http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~mbseigel/

MAJOR AMERICAN AUTHORS - HU3541.R01
Spring 2009, Fisher 130, MWF 12:05-12:55pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Literature is not a historical artifact, but a living, breathing, animal, here and now. But where is it? Where are its voices? And in a culture where serious reading, critical reading continues to slip from the popular consciousness as a means of acquiring knowledge, what relevance can literature have in 2009, major author or otherwise? What does it mean to be an American author in this era? What makes an American author major in this era? Who decides? These questions and others will be explored as students read eight of the brightest, most difficult new novelists in American letters today.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Willett, Jincy. Winner of the National Book Award.
Holleran, Andrew. Grief.
Lipsyte, Sam. Homeland.
Link, Kelly. Stranger Things Happen.
White, Curtis. Memories of My Father Watching IV.
Unferth, Deb Olin. Vacation.
Dewitt, Helen. The Last Samurai.

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

M. Bartley Seigel
Assistant Professor of Diverse Literatures and Creative Writing
Editor, PANK
Office: 342 Walker Arts and Humanities Center, MTU
Email: mbseigel@mtu.edu
URL: http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~mbseigel
Phone: 906-487-2016
Office hours MWF 9-10am & 11am-12noon, appointments recommended and preferred.

EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING

First, fulfill your responsibilities, seldom early & never late. Attend class & visit office hours, complete all assignments in & out of class on deadline, read, take notes, participate, be engaged & be engaging. Late assignments WILL NOT be accepted & NO coursework can be made up unless accompanied by written documentation from a mortician, a doctor, the Dean of Students, or your congressional representative - that means death, dismemberment, severe illness, classified military service, etc. Do not present me with excuses. Do not ask me to make an exception in your case. DO NOT ASK ME TO BABYSIT YOU AND WE WILL GET ON FINE.

Second, please bear in mind that integrity and ethics are central components of a student's education and the ethical conduct maintained in an academic context will be taken eventually into a student's life both professional and personal. Integrity and ethics are essential in any community searching for truth and are, some might argue, central to any social system claiming civilization as its own. Anything less than total commitment to integrity and ethics undermines the efforts of the entire community. Every member is responsible. Every member is culpable. Be kind. Be honest. Be curious. Be adventurous. Work hard. Leave the campground better than you found it. Those who cannot keep the compact will be asked to leave the building.
Third, in terms of access, Michigan Tech encourages ALL qualified persons to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please contact Prof. Seigel as soon as possible and/or visit the Office of Student Affairs or phone 487-2951.

Fourth, concerning grading, students can expect the following:

A (4) = Excellent. Student exceeded all course expectations.
A/B (3.5) = Very good. Student exceeded most course expectations, but not all.
B (3) = Good. Student met all course expectations, exceeding many.
B/C (2.5) = Above average. Student met all course expectations, exceeding some.
C (2) = Average. Student met all course expectations.
C/D (1.5) = Below average. Student met some, but not all course expectations.
D (1) = Inferior. Student met few course expectations.
F (0) = Failure. Student met very few to none of the course expectations.

COURSEWORK

Attendance and Participation (25%): Engage. Come to class every day, prepared, and take part thoughtfully and conscientiously. I reserve the right to fail students who amass more than three unexcused absences. Meet your deadlines, all of which are final. Read daily, in small bites and stay current. Come to class with observations to make; come with questions (classes in which students participate are significantly more interesting than those in which the professor drones on and on). Visit office hours.

Reading Quizzes (25%): Conscientious and attentive reading is absolutely necessary for a literature class to function. As a gentle reminder of this, there will be eight reading quizzes, one for each novel, covering content.

Group Presentation (25%): Students will be assigned to groups whose presentation should help broaden the class’ understanding of the larger cultural context of the assigned novel/author. Presentations should include: Relevant biographical information about the author; historical, sociological, or personal context of the novel; review of critical reception of the novel and subsequent scholarly attention; review of the author/novel’s broader cultural import; etc. Presentations should be no more than 15 minutes total and should be well researched, well prepared, fluid, coherent, relevant, and thought provoking. Test your technology before you present!

Responses (25%): Students will write eight 1000-word responses, one for each of the novels read in class. Each response should illustrate the student’s understanding of each novel, its author, its cultural and historical context including both its critical reception and any subsequent scholarly attention it may have received. Venture an idea, pose a research question, HAVE A THESIS, do outside research, support your claims. Three sources minimum (not wikipedia, not some jerk’s homepage, not the publisher’s website).

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR, SPRING 2009

Week 1

Mon. 01.12: Intro to the course.
Wed. 01.14: Winner of the National Book Award.
Fri. 01.16: Winner of the National Book Award.

Week 2

Mon. 01.19: No Class.
Wed. 01.21: Winner of the National Book Award.
Fri. 01.23: Winner of the National Book Award; Response 1 Due.
Week 3

Mon. 01.26: Quiz; Group 1 presents: Grief.
Wed. 01.28: Grief.
Fri. 01.30: Grief.

Week 4

Mon. 02.02: Grief.
Wed. 02.04: Grief; Response 2 Due.
Fri. 02.06: No Class.

Week 5

Mon. 02.09: Quiz; Group 2 Presents; Homeland.
Wed. 02.11: Homeland.
Fri. 02.13: Homeland.

Week 6

Mon. 02.16: Homeland; Response 3 Due.
Wed. 02.18: Quiz; Group 3 presents: Stranger Things Happen.
Fri. 02.20: Stranger Things Happen.

Week 7

Mon. 02.23: Stranger Things Happen.
Wed. 02.25: Stranger Things Happen.
Fri. 02.27: Stranger Things Happen; Response 4 Due.

Week 8

Mon. 03.02: Quiz; Group 4 presents: Memories of My Father Watching TV.
Wed. 03.04: Memories of My Father Watching TV.
Fri. 03.06: Memories of My Father Watching TV.

Week 9

Mon. 03.16: Memories of My Father Watching TV.
Wed. 03.18: Memories of My Father Watching TV; Response 5 Due.
Fri. 03.20: Quiz; Group 5 present: Nice Big American Baby.

Week 10

Mon. 03.23: Nice Big American Baby.
Wed. 03.25: Nice Big American Baby.
Fri. 03.27: Nice Big American Baby.

Week 11

Mon. 03.30: Nice Big American Baby; Response 6 Due.
Wed. 04.01: Quiz; Group 6 presents: Vacation.
Fri. 04.03: Vacation.

Week 12
Mon. 04.06: Vacation.
Wed. 04.08: Vacation.
Fri. 04.10: Vacation; Response 7 Due.

Week 13

Mon. 04.13: Quiz; Group 7 presents: The Last Samurai.
Wed. 04.15: The Last Samurai.
Fri. 04.17: The Last Samurai.

Week 14

Mon. 04.20: The Last Samurai.
Wed. 04.22: The Last Samurai.
Fri. 04.24: Quiz; Response 8 Due; Close up shop, evaluations, etc.