoreau as Seen By His Contemporaries [a useful collection of snippets revealing how odd yet compelling Thoreau appeared to his countrymen]

-----R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century [50 years old, but still worth studying]

-----William Cain, ed. A Historical Guide to Henry David Thoreau [one of a series of useful books directed at undergraduate majors]

-----Day 3: William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis," "To a Waterfowl," "To the Prairies"; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life," "The Slave's Dream," "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport," "My Lost Youth," "Paul Revere's Ride" (handout), "The Arrow and the Song" (handout); John Greenleaf Whittier, "Ichabod," "Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl," "Barbara Frietchie" (handout)

Textual and Contextual Issues:

-----The selections for this day are included mainly for purposes of contrast with the preceding and succeeding days' readings, and because some of them are still taught in elementary and middle school. Bryant, Longfellow, and Whittier were the most popular poets of the time. Although their names are recognizable today, few young readers are familiar with their works. Now, we remember Emerson and Whitman. But it is important to see what the prevailing literary choices were in the 1830s and 1840s, both as a historical point and as a contrast to Emerson et al.

-----When studying these figures, examine them in terms of style and content. Note the verse forms they use, such as the blank verse in Bryant's "Thanatopsis." Pay attention to diction, rhyme, and prosody. Cataloguing formal features of these poems will help students imagine what the tastes of the mid-century reading public preferred. It

will also serve as an effective introduction to the verse experiments of Whitman and Dickinson.

-----Also, paraphrase the themes and ideas of the verse. Note their fairly conventional focus on mortality, morality, and life. This, too, will serve as a useful contrast to the ideas and themes put forward by Emerson and Thoreau.

Supplementary readings:

-----Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [a period-piece biography by one of the Nineteenth Century's leading literary editors]

WEEK 3--Day 1: Hawthorne, "The Custom-House," The Scarlet Letter

Textual issues:

-----The "Custom-House" section is the Introduction to The Scarlet Letter. It fabricates the discovery of the scarlet letter in a box up in the attic of the custom-house, where Hawthorne worked as a minor government employee. Discuss why this semi-autobiographical narrative precedes a novel that takes place two hundred years earlier. What is the connection between Hawthorne in the custom-house and Hester in Salem? The answer partly lies in the comparison between the current employees of the custom-house, who worry about keeping their jobs and enjoying the dinners, and Hawthorne's forebears, who speak about civic duty and glorifying God.

-----The Scarlet Letter is Hawthorne's greatest work, but it is one that students may interpret too much in contemporary terms: that is, as a repressive community punishing two people for an act of love. (The problem here is that few students today have a strong awareness of sin.) It is important that students understand the conflict between the passion of Hester and the rigidity of Salem. But they should also discern that conflict in a different light: between the headstrong independence of Hester and the moral structure of the community. Point out that while Hester accepts her punishment--having to wear an "A"--she rebels against it by sewing an "A" that is brazen and bright. Despite acting the part of a "scarlet woman," she nurses dreams of running away with Dimmesdale. Only at the very end of the novel, when she returns to the town to assume a position as a wise counselor to young women, does it seem that she accepts her sin and makes her peace with the community. Discuss these moral complications--Hester as strong, passionate woman vs. Hester as self-absorbed and proud rebel, Salem as backward, tyrannous town vs. Salem as moral community.

-----Detail the exact structure of the novel, which turns upon three major moments in the same spot: Hester emerging from the jail and refusing to name the father; Dimmesdale mounting the scaffold at night to confess his crime to the nighttime sky; and finally, Hester and Dimmesdale and Pearl mounting the scaffold to reveal themselves to the community.

Contextual issues:

-----Henry James believed that Hawthorne wasted his talents by writing about an impoverished culture, Puritan New England. Discuss the kind of dramatic conflicts the Hawthorne finds in seventeenth-century America. Are they worth staging in a lengthy narrative? Or are the short tales examined earlier better suited to this world?

-----Examine the scarlet letter as a specimen of symbolism, that is, an object that seems to have some mysterious significance that can't be entirely determined. Hawthorne discovers it in the attic and feels an electric charge when he touches it. At one point it seems to appear on Dimmesdale's chest, at another in the nighttime sky. Pearl acts crazily when Hester removes it. Note these instances as a literary technique, calling out for interpretation. Relate it to other famous symbols in American literature, like the white whale Moby-Dick and the green light that absorbs Gatsby every night.

Supplementary readings:

-----Henry James, Hawthorne [a fascinating study by the novelist early in his career]

-----James R. Mellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne [National Book Award-winning biography]

-----Day 2: Poe, "The Purloined Letter," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Man of the Crowd," "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Cask of Amontillado," "Annabel Lee," "The Raven," "The Philosophy of Composition"

Textual issues:

-----Detail the versification of Poe's poems. Concentrate on the musical effects of his language and metrics, and what they suggest about Poe's aestheticism, namely, that he considered producing in readers a hypnotic absorption-effect the ultimate aim of poetry.

-----Next, examine the poems for their psychological depth. The narrator of "Annabel Lee" eulogizes his love, for example, but his attitudes are filled with resentment and suspicion of others. His claim that their love was absolutely incomparable sounds aggressive as well as nostalgic. Help students to read between the lines to achieve a larger portrait than the romantic one ostensibly expressed in the poems.

-----Discuss "The Purloined Letter" as a detective story, one that emphasizes, as Poe would put it, "ratiocination" over action. Note the emphasis on logical inference and psychological analysis, as well as the focus on games in terms of the minds of the players.

-----"The Man of the Crowd" is a strange story of a man following a stranger through the streets of the city for hours on end. The man of the crowd seems to be motivated only by a desire to be among others. His greatest anxiety comes from solitude.

One can examine this condition not just in personal terms, related only to that character, but in connection with larger ideas about society and anonymity. Discuss the story as a political allegory, especially in light of the narrator's final judgment of the man of the crowd as a nonentity who is nevertheless a figure of danger. Interpret this moment as Poe's vision of conformity as evil.

-----Outline the aesthetics of "The Philosophy of Composition," particularly regarding the experience of the reader, the choice of subjects, and the effect of loss.

Contextual issues:

-----Because of the remoteness and aestheticism of Poe's stories and poems, it may appear difficult to link his works to contemporary events and issues or to various literary traditions. However, one issue to consider is the distant settings of Poe's works, specifically, their drastic difference from those of Hawthorne, Thoreau, and others. While the abovementioned stick to a well-lit American landscape, Poe prefers the dark salons of Paris, smoky European coffee houses, Italian wine cellars. Consider these settings as outgrowths of his cosmopolitanism and aestheticism. They are one reason he was beloved by French writers from Baudelaire to Valery.

Supplementary readings:

-----Daniel Hoffman, Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe [a quirky but interesting study]

-----The Poe Encyclopedia [a good resource book, covering life and works]

-----Tara McCarthy, Teaching the Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (Grades 4-8)

-----Day 3: Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," Billy Budd

Textual issues:

-----Determine the central conflict in "Bartleby," and how it is largely confined to the pressures Bartleby places on his boss, the narrator. The question is, Should the narrator help Bartleby more than he does? Discuss the narrator's dilemma, which we might phrase as the pressures of business vs. the impulses of charity.

-----Billy Budd is an odd story that sometimes seems stage-like. The plot progresses in a series of vignettes, such as Billy spilling the soup, with the characters evolving toward their final confrontation. Consider the main characters as dramatis personae, and draw up profiles of Billy, Claggart, and Vere. Recall their backgrounds. Explore why Claggart hates Billy, why Vere can't be merciful, and why Billy strikes Claggart dead.

-----Focus closely on Vere's speech at the trial. This is the lengthiest thematic statement in the story, a step outside the maneuverings of the characters. Analyze Vere's justification for disregarding the question of Billy's intention in striking Claggart. Take

his speech as a statement about justice and order.

Contextual issues:

-----The subtitle of “Bartleby” is “A Tale of Wall Street.” This suggests that there is a subtext in the story of capitalist labor. Explore the labor setting of the story, and how Bartleby disrupts it. Then, ponder whether there is any social criticism implied in Bartleby’s fate.

-----In the background of Billy Budd is a mutiny that has recently taken place on another ship. This is one reason Captain Vere is so unflinching in his administration of justice. But at the very end of the work, Melville divides the account into two versions, one an “Official Story” that is distorted and submissive to the navy, the other a musical poem that circulates among the common sailors. Discuss the political aspects of these versions, and what they say about authority.

Supplementary readings:

-----Edgar Dryden, Melville’s Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth [a close reading of some of the stories and novels]

-----Carolyn Karcher, Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville’s America [good study of political themes and events in Melville’s life]

-----Elizabeth Hardwick, Herman Melville [readable entry in the Penguin Lives Series]

WEEK 4--Day 1: Margaret Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit: MAN vs. MEN, WOMAN vs. WOMEN”; Harriet Beecher Stowe, chapters from Uncle Tom’s Cabin

Textual and Contextual Issues:

-----The readings for today need not undergo close textual analysis. They are excerpted from larger works, and so it is difficult to address them outside that context. Also, they are important more for historical reasons than for literary reasons. They stand as representatives of the two major social movements of the day, the women’s movement and the abolitionist movement. In teaching them, the important thing is to abstract the ideas of equality and democracy from them, and to examine how they dramatize the sufferings of women and slaves.

-----Fuller casts her social critique in legal terms. Why? Is this effective? Pick passages from Fuller’s prose that serve as useful polemical points in the fight for women’s rights. Make sure students understand that at this time women could not vote, had limited property rights and employment possibilities, and were virtual servants to their husbands.

-----Stowe’s novel was one of the most popular books ever written, at the time second only to The Bible. One reason was that she applied the conventions of sentimentality to a black family, and evoked tremendous commiseration for them from

white readers. Explain to students how this is an effective strategy, in that it doesn't overtly accuse the masters of cruelty or demonize the entire South, but instead tries to appeal to a common humanity in all persons. Pick scenes from the novel that support the abolitionist cause.

Supplementary readings:

- Eve Kornfeld, Margaret Fuller: A Brief Biography with Documents [a good source book containing life, letters, politics of the day, contemporaries' opinions etc.]
- Carolyn Heilbrun, Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold
- Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household [fascinating study of relations between slave women and white women]

-----Day 2: Frederick Douglass, Narrative

Textual issues:

-----Most autobiographical writings begin by citing birth date and parentage. Douglass's begins with the absence of those things. Consider the Narrative in these non-autobiographical terms, and what it says about his situation and his struggle to attain humanity. Explain to students that this isn't just a man recounting his life, but a man struggling to establish an identity that can be recounted.

-----Douglass was often heralded for his rhetoric, and he was a magnificent orator. Analyze any passage of prose for samples of eloquence and rhetorical syntax (parallelism, chiasmus, and the like). Have students read them out loud.

-----Douglass singles out his fight with Mr. Covey as his "turning point" his career as a slave. Examine this scene for its transformations of character. Explain how Douglass's mind changes during this event, especially when he decides to risk his life to protect himself. Note how this puts the slavemaster in a bind, that is, having to threaten the life of his own property. In other words, it puts the putative paternalism of the masters to the test.

Contextual issues:

-----Consider the presentation of Christianity in the Narrative. Examine the actions of practicing Christians and what Douglass says about them. Discuss the ways in which Christians in the South interpreted their lordship as compatible with Christianity. (See Genovese on this.)

-----One of the points Douglass insists upon is that the real evil isn't the masters, but the institution of slavery itself. He considers masters almost as much victims of the system as the slaves. Discuss the viability of this view. Could it be just a sop to white readers?

-----After the Narrative was published, many readers could not believe that Douglass was the actual author. They didn't think someone brought up in slavery could compose such a powerful and intelligent portrayal. Ask students how someone in Douglass's situation might prove them wrong.

Supplementary readings:

- Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass [a popular biography by the most famous black man in America at the time]
- Eugene Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made [superior history of life in the slave quarters]
- William Andrews, ed., Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass

-----Day 3: Abraham Lincoln, "A House Divided," "Address Delivered at Gettysburg," "Second Inaugural Address"; Herman Melville, poems in "Battle-Pieces"; Ambrose Bierce, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"

Textual issues:

-----Lincoln is considered one of the great political rhetoricians of our nation's history. Select certain phrases and sentences in his work for their eloquence. Analyze his parallelisms--e.g. "The world will little note, nor long remember . . ."--and his cadences and determine why they are so effective.

-----The Gettysburg Address hearkens back to the Declaration of Independence in its opening sentences. ("Four score and seven" subtracted from 1863 equals 1776.) Discuss how and why Lincoln tries to align the cause of the Union forces in the Civil War with the Founding Fathers.

-----Melville's poems about the Civil War are somber reflections upon glory and duty. Consider how Melville fits the intensities of life and death into verse. Pay attention to the verse form, the refrains, the stanza structure.

-----Examine the narration of Bierce's story as the delusion of a soldier about to die. Consider the effects of the ending, after readers have been led through daring escapes and the final arrival at home, only to discover that it all took place in the spy's mind in the milliseconds before the rope snapped his neck.

Contextual issues:

-----Although we look back upon Lincoln as a beloved American hero, in his lifetime he was despised by much of the population and by insiders in Washington. Look for traces of things in his speeches that might anger people, and state why. For example, his "With malice toward none" attitude in the Second Inaugural Address sounds charitable and conciliatory, but think of how Northern politicians whose sons died on the

battlefield might feel about this. Or, think of how Southerners who believed that the Constitution protected states' rights against the power of the Federal Government might feel about the Gettysburg Address, which implied that the Founding Fathers would all be on the Union side.

-----Looking at Lincoln's political speeches, such as the Second Inaugural Address, apart from their overt content, determine what political ends they are out to satisfy. Beyond the sentiments and ideas, what does Lincoln hope to gain from his orations? Think, for example, of the rhetoric of the Gettysburg Address, and how it elevates the Union cause beyond national politics and into a poetic "birth of freedom" (note the birth imagery in "our fathers brought forth . . . a new nation, conceived in liberty").

-----When Melville published his poems, the nation was still recovering from the bloodiest war in human history. Consider how his efforts may be a form of mourning, and how they might help readers, virtually all of whom were personally affected by the death and destruction, come to terms with what happened.

Supplementary readings:

-----David Madden, ed. Classics of Civil War Fiction

-----Edmund Wilson, Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Life of the American Civil War
[eccentric study by one of the great cultural critics of the 20th Century]

-----Daniel Aaron, The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War

-----James McPherson, Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution
[biography by the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian]

WEEK 5--Day 1: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," "Concord Hymn"; Walt Whitman, "Preface" to Leaves of Grass

Textual issues:

-----Emerson's "The Poet" can be read as a call to aspiring New World writers to become the bards of their time and place. Outline this semi-nationalist slant, and why Emerson feels it so urgently. State his belief that a nation isn't whole until it achieves a cultural independence parallel to its political independence (recall that Thoreau moved to the woods on July 4).

-----Discuss Emerson's "Concord Hymn." Is it a good example of what Emerson calls for in "the Poet"? Why or why not?

-----Whitman's "Preface" is almost a prose poem dedicated to his country. Examine his statements about the United States and compile Whitman's vision of what the nation is and should be. Enumerate the things he singles out most for praise, such as the President taking his hat off to the people, not the people their hats to him. You might note that the term "race" signifies not just "black," "white," etc., but also "Italian,"

“Irishman,” and other national identities, which is why America is “the race of races.”

-----Whitman shares with Emerson a “bardic” sense of America’s poets. This bard figure is one of the masses, and his utterances serve as a kind of social glue binding the people in a common experience of life. Discuss the communal role of bardic poetry. If possible, show students the portrait of himself that Whitman places on the frontispiece of Leaves of Grass, showing Whitman in working-class garb, his shirt open at the chest. In the absence of an author’s name on the title page, this picture was to secure the poet’s identity as a voice of the people.

Contextual issues:

-----At the time Emerson’s “The Poet” was published, there was a growing sense in the United States that its culture was still too derivative, too much an imitation of British culture. Note that magazines like Harper’s were filled with reprints of British literature. (If possible, show students a table of contents from an issue.) Discuss Emerson’s essay as a response to a feeling of cultural poverty.

-----Emerson and Whitman had a curious relationship. At one point, Whitman attributed his inspiration to Emerson’s works. At another point he denied reading Emerson before writing Leaves of Grass. Discuss the problem Whitman faces in heeding Emerson’s call to originality, but thereby taking his cue from someone else.

Supplemental readings:

-----Harper’s Monthly Magazine, vols. 1-11 (1850-60) [reading through Harper’s, the leading U. S. literary monthly of the time, one sees what the prevailing tastes, authors, and genres were in the antebellum period]

-----F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance [chapter on Whitman]

-----Charles Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature [opening chapters on Emersonian poetics]

-----Day 2: Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (1855 version) “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” “As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life,” “I Hear America Singing” (handout), “O Captain My Captain” (handout).

Textual issues:

-----Examine Whitman’s poems as specimens of free verse. Note the length of the lines, the lack of regular rhyme. Chart his catalogues, measure the length of his sentences, etc. Observe that the original version of “Song of Myself” (as well as the other poems in the first, 1855 edition) had no title and no section divisions. Align this seeming formlessness with Whitman’s insistence on the uniqueness of his utterance, with his idea that no traditional form can contain his inspiration.

-----Consider the egotism of “Song of Myself.” Whitman focuses attention upon himself, his sexuality, his faith, his experiences, but he also reaches out to other figures, like the escaped slave and men massacred in the “jet black sunrise,” as well as to readers. Discuss whether these gestures save him from narcissism, or his concern for others is just another way of elevating himself.

-----“Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” recalls a childhood experience on the beach of Long Island. It culminates in the boy realizing his identity as a fledgling poet. Examine this poem as a voyage of discovery. Consider why watching the fate of the birds leads him to become a “solitary singer.” Establish for students the connection between loss and poetry (“death,” he says at the end, is the word the sea whispered to him, and is the source of all poems).

-----“As I Ebb’d with the Ocean of Life” reveals Whitman in a depression, his poetry no longer providing him with faith and hope. Examine the poem as a lament that can be paired with “Out of the Cradle,” especially considering that both involve beach walks.

Contextual issues:

-----Many initial readers of Whitman’s poetry didn’t even recognize it as such. Compare Whitman’s verse to that of Whittier, Bryant, and Longfellow to demonstrate how radical is its form.

-----Whitman intended Leaves of Grass to be a kind of national anthem for the United States. He hoped all Americans would keep it by their bed next to the Bible. Consider how “Song of Myself” might be a national epic for America, with a new kind of “common man” hero. Recall that epics are often interpreted as the expression of a national identity, as The Aeneid is understood to be the story of the Roman temper.

-----Many readers were scandalized by some of Whitman’s scenes of sexual passion, for instance, his inclusion of prostitutes and “onanists,” and Leaves of Grass was banned as indecent by the Boston authorities. Consider the sexual morality of his poems. Note that Whitman considers sexual fantasy an entirely natural behavior, as in Section 11 in which the woman “aft the blinds” engages in orgiastic fantasy with the “twenty-eight young men.”

Supplementary readings:

-----Richard Chase, Walt Whitman Reconsidered [a short book from the Fifties, by an intelligent cultural critic]

-----J. R. Lemaster and Donald Kummings, eds., The Walt Whitman Encyclopedia [useful sourcebook]

-----Jerome Loving, Walt Whitman [recent biography]

-----Day 3: Emily Dickinson, “Success is counted sweetest,” “‘Faith’ is a fine invention,” “I’m

‘wife’--I’ve finished that--,” “I taste a liquor never brewed,” “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” “I like a look of Agony,” “There’s a certain Slant of light,” “The Soul selects her own Society,” “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church,” “A Bird Came Down the Walk,” “After great pain, a formal feeling comes,” “Much Madness is divinest Sense,” “I died for Beauty--but was scarce,” “I heard a Fly buzz--when I died,” “Publication--is the Auction,” “Because I could not stop for Death,” “My Life had stood--a Loaded Gun,” “A narrow Fellow in the Grass,” “Further in Summer than the Birds,” “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant,” “Apparently with no surprise,” “My life closed twice before its close”; “I dwell in possibility” (handout), “I like to see it lap the Miles” (handout), “Bee! I’m expecting you!” (handout), “There is no Frigate like a Book” (handout); correspondence with Higginson (April 15, 1862; April 25, 1862; June 7, 1862).

Textual issues:

-----Dickinson’s voice is idiosyncratic, her prosody unique. Her poems are filled with unusual punctuation, ellipses, dashes, faulty articles, etc. In one of her letters she says that her “lexicon” was her “only friend.” Examine her verse as a singular language, concentrating on the striking metaphors and elliptical syntax.

-----Dickinson grew up in a devout family and community, but sometimes in her poems she verges on statements of agnosticism. Consider relevant poems as meditations on God, His existence and His mercy. Sometimes God is depressingly absent, sometimes overwhelmingly present, sometimes mysteriously there and not there.

-----Select poems on the theme of death, and chart how death appears in different guises, and how life after death has a curious being of its own. Note the bizarre “aftermath” setting of many poems, like “After great pain” and “I heard a fly buzz -- when I died.” Students may have difficulty tying these situations to anything real in their lives, so encourage them to regard this aftermath moment as an emotional condition, or as something besides a simple post-death existence.

Contextual issues:

-----Few of Emily Dickinson’s poems were published during her lifetime, obviously because of the eccentricity of her verse. The few editors to whom she showed her poems advised her to revise them into a more conventional expression. But when a volume was finally published five years after her death, it went through five editions in two years, and made her one of the most famous writers in America. Consider what editors in the 1850s would have found off-putting about her verse, and what readers in the 1890s would have found fascinating.

-----By age 30, Dickinson was considered a confirmed spinster, with no avenues in life except that of an aging family member confined to the house. Consider where samples of social restriction for women enter into her verse. Single out her poems about women, such as “I’m ‘wife’ -- I’ve finished that,” and treat them as social commentary.

Supplementary readings:

- Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Emily Dickinson [the best biography]
- Gary Lee Stonum, The Dickinson Sublime [an interesting reading]
- Jane D. Eberwein, ed., An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia [a useful sourcebook]

WEEK 6--Day 1: Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Textual issues:

-----Determine the structure of Huck Finn. It is episodic, with the plot moving along with Huck and Jim as they cruise down the river and encounter various characters and places. Interpret the plot as a journey motif, like that of The Odyssey, or of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Explain how the river passage gives continuity to the events, and each stop and each town provides an episode. Huck and Jim moor somewhere, Huck sallies forth, then comes hurrying back to the peace and security of the river after witnessing cruelty, greed, fraud, and cowardice.

-----Consider Huck Finn as a specimen of regionalism. Regionalism is literature that emphasizes local settings, people, mores, customs, and speech, sometimes for entertainment, sometimes for social commentary. Select certain towns and characters as regional figures, and discuss how Twain weaves them into a portrait of the Mississippi region.

-----Consider Huck Finn as a moral conflict, the central one being in Huck's mind. That is, should he help a slave escape, or should he turn him in? Note the crucial scene when Huck declares that he will rescue Jim and accept "going to Hell."

-----Examine the scene in which Colonel Sherburn shoots Boggs dead in the street. Note the uneasy mixture of comedy and horror in Twain's narration--at first Boggs is comical, and the scene seems like a vaudeville comedy, until Sherburn issues his warning, then emerges with his pistol--and the way in which Huck Finn switches from antic humor to high seriousness.

-----T. S. Eliot once spoke of Huck as one of the most solitary of fictional characters. Note that in the midst of con men, drunks, slavemasters, fortune hunters, feuding families, and other figures, he often remains quiet, uncared-for (except by Jim), and he longs for the calm solitude of the raft on the river. Remember his final impulse to "light out for the territory." Examine the loneliness that lies beneath the humor and adventure.

Contextual issues:

-----One thing all teachers must come to terms with is the racist language in the book, especially the word "nigger." We suggest that teachers explain the prevalence of the word at the time. Then, argue that for a novelist to represent antebellum Southern

society and omit the word “nigger” would deny his work any realism, any plausibility.

-----When Huck Finn was published, the Concord Public Library banned it from the shelves. (Twain asked his agent to send the Library committee a letter thanking them for thousands of dollars of publicity.) Consider what immoralities in the book might have led to this decision.

-----In following the Mississippi from Illinois to the Deep South, Huck and Jim grant readers a broad panorama of American culture and society. Generalize on their findings and construct Twain’s vision of America. The key is to tabulate how many good, courageous people they come across, and how many horrible people they meet.

-----Relating Huck Finn to Douglass, Lincoln, and other figures broaching the slavery question, discuss whether Huck Finn is an abolitionist novel. You might note that Twain sat out the Civil War himself.

Supplementary readings:

-----Louis Budd, Mark Twain: The Contemporary Reviews [good for understanding Twain’s reputation in his time]

-----Justin Kaplan, Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain [award-winning biography]

-----Forrest Robinson, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain [part of a useful series geared to undergraduates as well as specialists]

-----Day 2: Henry James, “Daisy Miller”

Textual issues:

-----Conflicts are what make a narrative interesting. The primary conflict in “Daisy Miller” is between the sensibility of Daisy and the people and settings she encounters in Europe. Contrast Daisy’s interests and responses to the things she experiences, such as the ruins at Chillon. At Chillon, the depths of European history are to be found, but she prances through the dungeons as if Chillon were a park for kids. Her companion at the moment, Winterbourne, finds it enchanting, but later her incognizance of European mores will cause her ostracism. Consider what her acquaintances expect of her--discretion, politesse, good form--and Daisy’s inability to provide it.

-----A critical point in the story is when Mrs. Walker urges Daisy to enter her carriage and stop cavorting with dubious Italian men in public. Daisy laughingly refuses. Consider why she does so, and what this says about her temperament and her moral makeup. Here we have an instance not so much of incognizance as rebelliousness, or self-destructiveness.

-----Examine the family situation of Daisy, specifically, the absence of her father and the ineffectiveness of her mother. Relate her unconventional and mildly defiant actions not just to her “American-ness” but to her parentage.

-----Consider the role of Winterbourne in the story. Discuss his feelings for

Daisy, and his odd position in European society. He sympathizes with her, but like the others he questions her innocence. After her death, he feels he has done her an injustice, but note that he does return to Switzerland to continue his idle companionships.

Contextual issues:

-----When “Daisy Miller” was published, it became a best seller and established Daisy as a prototypical “American girl.” Consider Daisy as a national type, a character with individual traits, but whose traits are easily connected to general traits of young American women. (The commonness of her name--unlike roses or orchids, daisies are banal flowers--like the “coldness” of Winterbourne’s name, is suggestive here.)

-----Along with various European/American oppositions in the story is a cultural opposition between the major settings in the story: Vevey (not far from Geneva) and Rome. One is Protestant, the other Catholic. Consider how these differences are played out in the story. Note how ruins like Chillon and the Colosseum serve as evocative settings for the events.

-----Relate the Millers’ journey to Europe to the rising tide of tourism in the late 19th Century, as wealthy Americans began to travel back to the Old World for cultivation and diversion, and American artists increasingly traveled to Italy and France to develop their craft. Discuss the cultural contrasts of relatively uncultured Americans plunging into a Europe filled with history and cultural depth.

Supplementary readings:

-----F. O. Matthiessen, The James Family [good for materials about the celebrated family]

-----Fred Kaplan, Henry James: The Imagination of Genius [biography]

-----Jonathan Freedman, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Henry James

-----Day 3: First Midterm Examination

WEEK 7--Day 1: Kate Chopin, The Awakening

Textual issues:

-----Consider The Awakening as a feminist bildungsroman, that is, the formation of a mature female temperament. Chart Edna’s growth from infantile wife and mother playing flirtatious games with others to independent woman ready to claim her sexual desires and artistic impulses.

-----As Edna develops, enumerate the resistances she encounters, from the bonbons her husband uses to pacify her to the injunction from her friend that she set her

children's needs before her own. As Edna grows, detail the forms of criticism, passive-aggressiveness, and disapproval that greet her.

-----Examine the men in her life--her husband, the doctor, Arobin, and Robert. Discuss the needs each one satisfies (or fails to satisfy) in her, and what she wants from them.

Contextual issues:

-----Early reviews of The Awakening were critical of Chopin's sympathetic portrayal of Edna. They regarded Edna as a selfish woman who romanticized her irresponsibility. Discuss this judgment.

-----Discuss The Awakening as a specimen of regionalism, here the upper middle-class world of New Orleans society. Note the forms of leisure involved, such as the beach interlude, and the prevalence of the arts.

-----Consider whether The Awakening is a feminist novel in contemporary terms. Is her affair an expression of independence? Does her suicide mark her as a tragic heroine, or a weak one? Her suicide may be interpreted as her failure to live independently, for Robert's disappointing responses to her at the end signal the final unhappiness for her. Or, her suicide may be interpreted as an independent action in itself, a decision to live and die on her own terms.

Supplementary readings:

-----Per Seyerstad, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography

-----Wendy Martin, ed. New Essays on "The Awakening" [part of a useful series started in the 1980s on important American works]

-----Day 2: Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Blue Hotel," "An Episode of War"

Textual issues:

-----"The Open Boat" recounts four men struggling to survive a shipwreck. Crane emphasizes two things: a pitiless nature threatening to drown them and a bond of brotherhood between the men in the lifeboat. These matters aren't discussed openly by the men. They are recounted only in the thoughts of the correspondent, in a speculative tenor. Outline this opposition.

-----Focus on the narrator's ruminations upon nature--as a goddess, as a "ninny woman," as a cold distant star--and what they imply about Crane's vision of the universe. Explain how Crane frames any supernatural belief as a projection of human beings searching for respect and dignity in the cosmos.

-----"The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" concludes with a humorous anti-climax:

instead of sheriff and desperado squaring off in the street, the desperado is totally disarmed by the sight of the cowering bride at the sheriff's side. Discuss this scene as the end of the Old West and its myths.

-----Discuss the discrepancy in "An Episode of War" between the casual, flat narration and the actual catastrophe of the loss of limb. Note how wanly Crane concludes the story, with a simple statement of woman weeping at the man's empty sleeve.

Contextual issues:

-----Consider Crane's "The Open Boat" as a specimen of naturalism. Consult another reading in the anthology, Norris's "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," as a statement of naturalist principles. These include: 1) only natural forces run the universe, not supernatural ones; 2) human beings differ from animals only in their intelligence; and 3) civilization is but a veneer of morality and propriety, and underneath lie all the primitive impulses and fears of an animal species.

-----Consider "An Episode of War" as precisely that, a war story. Think of what other war stories focus on--heroism, battle, death--and treat this story as a commentary on just how banal and casual, yet still horrifying, war really is.

-----Treat "The Bride Comes . . ." and "The Blue Hotel" as variations on the literature of the frontier. In each story, a character from more civilized quarters enters a realm of potential violence and lawlessness. Discuss how their expectations contrast with the realities of the West.

Supplementary readings:

-----Christopher Benfey, The Double Life of Stephen Crane [trade biography by a distinguished critic]

-----David Halliburton, The Color of the Sky: A Study of Stephen Crane

-----Day 3: Henry Adams, selections from The Education of Henry Adams

Textual issues:

-----The Education is an autobiography written in the third person, with Adams often deriding himself and his earlier pretensions, especially in terms of his search for knowledge. Given the title of the book, examine the narrative in terms of what Adams learns, or fails to learn.

-----The chapter on "The Virgin and the Dynamo" contains a famous meditation on the practice of history writing. Analyze the passage closely and explore how the aims of historians--to construct rational sequences of cause and effect in history--break down as Adams passes through the exposition hall filled with dynamos.

-----Reconstruct the world Adams evokes in the “Quincy” chapter. Determine what measure of nostalgia is involved, and how Quincy relates to the larger questions of antebellum U.S. history.

Contextual issues:

-----Adams is a member of the most famous family in U. S. history, the great grandson of one president, grandson of another, and the son of an important diplomat. Discuss how this familial and historical shadow extends over the Education.

-----Adams considered himself a child of the Eighteenth Century who was thrust into the dawn of the Twentieth Century without adequate preparation. Taking the Education as a model, discuss how turn-of-the-century advances in technology and science might shock someone who was already past middle age.

Supplementary readings:

-----J. C. Levenson, The Mind and Art of Henry Adams [though it dates from the 1950s, still the best general study of Adams]

-----John Carlos Rowe, ed. New Essays on “The Education of Henry Adams

WEEK 8--Day 1: Booker T. Washington, selections from Up from Slavery

Textual issues:

-----Consider Up from Slavery as a traditional autobiography about personal success, in the vein of Franklin’s Autobiography. Detail the habits and moral qualities to which Washington attributes his rise to prominence, especially his gospel of hard work.

-----Washington was considered one of the great orators of his time. Examine his writings for effective pieces of eloquence, such as the metaphor of “Cast down your bucket!” in the Atlanta Exposition speech. Note the straightforward language and declarative style of his sentences.

-----Note how Washington describes the coming of Emancipation, the elation followed by doubt. Dramatize the scene of slaves rejoicing over their freedom, but then sneaking back to the master’s house for guidance as to how to exercise that freedom. Examine this as part of the psychological and social complexity of the slave’s condition.

Contextual issues:

-----During Washington’s lifetime, race prejudice was intense, and Jim Crow laws governing segregation were strictly observed throughout the South. In pressing for black “uplifting,” Washington had to be careful not to provoke a white backlash. Scan his writings, especially the Atlanta Exposition speech, for remarks designed to appease white

audiences. Consider, especially, his idea that white prosperity will rise if whites and blacks cooperate economically, as employer and employee. You might also consider that Southern states were forming plans to bring more European immigrants to the South to help with a labor shortage, and that Washington was, perhaps, trying to turn those energies toward the African-American population.

-----Compare Washington's portrayal of the relations of slaves to masters with Douglass' portrayal. Washington doesn't mention violence, nor does he blame the masters for the enslavement. He simply remembers slavery as an unfortunate system of labor, though he does emphasize the value of the slave's work.

-----Consider Washington's story as a political document. Where might he stand on issues of today, like affirmative action, welfare, black education?

Supplementary readings:

-----August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington [good historical summation by longtime historian of U. S. race relations]

-----Louis Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-15 [second volume of award-winning biography]

-----Day 2: W. E. B. Du Bois, selections from The Souls of Black Folk

Textual issues:

-----The beginning of Souls announces one of the most famous formulations of American writing, the statement of the "problem of the color line" and the "double consciousness" of blacks in the United States. Discuss these ideas in depth. Explain how Du Bois claims that blacks occupy an especially complex position in U.S. society, in that they are citizens, but denied certain civil rights; in that they must be ever vigilant of their public behavior, mindful of Jim Crow rules and white sensitivities; and in that they learn to have one identity in a white environment, and another in a black environment.

-----The chapter on Booker T. Washington is one of the centerpieces of Souls, and caused the most comment when the book appeared. Specify exactly what Du Bois says is most remarkable about Washington's ascent, and why whites have chosen him as the "leader of his race." Single out Washington's economic appeal, and his downplaying of political activity. Then, detail the reasons why, Du Bois says, Washington's "go slowly" strategy, and his refusal of political agitation, is bound to fail.

-----Consider the chapter on "Sorrow Songs" as an emotional rhetorical plea for the recognition of African-American suffering.

Contextual issues:

-----The importance of talking about “spiritual strivings” (in Chapter I) becomes clear if we remember that many people in the United States at this time did not regard blacks as even having spiritual strivings. Consider Du Bois’ comments in light of the resistance he anticipates from white readers.

-----After Souls was published, many white readers were impressed with its intelligence and poignancy, but white supremacist commentators said that Du Bois’s gifts demonstrated nothing to disprove the inferiority of blacks. Du Bois himself was obviously brilliant, but he was just an exception. How might Du Bois respond to this?

-----Du Bois criticizes Washington’s so-called “accommodationism,” but the two men occupied different worlds. Washington was born into slavery, worked to put himself through school, and then ran a school in a small town in rural Alabama. Du Bois was a Harvard PhD who studied in Germany and worked at a university in the flagship city of the New South, Atlanta. Consider how their different situations might explain their differing politics.

Supplementary readings:

-----Elliott Rudnick, W. E. B. Du Bois: Propagandist of the Negro Protest [study by a prolific historian of U. S. race relations]

-----David Levering Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919 [first volume of the prize-winning biography]

-----The Voice of the Negro [fascinating monthly periodical published 1903-07, edited in Atlanta by African-Americans connected with Du Bois]

-----Day 3: Sherwood Anderson, “Mother,” ““Queer””; Edwin Arlington Robinson, “Richard Cory,” “Miniver Cheevy,” “Mr. Flood’s Party”; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”

Textual issues:

-----Anderson and Robinson compose stories of small town denizens. Examine their works as psychological and social profiles of the inner and outer worlds of middle-class America. Examine the secrets and motives beneath the ordinary appearances of their lives.

-----For each author, produce a formal description of their writing. For Anderson, discuss the narrative perspective, the detached yet penetrating dissection of character. For Robinson, detail the verse form, and determine how it fits the subject (for example, the way the form of “Richard Cory”--the quatrains, the use of pronouns, the delay of the culmination until the final line--reveals social relations in the town). For Gilman, note the short paragraphs and the interior viewpoint.

-----Chart the psychological decay of Gilman’s narrator, and determine how the conditions of her marriage (for instance, her husband’s obtuseness) contribute to her

decline.

Contextual issues:

-----As the United States entered the Twentieth Century, small town life was becoming more middle-class, more conventionalized. Treat Anderson and Robinson as exploring this new social setting.

-----Consider Gilman's "Yellow Wallpaper" as a feminist protest piece. Note the confinement she suffers, and her experience of the machinations of the men she encounters.

Supplementary readings:

-----Amy Lowell, Tendencies in Modern Poetry [a study from 1917, that touches upon Robinson and others]

-----Irving Howe, Sherwood Anderson [short study by a leading New York Intellectual]

-----Janet Beer, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman

WEEK 9--Day 1: T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," The Waste Land, "Journey of the Magi," "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

Textual issues:

-----Consider "Prufrock" as an interior monologue, in which a character speaks to us as if we were overhearing his thoughts. Note the characters that pop in and out (for example, the women talking of Michelangelo, Hamlet, Polonius), the metaphors Prufrock opts for (for example, a lobster or crab, a fly), and the oppressive conclusion that follows his meager efforts assert himself.

-----The "Journey of the Magi" operates on a curious premise: that one of the kings who witnessed Christ's First Coming looks back on the event with confusion and dismay, forever changed by it but not quite understanding it. Analyze the poem as a disturbing reminiscence by a man about to die, and feeling that a culture, a way of life, is dying with him.

-----"The Waste Land" is the most famous work of High Modernism. Its fragmentary form, deep allusiveness, irony, and criticism of contemporary vulgarity embody a modernist aesthetic that has been adopted by generations of writers and critics. Because the poem is too complex and dense to cover in one class period, simply try to uncover some important allusions, isolate episodes where a narrative is discernible, and determine the basic sense of the language and atmosphere of the poem.

-----The essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is a classic statement of modernist principles, one of which underscores the "historical sense" defined near the beginning. Clarify this concept and discuss how the "sixth sense" relates to a modern

understanding of the West.

Contextual issues:

-----Paradoxically, Eliot's modernism is in many ways a reaction against the modern world. He abhors its commercialism, its vulgarity, its accelerated pace, its disregard of the past. This is one reason he hearkens back to Elizabethan literature and pagan myth, trying to maintain contact with a less mechanistic, bourgeois world. Examine his poems as a search (sometimes a failed one) for a better world.

-----Love, or the lack of it, is a prominent aspect of "The Waste Land." Compile a motif of "modern love" in the poem, which includes sex without passion, abortion, infidelity, and homosexual rendezvous, and determine Eliot's attitude toward each.

-----"Tradition and the Individual Talent" is a classic of modernist "impersonal poetics," but also a general statement about tradition. Examine with students the passage in which Eliot talks about the canon and what happens to it when a work that is genuinely innovative is added to it. Pick examples, such as: how the advent of Whitman changes our understanding of poetry, and of poets like Longfellow and Whittier.

Supplementary readings:

-----T. E. Hulme, Speculations [important collection of essays by a contemporary of Eliot who was killed in WWI]

-----Maud Ellmann, The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound

-----Ronald Schuchard, Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art [excellent recent study of Eliot's encounters with influential figures and how they shaped his poetry]

-----Day 2: F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

Textual issues:

-----One of the first things to consider in presenting Gatsby is the narrative perspective of the novel. All of the events and characters are filtered through Nick, a man who has traveled from the West and become an intimate witness of murder, adultery, vanity, and profligacy among the wealthy denizens of the East. When it's all over, he says, he wants "no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart." Trace Nick's experience in the novel--his involvement with Jordan Baker, his admiration for Gatsby, his contempt of Tom--and develop a profile of his character, and how it shapes his observations. Explicate scenes such as the opening lines in which Nick describes himself.

-----Next, develop a profile of Gatsby as a typical American hero. Like earlier characters in American literature, Gatsby is a runaway, a loner, a self-made man, an

ambitious but romantic dreamer. Notice that behind all his financial chicanery is an impossible desire to relive the past. Nick calls it “the colossal vitality of his illusion.” Pick scenes such as Gatsby staring out at the green light across the bay or Gatsby kissing Daisy for the first time and explicate them as portraits of an American character.

-----Discuss the basic plot of the novel, emphasizing how simple and conventional is its background. Poor young man falls in love with rich girl. Girl marries another man while the first goes away to war. The first man sets out to make a fortune to win her back. Explore how Fitzgerald takes this ordinary tale and elevates it into serious literature, a profound reflection on time, ambition, youth, and love. Gatsby’s goal is adolescent, but though readers (and Nick) recognize it as such, still it has an integrity and beauty.

Contextual issues:

-----Explore Gatsby as a novel of the “jazz age,” the “Roaring Twenties.” Fitzgerald fills the plot with wild parties on Long Island, pleasure trips to New York City, underworld characters, financial schemes, bootlegging, college football, and liberated women. Examine these as the markers of an era, of the glamor and the sordidness of post-World War I “Vanity Fair” America.

-----At one point in the novel, Tom speaks about the decline of civilization. Although Tom is hardly an avatar of civility and learning, teachers might take his complaint seriously and consider the novel as a rumination on the decline of spiritual values. Detail how the crude pursuit of wealth, superficial prestige, ennui, and deceit have replaced dignity, charity, and faith. Note the images of dust and ashes in the land between West Egg and New York, the failed commercialism of the billboards, the degradation of the Wilsons’ lives. Compare the sad and sordid events of the novel with Nick’s vision of innocence and newness at the very end.

Supplementary readings:

-----Dalton Gross and MaryJean Gross, Understanding “The Great Gatsby”: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents [rudimentary, but informative gathering of contextual materials and documents]

-----Ernest Lockridge, ed., Twentieth-Century Interpretations of “The Great Gatsby” [an old collection of articles, but still illuminating]

-----Harold Bloom, ed., Major Literary Characters: Gatsby [recent collection]

-----Day 3: William Carlos Williams, “The Young Housewife,” “Portrait of a Lady,” “Spring and All,” “To Elsie,” “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “This is Just to Say,” “The Dance (‘In Brueghel’s great picture’),” “Lear,” “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,” “The Dance (‘When the snow falls the flakes’); Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Recuerdo,” “I think I Should Have Loved You Presently,” “[I being born a

woman],” “Apostrophe to Man,” “I, Too, beneath Your Moon, Almighty Sex,” “The Snow Storm,” “I Forgot for a Moment,” “[I will put Chaos into fourteen lines],”

Textual issues:

----- Because the selections of poems for both poets are scattered, it is difficult try to derive larger issues from what is represented. Students should focus instead on individual poems in terms of their style and content. For example, analyze the structure and diction of Williams’s famous poem “The Red Wheelbarrow.” Note the sound effects (depends/ upon, glazed/rain, beside/white), the placement of prepositions, the breakup of stanzas.

Contextual issues:

-----Williams was a physician who spent many hours doing obstetrical work. Consider how his professional interactions with women finds its way into his verse. Note the many portraits of women that appear.

-----Williams believed that the high modernism of Eliot and other modernist writers was too European and too oriented toward the past. He advocated a poetry that would deal with direct experience, and not lose itself in old traditions. Examine his poems for instances of experience unmediated by cultural forms. Ponder whether his examinations of painting in the Brueghel poems violate his insistence on direct representations of things.

-----Millay led a notoriously active sex life, which included perhaps a hundred lovers, male and female. Examine her poetry as an expression of sexual passion, its exaltations and disappointments.

Supplementary readings:

-----James Breslin, William Carlos Williams: An American Artist

-----Paul Mariani, William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked [monumental biography]

-----Nancy Milford, Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay [a new biography]

WEEK 10-Day 1: Wallace Stevens, “The Snow Man,” “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” “Sunday Morning,” “Anecdote of the Jar,” “The Idea of Order at Key West,” “Study of Two Pears,” “Of Modern Poetry”; e.e. cummings, “in Just--,” “O sweet spontaneous,” “Buffalo Bill’s,” “Poem, or Beauty Hurts Mr. Vinal,” ““next to of course god america I,” “I sing of Olaf gad and big,” “somewhere I have travelled, gladly beyond,” “anyone lived in a pretty how town,” “pity this busy monster,

manunkind”

Textual issues:

-----One of the first things that strikes readers of Stevens’s poetry is his quirk subjects, such as a jar in Tennessee or two pears seen from different perspectives. Discuss these odd subjects and how they present a different sense of reality. (Reality is a frequent topic in his verse.)

-----Consider “Of Modern Poetry” as a doctrinal statement about poetry in his historical moment. Examine the “actor on the stage in the dark” metaphor as the image of the modern poet, and note the intellectual qualities Stevens emphasizes.

-----Pick a short poem of Stevens and analyze the verse. For instance, “The Snow Man”: it is one sentence long, arranged into three-line stanzas, with evocative metaphors (“mind of winter”), and the dense repetition of “nothing” in the final lines.

-----Pick a short poem of Cummings and analyze the verse. For instance, the “Buffalo Bill’s” poem, with its broken lines, fused words, and final question addressed to death.

Contextual issues:

-----Because Stevens lived an uneventful life as an insurance executive in Hartford, connecting his verse to historical issues of the time is a tenuous process. Most critics examine his verse without tying into to historical contexts, but instead tie it to intellectual contexts. Stevens is sometimes considered to have a humanistic vision of the world, which is atheistic and aesthetic. Examine “Sunday Morning,” “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” and other poems as expressions of secular belief. (Note: the scene in “Emperor” is of a funeral vigil.)

-----Many have approached Stevens’s verse philosophically, as meditations on perception, reality, and truth. Examine “The Idea of Order at Key West” and “A Study of Two Pairs” as explorations of a mind-reality encounter. Treat them as inquiries into the extent to which the mind colors the world with its dispositions.

-----Construct an emotional attitude from Cummings’ poems, which are filled with mockery, anger, and irreverence. What are the targets of his ridicule? Is his verse a form of social commentary?

Supplementary readings:

-----Joseph Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye [an excellent close reading of Stevens’s corpus]

-----A. Walton Litz, Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens [thoughtful study by distinguished critic]

-----Peter Brazeau, Parts of a World, Wallace Stevens Remembered: An Oral Biography [quirky semi-biography compiled of scattered testimonies and documents pertaining to the poet/insurance executive]

-----Richard S. Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings

-----Day 2: Robert Frost, “The Pasture,” “Mowing,” “Mending Wall,” “The Wood-Pile,” “The Road Not Taken,” “The Oven Bird,” “Birches,” “Fire and Ice,” “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” “Once by the Pacific,” “Departmental,” “Desert Places,” “Design,” “Provide, Provide,” “The Gift Outright”

Textual issues:

-----Consider Frost’s poetry in terms of its stylistic simplicity. His language is elementary and clear, his verse forms familiar (usually blank verse, or pentameter or tetrameter lines arranged in stanzas of 3, 4, or 5 lines). Detail the basic features of his verse and select instances in which Frost is able to achieve profound effects with such simple materials, for example, the repetition of the last line in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”

-----Consider Frost’s poetry as landscape poetry, in which one goal of the verse is to describe a setting. Many of his settings are rustic New England fields and farms, but Frost often manages to effect an ambiguous meditation upon humanity, such as in the poem “The Wood-Pile.” Examine how Frost singles out a banal endeavor like strolling through the woods or mending a stone wall, and derives a moral or cosmic meaning from it.

-----In poems like “Fire and Ice” and “Once by the Pacific,” Frost imagines an end-of-the-world kind of catastrophe. Examine these and other poems for visions or intimations of widespread destruction and finality.

Contextual issues:

-----Because of Frost’s simplicity, it is difficult to tie his verse directly to historical contexts, besides the obvious context of rural, agrarian New England. For this reason, it is best to focus upon close analyses of the poems.

Supplementary readings:

-----Richard Poirier, Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing [readable study by distinguished critic]

-----Jay Parini, Robert Frost: A Life [major biography]

-----Day 3: Ernest Hemingway, “Big Two-Hearted River” (handout); F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Babylon Revisited”

-----Both of these stories portray men trying to restore their lives and their psyches after enduring horrible experiences. Describe the pasts of these two characters, and what was so traumatic about them. (Because “Big Two-Hearted River” only hints at Nick’s past, students should know that he is returning from the war in Europe. Students may wish to consult other stories in the volume in which “Big Two-Hearted River” appears, In Our Time.)

-----The bulk of each story describes efforts made by the characters to reconstruct themselves. Contrast the strategies of each, and how the goals they pursue will improve their state of mind.

-----Examine “Big Two-Hearted River” for Hemingway’s celebrated prose style. Diagram his sentences, count their length, categorize his diction and syntax. Note the absence of subordinate clauses, the emphasis on concrete detail. Then, ponder how this linguistic reduction bears upon Nick’s emotional condition.

-----Much of the conflict in “Babylon Revisited” bears upon the emotional dynamic between Charlie, his wife’s sister, and his old friends who arrive at the end and spoil his plans. Follow this dynamic as it plays out in the final scene, when Charlie appears to have won his point and overcome his sister-in-law’s hate, only to have his past catch up with him once again.

Contextual issues:

-----Fitzgerald’s story takes place in Paris after the Depression has hit. Compare Charlie’s impressions of post-Roaring Twenties Paris with that of the time of the story. Note how he expands his impressions into the vision of two eras.

-----As one of the most famous Americans of the Twenties, Fitzgerald’s glamorous personal life was often discussed in magazines and society columns. His troubled marriage and his alcoholism were not as openly known. But by the time of the story, his wife Zelda had been diagnosed as mentally ill, and Fitzgerald’s alcoholism had drained his life of youth and hope. Interpret “Babylon Revisited” in light of these declines. How has Fitzgerald revised his life through Charlie, yet retained its emotional tones?

-----Take the burnt over landscape of the town at the beginning of “Big Two-Hearted River” as a parallel to a World War I battlefield, and regard Nick’s psychic fragility as a post-combat trauma. Interpret the story as one of the many instances of soldiers returning from the Great War alienated, troubled, and disaffected.

Supplementary readings:

-----Richard Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of Fiction [critical study from the Sixties]

-----J. Gerald Kennedy and Jackson R. Bryer, eds. French Connections: Hemingway and Fitzgerald Abroad [useful recent collection]

-----Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist [good critical and biographical

study]

WEEK 11-Day 1: William Faulkner, “Barn Burning”; Flannery O’Connor, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” “Good Country People”

Textual issues:

-----Faulkner’s tale of a young man coming to betray his resentful, criminal father may be interpreted as a coming-of-age story. Sarty Snopes is a young man beginning to see his father Ab as an evildoer, not as a strong, principled man. Examine the course of Sarty’s opinion from the opening scene when he is called to speak to the final scene when he runs away knowing his father will die.

-----Consider “Barn Burning” in light of the three main settings of the story: the sharecropper’s cabin, the plantation mansion, and the general store. These are three important locales, each with long histories and deep meanings to them. Analyze these places in the story. Note what happens there, and who belongs there.

-----Discuss “The Life You Save . . .” as a moral tale. Two people, the mother and Tom, both conniving and selfish, barter with one another over an innocent, deaf woman, the daughter. The two maneuver each other into a transaction: he takes the daughter off her hands, she gives him money and the car. At the end, he has the car, the mother has gotten rid of her daughter, and the daughter is stranded in a diner.

-----Consider the odd assortment of characters in “Good Country People”: Hulga’s mother, conventional and obtuse; her friend, gossipy and self-important; Hulga herself, a PhD in philosophy and a cripple, filled with nihilism and hate; and the roving Bible salesman, young and earnest, and villainous. Note how the characters react to one another, their expectations and disappointments.

-----In the final scene between Hulga and the young man, at first Hulga seems in control and condescending, willing to grant this inferior boy a moment of affection. But once Hulga exposes her artificial leg to him, the power shifts. She becomes vulnerable, he becomes contemptuous. She wants her mother, he keeps her leg along with other grotesque prizes in his suitcase. Analyze this emotional shift in Hulga--which is the culmination of the story--and determine how it reflects on her previous atheism and her spite toward her mother.

Contextual issues:

-----The Snopes’s are part of a class in the South that used to be called “white trash.” Consider Faulkner’s story as a representation of this class. Detail the social characteristics of these people, marking the traits that distinguish them as, precisely, white trash.

-----Faulkner’s early work helped inaugurate a sub-genre of American fiction, named “Southern Gothic.” Flannery O’Connor is considered one of its most skillful

practitioners. These works often present characters shadowed by a dim, but ominous past (for example, the defeat of the Civil War, or slavery), harboring family secrets, and experiencing extreme emotions that waver between the grotesquely comical and the violently horrifying. Consider “Barn Burning,” “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” and “Good Country People” as specimens of Southern Gothic.

Supplementary reading:

-----David Minter, William Faulkner: His Life and Work

-----John T. Irwin, Doubling and Incest: Repetition and Revenge [eccentric but penetrating essay on Faulkner’s early novels]

-----Robert Brinkmeyer, The Art and Vision of Flannery O’Connor [the best full-scale study]

-----Day 2: Ralph Ellison, selections from Invisible Man; Richard Wright, “The Man Who Was Almost a Man”

Textual issues:

-----The events in Ellison’s story (such as the blonde stripper dancing for the black youths) and the title of Wright’s piece mark these selections as narratives of black manhood and its problems. Consider the customary aspects of manhood and how they are foreclosed to these protagonists. Ponder the compromises or strategies they devise to assert some form of manhood in a hostile or mocking world.

-----In “Battle Royal,” Ellison’s invisible man seems to want to please everybody, but frequently ends up annoying or provoking people of both races. Consider why people dislike him or mistrust him, even though he works hard, studies well, and wins a scholarship.

-----In “The Man Who . . .” and other stories by Wright, unintentional violence often propels the action, placing the protagonists in physically dangerous and morally ambiguous situations. Explore what leads Bigger into his mistake, particularly the pleasure he gets from handling the gun. Examine the progress of the action as a result of external pressures and internal desires.

Contextual issues:

-----In the pre-Civil Rights era, Jim Crow rules governed social conduct all across the South, regulating voting rights, public access, seats in theaters and buses, etc. Consider Ellison’s “invisibility” as the social status blacks suffer in this system. Note how Ellison expands the limitations blacks suffer into a metaphysical condition.

-----Compare the young man in “Battle Royal” to the young Booker T. Washington in Up from Slavery. Behind many of Ellison’s portraits of success-seeking

young black men is Washington.

-----The invisible man commits a troubling faux pas when he substitutes the word “equality” for “responsibility” in his speech. The white men grow silent, until reassured that the substitution was just a slip of the tongue. Their worry stems from the politics of the time, and the role blacks were given in a white supremacist society. “Responsibility” signified the duty blacks had to be active, clean citizens, and avoid the crime, alcoholism, and shiftlessness that was imputed to their natures. “Equality” signified the demand for full rights of citizenship. Consider this scene as a clash of those two attitudes.

-----In Wright’s story, Bigger’s final decision is to flee. Expand on this choice by interpreting it as a fateful passage for young black men in a society that puts them down (through both white and black representatives).

Supplementary reading:

-----John Reilly, Twentieth Century Interpretations of “Invisible Man” [collection of essays from the Fifties and Sixties]

-----Henry Louis Gates and Kwame Anthony Appiah, eds. Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present [collection by two leading African-American literature scholars]

-----Hazel Rowley, Richard Wright: The Life and Times [a new biography, well-reviewed]

-----Day 3: Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “I, Too,” “Mulatto,” “Song for a Dark Girl,” “Refugee in America,” “Dream Variations” (handout), “Theme for English B” (handout), “Dreams” (handout); Gwendolyn Brooks, “kitchenette building,” “the mother,” “We Real Cool,” “The Bean Eaters”

Textual and Contextual Issues:

-----Because the selections of poems for both poets are scattered, apart from the exploration of black experience in the United States, it is difficult to derive larger considerations from what is represented. Students should focus instead on individual poems in terms of their style and content. For example, analyze the structure and diction of Brooks’s famous poem “We Real Cool,” noting its schoolyard rhyme, its juxtaposition of fun and threat, and its ominous, resigned final line. Or, compare Hughes’s “I, Too, Sing America” to Walt Whitman’s poem entitled “I Hear America Singing.”

Supplementary readings

-----Arnold Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes [exhaustive biography]

-----R. Baxter Miller, ed., Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks: A Reference Guide

-----George Kent, A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks

WEEK 12-Day 1: Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish,” “At the Fishhouses,” “Questions of Travel,” “The Armadillo,” “In the Waiting Room,” “The Moose,” “One Art”; Robert Lowell, “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,” “Mr. Edwards and the Spider,” “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow,” “Memories of West Street and Lepke,” “Skunk Hour,” “For the Union Dead”

Textual issues:

-----Bishop’s poems are often records of a personal experience that grow into broader meditations on human being. To appreciate Bishop’s method in this regard, do a close analysis of “In the Waiting Room,” a reminiscence of an ostensibly ordinary moment in her childhood. Note most of all how a combination of circumstances--a child sitting alone in a medical waiting room, browsing through a National Geographic, hearing her aunt cry out in pain--leads to a fundamental moment of self-recognition.

-----Diagram the verse form of Bishop’s “One Art,” concentrating especially on the rhymes, the diction, and the stanza structure.

-----Lowell’s poems often work within an implicit connection of somber, inauspicious landscapes and psychic turmoil. Do a close analysis of “Skunk Hour,” Lowell’s strange poem about a moment in a seaside town. Focus on the details of the scene, and how they reflect back upon the narrator.

Contextual issues:

-----Consider some of Bishop’s poems as environmentalist poems. For instance, “The Armadillo”: A religious ritual in South America includes sending fire balloons up the rising air drafts on a mountainside, but sometimes they end up starting small fires. Bishop watches the beautiful nighttime scene and appreciates its spiritual significance, but when she spies an armadillo searching for cover, her perspective broadens. She thinks about how human actions affect the natural landscape. Discuss this moment as a moment of ecological awareness. There are similar moments in “The Fish” and “The Moose.”

-----Lowell’s poem “For the Union Dead” marks a range of historical contrasts between the vision offered in St. Gauden’s relief of Shaw’s regiment on Boston Common and present-day Boston with its traffic and construction zones. Examine Lowell’s images and derive a set of values from each historical pole, for instance, the mortal dedication of Shaw and the modernization projects of contemporary Boston.

Supplementary readings:

- David Kalstone, Becoming a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop with Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell [sets up illuminating conversations between poets]
- Bonnie Costello, Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery [good textual analysis of individual poems]
- Steven Gould Axelrod, Robert Lowell: Life and Art [excellent critical study]
- Jeffrey Meyers, ed., Robert Lowell: Interviews and Memoirs

-----Day 2: Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman

Textual issues:

-----This is perhaps the most studied and performed American play, one involving norms of middle-class life, the Protestant work ethic, the American Dream, and heroism. But most of all, it is a complex family drama of a father, mother, and two sons. Begin, therefore, with profiles of Willy, Linda, Biff, and Happy, proposing each one's putative role in the family structure (Willy as ideal breadwinner, Linda as caretaker, Biff as young hotshot, Happy as lesser brother), and each one's actual condition.

-----Explain to students the shifting time frames of the story, as Willy floats in and out of his present and past. Diagnose these changes as the breakdown of Willy's mind, but also note the content of his hallucinatory world, particularly the ideals of fatherhood and salesmanship that he treasures.

-----Consider Willy's suicide not just as the culmination of his mental breakdown, but as a moral action. One might consider it his recognition that the world did not match his ideas and expectations, or that with his final scene with Biff he has made his peace with his life, or that he knows he has no more purpose to live for. Ponder the moral issues involved, especially in light of the summation by Charlie, the no-nonsense businessman, "Nobody dast blame this man."

Contextual issues:

-----Introduce students to the classical theory of tragedy (articulated by Aristotle) that tragedy consisted of the fall of a good, heroic man through the operations of fate, for example, the circumstance of Oedipus killing his father without knowing who he is. Examine Willy Loman in this light. Discuss with students Willy's fall--his decline as a husband, a father, a salesman. Ponder whether Willy can qualify in any way as a tragic figure. (Remind students that "tragic" doesn't just mean sad or horrifying. It has a specific meaning in dramatic studies, specifically, the fall of an individual through his own principled actions.)

-----Many have pointed out the status of women in the play, which is marginal and polarized. On the one hand is Linda, on the other the Woman. Discuss whether Miller provides any deeper glimpses into these female characters than what is provided by their interaction with the males. Do they have any independent being?

Supplementary reading:

- Brenda Murphy and Susan Abbotson. Understanding “Death of a Salesman.” A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents
- Matthew Roudane, ed. Conversations with Arthur Miller

-----Day 3: Saul Bellow, “Looking for Mr. Green”; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (handout), “I Have a Dream” (handout)

Textual issues:

-----Bellow’s story follows Mr. Grebe, a former Latin instructor, on his first day on a job that has him delivering government relief checks to home-bound African-Americans. The situation allows for numerous tensions. One, Grebe doesn’t know the neighborhood, nor does he understand the complexities of black-white relations. Two, blacks mistrust him, and so they frustrate him in his search for Mr. Green’s home. Three, his boss is enterprising and understanding, but he does drop a racist comment about Greeks being smart enough not to free their slaves. The story culminates in various encounters Grebe has with residents, who seem filled with ideas and passions that Grebe doesn’t understand. Discuss the story as a kind of social education for Grebe, which he steers his way through only by focusing on his aim: find Green.

-----Discuss the distinction in King’s “Letter” between just and unjust laws. Explain King’s claim that there is a moral law which trumps local legal practices and social customs.

-----Examine King’s comments in the “Letter” on the “white moderate.” Consider what form of appeal this is, and how King expects it to take effect.

-----King’s “I Have a Dream” speech offers a universalist message to all Americans. Note the “glue,” so to speak, which holds all peoples together--that is, freedom--and the rhetorical techniques King uses to intensify his message (for instance, the anaphora of “I have a dream . . .,” the catalogues of United States geography, the parallel sentences.)

Contextual issues:

-----Because Bellow’s story is so localized, so to speak, it is hard to relate it to historical issues except in a distant and general way (for example, the nature of black-white relations in the urban north during the Depression).

-----To introduce King’s two pieces, it will be necessary for teachers to establish the setting of each. Detail the circumstances of King’s arrest in Birmingham. Describe the gathering at the Mall in Washington, DC.

Supplementary reading:

- Malcolm Bradbury, Saul Bellow [short study by distinguished Americanist critic]
- James Atlas, Bellow: A Biography [controversial new biography]
- Michael Eric Dyson, I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr. [provocative new biography with an edge]

WEEK 13-Day 1: Sylvia Plath, “Morning Song,” “Lady Lazarus,” “Daddy,” “Words,”; Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” “A Supermarket in California,”

Textual issues:

-----Plath’s poetry is often oblique and dense in its images and language, and it helps to bring biographical knowledge to the verse (see below). However, teachers can examine Plath’s poetry for its formal properties, particularly its concentrated figurative language. Pick a poem and break down the figures of speech, for example, “Morning Song.” The poem is a young mother’s reflection upon the moment of childbirth and nightly breast-feeding. Examine how Plath represents her experience in poetry. Note the similes--“Love set you going like a fat gold watch,” “The clear vowels rise like balloons”--and ask students to tie them down to concrete things. This is poetry that translates personal experience into intense, penetrating metaphors and images. One of the tasks of reading it is understanding the experience that motivates it.

-----Chart the form of “Howl,” Ginsberg’s rant on madness, depravity, and spiritual elation. Note the length and organization of the verse lines, the oracular cadences--if possible, listen to a recording of Ginsberg reading the poem to audiences in the Fifties--the repetitions and catalogues, the Whitmanian free verse elements.

-----Although Ginsberg emphasizes the “voice of a generation” aspect of Howl, examine the poem as a personal statement, a record of Ginsberg’s experiences. Detail the episodes he selects for memorialization--arrests, orgies, drug-taking, etc.--and what they suggest about his life. Ask students what they think all the intense emotional reminiscence is for. Where is a “howl” supposed to go? What is it supposed to do?

Contextual issues:

-----Ginsberg’s era is that of the Beat Generation, and “Howl” was its anthem. Isolate the elements in “Howl” that emphasize a generational condition, as if the experiences of Ginsberg and his Beat friends were representative of a time and place, of youth rebellion and mistrust.

-----Ginsberg’s poetry often links psychic and sexual freedom to anti-Establishment attitudes, as his references to being arrested, the FBI, and other authorities indicate. Determine the political implications that Ginsberg attaches to ostensibly

personal actions, such as taking drugs or participating in sexual orgies.

-----Before Plath wrote “Lady Lazarus,” she had made two suicide attempts and was soon to contemplate a third (which was successful). Analyze the poem in terms of such biographical details, tying images such as Lady Lazarus in a freak show to Plath being cared for by doctors and friends after one suicide attempt.

Supplementary readings:

-----Allen Ginsberg, “Howl”: Original Draft Facsimile . . ., edited by Barry Miles [a sourcebook that also contains letters, legal documents, historical information]

-----Anne Waldman, The Beat Book: Poems and Fictions of the Beat Generation [good general study]

-----Paul Alexander, Rough Magic: A Biography of Sylvia Plath

-----Janet Malcolm, “The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes” The New Yorker (August 1993) [a controversial, but fascinating study of the Plath legend]

-----Day 2: John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse” (handout); Thomas Pynchon, “Entropy”

Textual issues:

-----Before we have read very far into this story of a boy on his way to the beach with his family, the author intrudes into the narrative to talk explicitly about his narrative techniques. Examine this division between direct narrative and authorial commentary. Determine Barth’s point in highlighting his own composition.

-----Entropy is a complex law of physics, but in writers’ hands it has been simplified into the principle that all things tend toward disorganization. Order slips into chaos, rule-governed systems of power into a random dispersment of energy. Describe the two apartments in Pynchon’s story in entropic terms. Below is a lease-breaking party in its second day. People come and go, drink, laugh, pass out, while the host administers to them. In the apartment above, a man and woman isolate themselves from the world, the man (named Callisto) trying to create a hermetically sealed environment, with plants and animals and humans in an orderly, life-preserving rhythm.

Contextual issues:

-----Consider “Lost in the Funhouse” as an example of metafiction, that is, fiction that comments upon its own fictionality. The kind of ironic self-consciousness has become standard in U. S. popular culture from “The Simpsons” to “Seinfeld.” Barth’s version of metafiction makes it more than just ironic mischievousness. The self-consciousness he shows, especially in relation to sexual matters, is grounded in the painful self-consciousness of early adolescence, the time of Ambrose’s life. This connection is made explicit at the end when Ambrose talks about telling stories about

other people, constructing funhouses of fiction that will lift him out of the funhouse of his chaotic life. Explain this to students, and help them distinguish between the cheap irony of popular culture and the deeper irony of Barth.

-----In later years, Pynchon became an iconic Sixties novelist, his entropic, pessimistic vision being matched to the spirit of the times. Pick elements out of “Entropy” that seem to have a Sixties cultural feel to them--for example, the wacky cosmology of Callisto and the “party-hearty” benevolence of Meatball.

Supplementary readings:

-----Zack Bowen, A Reader’s Guide to John Barth

-----Thomas P. Walsh, John Barth, Jerzy Kozinski, and Thomas Pynchon: A Reference Guide

-----George Levine and David Leverenz, eds., Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon [interesting volume edited by leading scholars]

-----Day 3: Second Midterm Examination

FINALS WEEK: Comprehensive Reading Exam

External Readings

Readings that are not in the Norton Anthology, and that are not included in the handout supplement, can be found in the following places:

Ernest Hemingway, “Big Two-Hearted River, Parts I and II”: these are the last pieces in Hemingway’s early collection In Our Time. They can also be found in almost any anthology of Hemingway’s stories.

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and “I Have a Dream” may be found in collections of King’s work such as A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., edited by James M. Washington.

John Barth, “Lost in the Funhouse”: this is the main story in a collection of short stories published by Barth under the title Lost in the Funhouse.

Sample midterm exam questions

The first part of each midterm asks students to explicate a short passage from the readings. The passages should be fairly easy to identify and should contain significant statements and expressions that lend themselves to close analysis. Emphasis should be placed on careful attention to language and style, and students should be discouraged from filling their answers with generalizations and abstractions. Here are some sample passages that will reward sensitivity to diction, metaphor, etc.

- The opening lines of the Declaration of Independence, in which Jefferson announces the principles of natural rights.*
- The opening sentences of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" in which Emerson announces the shame of conformity and the greatness of genius.*
- The passage near the end of "Where I Lived and What I Lived For" in Thoreau's Walden that begins "Let us settle ourselves . . ." in which Thoreau demands that readers join him in a pursuit of "reality."*
- The last section of Whitman's "Song of Myself" in which the poet encourages readers to follow him on his journey to "happiness."*
- The section in Douglass's Narrative in which he fights back against Mr. Covey and recovers his manhood.*
- Any quatrain from Emily Dickinson that embodies her striking metaphors and keen observations.*
- The section in Huck Finn in which Colonel Sherburn faces down the lynch mob after having killed Boggs in the street.*
- The scene early in The Awakening when Edna's husband returns home, awakens the children, then chides Edna for being negligent.*
- In Crane's "The Open Boat," when the narrator paraphrases the thoughts of the men as they worry about drowning and desire some figure ("ninny-woman Fate") to blame.*
- The section in Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" on the "historical sense" and its importance to the formation of a critical intelligence.*
- The opening stanza of Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," which contrasts the woman's sensuous relaxation on Sunday morning with the forms of worship going on in church.*

-----Any paragraph from Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," taking it as an example of the clipped, concrete Hemingway style.

-----Any paragraph from Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, taking it as an example of the stream-of-consciousness method.

-----The opening of Invisible Man, in which Ellison outlines his conception of "invisibility."

-----The conclusion of O'Connor's "Good Country People," in which the young man criticizes Hulga for not being "truly" nihilistic.

-----Any lines from Ginsberg's "Howl," taking them as representative of an oracular poetry eliminating all limits of decorum, beauty, and form.

The second part of the midterms asks students to address several works of literature in terms of specific themes and ideas. For each question, students should be asked to refer to at least 5 works, searching for continuities and contrasts. Here are some sample questions for the first half of the course:

-----Consider how economics plays a role in the works of Franklin, Thoreau, Douglass, Melville, and Fuller. Consider why the authors foreground economic concerns in their narratives and commentaries, which are putatively about other things, like freedom and equal rights. How does wealth relate to success in these accounts? How do the characters portrayed economize their lives?

-----In many of the works studied, God or Spirit is an elusive, but powerful force, hard to define but often instrumental in the experiences the writers recount. Consider the nature of God in works by Jefferson, Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson, and Twain. For instance, what are the qualities Jefferson attributes to God? How does Spirit manifest itself in Emerson?

-----Many of the works so far involve conflicts between individuals and the social worlds they inhabit. Thoreau, Douglass, Fuller, Whitman, Huck Finn, Daisy Miller, and many others find themselves at odds with their environments, and usually the environment is found to be at fault. Explore this individual/society conflict, and consider the justness of setting the individual up as the judge of the world.

Here are some questions for the second half of the course:

-----Examine works by Chopin, Adams, Du Bois, Gilman, Robinson, and Cummings as forms of social criticism. In each work, single out the target of the criticism and the reasons why the

author attacks it. Consider also the vehicle of the critique--is it the sympathy evoked for victims of social realities, the arguments made directly against them, etc.?

-----Many works from the second half of the course are meditations on the modern condition. Examine the works of Eliot, Stevens, Fitzgerald, Miller, Ginsberg, and Pynchon as representations of 20th-century life in the United States. Consider especially the breakdown of cultural frameworks--religious, patriotic, and familial--and the loss of meaningful structures of experience, as the protagonists face a chaotic, commercial, unsatisfying world.

-----One of the strongest traditions in American literature is the African-American tradition. Explore the meaning of blackness in works by Washington, Du Bois, Brooks, Hughes, Ellison, and Wright. After describing the racial situations found in these writers, consider, for example, whether they postulate an essential black identity, or whether they believe that there is a human identity that is deeper than racial identity.

Teachers may also wish to compose questions about regional literature (Twain, Chopin, Faulkner, O'Connor, Bellow), about experimental poetry (Whitman, Eliot, Williams, Cummings, Brooks, Ginsberg), and about the effects of war (Jefferson, Irving, Hawthorne, Lincoln, Melville, Eliot). The important thing is that the questions force students to address a wide range of literary works under the purview of specific themes.

The final test is the reading comprehension exam. This exam is designed to assess the students' general knowledge of American literary history once they have completed the course. Students who have read carefully should be able to identify the passages with ease, and provide concrete reasons for doing so. Sometimes, a specific reference may give the passage away, such as the name of a character. Other times, students will have no unique signals and will have to make a guess at the work based upon the style and the general content. The exam should run two hours and contain 50 passages. Here are some examples of passages and strong answers:

*O baffled, balk'd, bent to the very earth,
Oppress'd with myself that I have dared to open my mouth,
Aware now that amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon me I have not once had the
least idea who I am or what I am . . .*

Answer: "This passage comes from Whitman's 'As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life.' The free verse form marks it as Whitman's. The lines are lengthy and verbose, with much alliteration and drama. The form is like other Whitman poems, but the negative judgments, the self-recriminations, are only found in 'As I Ebb'd.' In "Song of Myself" and other poems, Whitman "celebrates" himself. He doesn't condemn himself."

They were closing the iron grill in front of Brentano's Book-store, and people were already at dinner behind the trim little bourgeois hedge of Duval's. He had never eaten at a really cheap restaurant in Paris. Five course dinner, four francs fifty, eighteen cents, wine included. For some odd reason he wished that he had.

Answer: "I think this comes from Fitzgerald's 'Babylon Revisited.' The reference to Paris matches the story, as does the third-person narration focused upon a single man, 'He.' Also, the allusion to money is central to the story, which describes a man returning to Paris after having lived an affluent, glamorous life there years earlier. The final line has a regretful tone that mirrors the main character's memory of his earlier mistakes."

To say that Ambrose's and Peter's mother was pretty is to accomplish nothing; the reader may acknowledge the proposition, but his imagination is not engaged. Besides, Magda was also pretty, yet in an altogether different way. Although she lived on B_____ Street she had very good manners and did better than average in school.

Answer: "This passage comes from Barth's 'Lost in the Funhouse.' The main character's name in that story is Ambrose, and he is infatuated with Magda. Furthermore, the reference to the reader and to the actions of the writer himself are characteristic of Barth's self-conscious narration. While telling the story of Ambrose at the beach, Barth also comments upon his own storytelling."

Paper Assignments

Teachers may set due dates for the papers according to their schedules. Typical times would be in the fifth week, the tenth week, and finals week.

-----For the first paper, in which students execute a close analysis of a specific passage, the choice is left to the student (although we advise students to clear the passage with the teacher).

-----For the second paper--in which students select a genre or literary tradition, then place two or more works within that genre or tradition--teachers may play a stronger advisory role, but we suggest that teachers refrain from limiting the choice of topics and texts too narrowly. Students should be encouraged to explore a particular literary form or sub-tradition and attach it to relevant works. Here is a list of suggested issues paired with texts:

-----oratorical literature (Emerson, Douglass, Lincoln, Washington, King): students would begin by describing the nature of oratorical literature, refer to the contexts of its performance, then analyze segments of selected texts for their rhetorical elements

-----free verse (Whitman and Ginsberg): students would define free verse and explain the rationale for following it, then analyze the structure of Whitman's and Ginsberg's major works

-----expatriate literature (James, Eliot, Fitzgerald): students would provide some biographical information about the authors' lives abroad, then examine how the situation of the American in Europe becomes a critical aspect of the literature

-----Southern Gothic (Twain, Faulkner, O'Connor): Southern Gothic would be defined, with characters and events culled from the literature as supporting examples

-----literature that sets out to define America (Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Douglass, Washington, Hughes, and others): this would be a genre made of works of literature that try to establish a national American identity; students would delineate the genre, then infer what kind of America is projected by the works

-----rite of passage literature (Hawthorne, Chopin, Hemingway, Ellison): students would establish a category of works in which characters undergo a difficult maturing process, for example, the way in which Young Goodman Brown goes to the woods to test his faith, and Edna Pontellier acquires the courage to be a free woman

-----The last paper is a research paper that addresses a critical topic using primary and secondary sources. Teachers may wish to limit the topics to 6 or 7 choices, and the papers may be concentrated on single work and a specific interpretative issue. Here are some examples:

-----*Determine the relationship between Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman and the Aristotelian theory of tragedy.*

-----*Describe the relationship between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois as it evolved from the late-1890s to Washington's death in 1915.*

-----*Compare the social reality of Puritan New England as represented in Hawthorne's writings with the historical Puritan New England.*

-----*Detail all the allusions in T. S. Eliot's poem The Waste Land. Determine where they come from and how Eliot fits them into the overall themes of the poem.*

-----*Examine the way in which Calvinist ideas of God and salvation enter into Emily Dickinson's poetry.*

Of course, these are highly general assignments, and teachers should work with students to refine them into a thesis that the paper will substantiate. The important thing is that the work involves an independent research component, one that forces students to do some reading in historical background, literary history, philosophy, sociology, and/or religion.

John Greenleaf Whittier Handout

Barbara Frietchie

Up from the meadows rich with corn,
Clear in the cool September morn,

The clustered spires of Frederick stand
Green-walled by the hills of Maryland.

Round about them orchards sweep,
Apple and peach tree fruited deep,

Far as the garden of the Lord,
To the famished eyes of the rebel horde,

On that pleasant morn of the early fall
When Lee marched over the mountain wall,--

Over the mountains winding down,
Horse and foot, into Frederick town.

Forty flags with their silver stars,
Forty flags with their crimson bars,

Flapped in the morning wind: the sun
Of noon looked down, and saw not one.

Up rose old Barbara Frietchie then,
Bowed with her four score years and ten,

Bravest of all in Frederick town,
She took up the flag the men hauled down.

In her attic window the staff she set,
To show that one heart was loyal yet.

Up the street came the rebel tread,
Stonewall Jackson riding ahead.

Under his slouched hat left and right

He glanced: the old flag met his sight.

“Halt!” the dust brown flanks stood fast:
“Fire!”--out blazed the rifle-blast.

It shivered the windows, pane and sash;
It rent the banner with seam and gash.

Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff,
Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf;

She leaned far out the window-sill,
And shook it forth with a royal will.

“Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country’s flag,” she said.

A shadow of sadness, a blush of shame,
Over the face of the leader came;

The nobler nature within him stirred
To life at that woman’s deed and word:

“Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!” he said.

All day long through Frederick Street
Sounded the treat of marching feet:

All day long that free flag tost
Over the heads of the rebel host.

Ever its torn folds rose and fell
On the loyal winds the loved it well;

And through the hill-gaps sunset light
Shone over it with a warm good-night.

Barbara Frietchie’s work is o’er,
And the Rebel rides his raids no more,

Honor to her! and let a tear
Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall’s bier,

Over Barbara Frietchie's grave,
Flag of Freedom and Union wave!

Peace and order and beauty draw
Round thy symbol of light and law;

And ever the stars above look down
On thy stars below in Frederick town!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Handout

The Arrow and the Song

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight,
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak,
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

Paul Revere's Ride

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,--
One, if by land, and two, if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm."

Then he said, "Good night!" and with muffled oar
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,

Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
The Somerset, British man-of-war;
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
Across the moon like a prison bar,
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
By its own reflection in the tide.

Meanwhile his friend, through alley and street,
Wanders and watches with eager ears,
Till in the silence around him he hears
The muster of men at the barrack door,
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,
Marching down to their boats on the shore.

Then he climbed the tower of the Old North Church,
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
To the belfry-chamber overhead,
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the sombre rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade,--
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
To the highest window in the wall,
Where he paused to listen and look down
A moment on the roofs of the town,
And the moonlight flowing over all.

Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
In their night-encampment on the hill,
Wrapped in silence so deep and still
That he could bear, like a sentinel's tread,
The watchful night-wind, as it went
Creeping along from tent to tent,
And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"
A moment only he feels the spell
Of the place and the hour, and the secret dread
Of the lonely belfry and the dead;
For suddenly all his thoughts are bent
On a shadowy something far away,
Where the river widens to meet the bay,--
A line of black that bends and floats
On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride
On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
Now he patted his horse's side,
Now grazed at the landscape far and near,

Then, impetuous, stamped the earth,
And turned and tightened his saddle-girth;
but mostly he watched with eager search
The belfry-tower of the Old North Church,
As it rose above the graves on the hill,
Lonely and spectral and sombre and still.
And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height
A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
A second lamp in the belfry burns!

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,
A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark
Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet:
That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,
The fate of a nation was riding that night;
And the spar struck out by that steed, in his flight,
Kindled the land into flame with its heat.

He has left the village and mounted the steep,
And beneath him, tranquil and broad and deep,
Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;
And under the alders that skirt its edge,
Now soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge,
Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

It was twelve by the village clock,
When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.
He heard the crowing of the cock,
And the barking of the farmer's dog,
And felt the damp of the river fog,
That rises after the sun goes down.

It was one by the village clock,

When he galloped into Lexington.
He saw the gilded weathercock
Swim in the moonlight as he passed,
And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,
Gaze at him with a spectral glare,
As if they already stood aghast
At the bloody work they would look upon.

It was two by the village clock,
When he came to the bridge in Concord town.
He heard the bleating of the flock,
And the twitter of birds among the trees,
And felt the breath of the morning breeze
Blowing over the meadows brown.
And one was safe and asleep in his bed
Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
Who that day would be lying dead,
Pierced by a British musket-ball.

You know the rest. In the books you have read,
How the British Regulars fired and fled,--
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farm-yard wall,
Chasing the red-coats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again
Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load.

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,--
A cry of defiance and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo forevermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

Ralph Waldo Emerson Handout

Concord Hymn

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the Conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept,
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

By this green bark, on this soft stream,
We set to-day a votive stone,
That memory may their dead redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare,
To die, or leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare,
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

Walt Whitman Handout

I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat
deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or
at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or
washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day--at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

O Captain! My Captain!

O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up--for you the flag is flung--for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths--for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Hear Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,

The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage close and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult O shored, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

Emily Dickinson Handout

I dwell in Possibility--
A fairer House than Prose--
More numerous of Windows--
Superior--for Doors--

Of Chambers as the Cedars--
Impregnable of Eye--
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky--

Of Visitors--the fairest--
For Occupation--This--
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise--

I like to see it lap the Miles--
And like the Valleys up--
And stop to feed itself at Tanks--
And then--prodigious step

Around a Pile of Mountains--
And supercilious peer
In Shanties--by the sides of Roads--
And then a Quarry pare

To fit its Ribs
And crawl between
Complaining all the while
In horrid--hooting stanza--
Then chase itself down Hill--

And neigh like Boanerges
Then--punctual as a Star
Stop--docile and omnipotent
At its own stable door--

Bee! I'm expecting you!
Was saying Yesterday
To Somebody you know
That you were due--

The Frogs got Home last week--
Are settled, and at work--
Birds, mostly back--
the Clover warn and thick--

You'll get my Letter by
The seventeenth; Reply
Or better, be with me--
Yours, Fly.

There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry--
This Traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of Toll--
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the human soul.

Langston Hughes handout

Dream Variations

To fling my arms wide
 In some place in the sun,
 To whirl and to dance
 Till the white day is done.
 Then rest at cool evening
 Beneath a tall tree
 While night comes on gently,
 Dark like me--
 That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
 In the face of the sun,
 Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
 Till the quick day is done.
 Rest at pale evening . . .
 A tall, slim tree . . .
 Night coming tenderly
 Black like me.

Theme for English B

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you--
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
 I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
 I went to school there, then Durham, then here
 to this college on the hill above Harlem.
 I am the only colored student in my class.
 The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
 through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,

Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear you--we two--you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me--who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records--Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white--
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
I guess you learn from me--
although you're older--and white--
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

