

## 2041 Lecture 1: Starting the Course

### **Getting Started:**

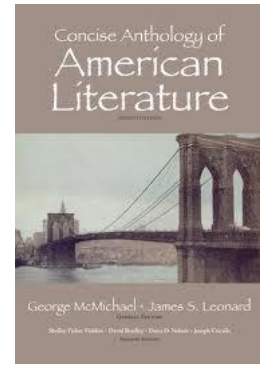
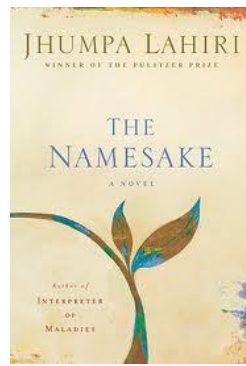
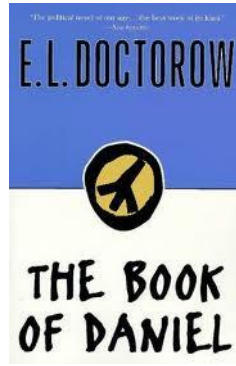
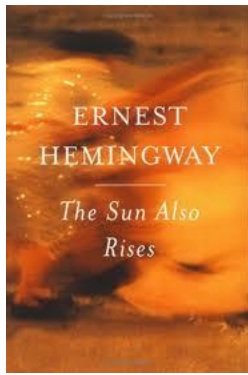
Our first lecture of the semester will get our course going, explain some policies, and introduce the directions our course will head in. In future weeks, I will try to have lectures, assignments, and notes posted by **Tuesday** of each week, which should give you time to complete everything necessary. If you choose to read ahead or to read your weekly assignment before Tuesday, that works. You don't need to wait for the weekly lecture to get going.

### **Introduction:**

Before I get into the details, I'd like to begin by introducing myself. My name is Eddie Ardeneaux and I am a faculty member in the department of English. A native of New Orleans, I grew up on the Westbank and attended UNO as an undergraduate. I received my Master's Degree from the University of Georgia with a focus on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Novel. I have been teaching at UNO for several years, though I must confess that this semester marks my second time teaching ENGL 2041 online, which will explain any problems that come up as we get going. As we settle into a rhythm as a class, however, I think things will flow fluidly.

### **Availability/Textbooks:**

Next, a note on availability – I teach on campus, so I will have physical office hours in my office. Since our class meets online, however, and I can't predict who can visit those hours, I will also be available on Monday afternoons in some version of 'cyber' office hours, which means I'll be available online to answer questions and concerns. I am of course available through UNO email, which I check daily (except on the weekends), so reaching me at the moment is that simple.



You have four required texts for this class, pictured above (note: your cover may not look like the picture, which is no problem). Three of them, Hemingway, Lahiri, and Doctorow, are novels, while the fourth, the *Concise Anthology of American Literature*, is a standard literature textbook. I tried to find the most affordable text that would fit our needs (though the price changed between the time I choose it and now, which only adds to my distrust of publishing companies). Having the textbook is important because it keeps us all on the same page, literally speaking. Since I will expect that you have read the same versions of texts that I assign, as well as the occasional author information, for exams and papers, it would be in your best interest to use the standard edition textbook for our class. The novels, on the other hand, you can get in any format that will allow you to read them. In my notes on the novels, I might mention a page number, but I will usually use a quote, which you can track down if you need to. Finding used copies of all texts could help you save money, though I think each novel costs under fifteen dollars. Please get these texts as soon as possible (especially the anthology).

At first glance, our schedule of readings probably looks daunting, merely because there are so many entries per week. When you look at the actual readings, however, you will find that for most weeks there are usually two longer readings and the rest are poems, very short stories, or short essays. While this won't be true for every week, I've assigned the same amount of

readings as I would if our class met for two 75 minute periods. The benefit of taking this course online is that you can set your own reading schedule. You can choose to: a) read slowly over the course of the week, b) read one author at a time, to maximize your understanding of the work or works in question, or c) read everything in a painful rush before you have a journal or discussion board due. While I would try to dissuade you from the third option, I know it is a popular one. Whatever you choose, **reading the required texts is the real purpose of our course**, and all tests, papers, and assignments will work from the basis that you have read. I realize this course is for non-majors and reading works of literature (especially 'old' works from early in American history) may not be your favorite thing. However, as your Instructor, I will try to impress upon you just why reading such literature could matter, an impression that will only hold weight if you actually attempt to read.

### **An Interlude on Reading Works of Art**

Here is my opening rationale for why reading matters: the difference between studying literature ([aesthetics](#), works of art) and studying other, more [empirical](#) methods of representing or understanding experience, involves the \*experience\* of the work of art itself. Someone can state an opinion in real life, he can show you some facts, he can even tell a short tale. But the experience of following characters through a set of circumstances can help you conceive the ways of seeing the world (perspectives) that are available. All works of art involve an experience of the work itself, whether a visual experience (painting, photography), auditory (music), or a combination of other senses. The difference between the act of reading and interpreting/understanding a work of literature and the boring struggle of memorizing a summary is in **the quality** of the experience. Works of art don't lend themselves to easy, straightforward analysis or answers. They are tricky, multilayered, and should force you to contemplate what is

said/shown/heard. You, the reader, complete the connection between the text itself and its original author, since you hold the key to decoding the messages and understanding the meaning of a text (since a text is written for a reader). On a practical note, the experience of reading and interpreting texts can be a useful skill throughout college and in the working world. You might think I am silly to say that reading literature will help you at a job, but if you can work out the meaning of a poem by Plath or a story by Hawthorne, you should be able to see the deeper meaning of a message from your boss or a company memo with ease. Once you are read and understand the hard stuff, the easier stuff should become...well...easier.

In a more technical sense, we are concerned with narration (who is telling the story and how), setting (where does it take place, details, and how this frames the story), symbolism (especially American symbolism), and [themes](#)<sup>1</sup> (of which there are many, but the course will be broken down into thematic segments by week/weeks). These technical aspects will provide a framework, both for understanding the contents of this course but, more importantly in my mind, for reading and analyzing works for pleasure or pain beyond this course. The framework we work through and the basic keystones we touch on should make you a more active and skillful reader in the future, beyond the guidance I have to offer. In this way, our course focuses as much on critical thinking and reading of literary texts as it does on the specific texts we will cover. While I would like you to be able to discuss the finer points of Hemingway or Frost, I truly hope that you will take away from this course more skill as a reader of texts, which you can apply to your own life in your own way.

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### **Final Course Logistics:**

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<sup>1</sup> The link from themes leads to a glossary of literary terms, in case you need clarification on any of those listed.

I'll get back off my high horse of discussing abstract ideas about art to continue discussing the logistics of the syllabus and our course. The remainder of the syllabus is more self-explanatory. There will be weekly or biweekly lectures that help us guide the course. What the syllabus stresses, however, are the various tools you will use to keep up with the course, from Discussion Board to Journals (the first of which is already available). Because 2041 is not generally a lecture course, the discussions you have with me individually and with your classmates will form the bulk of the work we do in this course understanding and discussing literature. While Blackboard is not the most useable format for class discussion, we have to work with what we have available, so please bear with the program and try to familiarize yourselves with it. Ultimately, this course is more about what you have to say than it is about what I have to say. We are in a conversation here, and hopefully it won't be one-sided.

What you get out of this course will depend largely on what you put into it. Beyond the grade, the workload for our course is designed to help you become a more effective reader, critical thinker, and writer of and about texts. While I will facilitate the course, you as students are responsible with keeping up, turning things in by the due date, reading thoroughly, and keeping me informed of how this process progresses. I cannot (nor would I like to) visit each of your houses to ensure you have done the reading each week. However, failure to read and keep pace with the class will become evident through the work you produce. My advice: do yourselves a favor and, if you are going to take this course, take it seriously. The only person who can suffer as a result of your performance is you.

Finally, as you can see, you will have to produce a good deal of writing this semester. Between the online postings, the papers, and the exams, you will largely communicate with me through writing. Let me say a few necessary words on the subject. Please consider your audience

before writing anything on Blackboard or via email. Because for many of you I will be "meeting" you for the first time through your Journal, be aware that the impression you leave will stick with me. I do not expect all writing used in this course to be formal and perfect (specifically grammatically). But please take the time to ensure you **write clearly and get your point across**.

Please remember that you are enrolled in a college level English class. While I expect the Discussion Board and Journal entries to be less formal, I do think that you should take care with your writing. After the first batch of Journals and next week's assignments, I will say more on this based on what you are producing. Just keep in mind that clear, readable prose is expected of 2000 level students.

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### **Diving into American Literature**

The point of today's lecture was largely to help familiarize you with the specifics of our course. Next week, my lecture will focus on what American literature really is. What makes something literature? What about a work is particularly American? How does reading American literature affect us as students or citizens of America? Will this class make you a better citizen? In a strictly American sense, it should, since understanding the foundations of thinking and underpinning ideas of a country should illuminate it a bit more. Of course I can't promise you will progress as a citizen, but as a student, I hope you will find our course helpful and challenging.

As your Week 1 Assignments document will explain, I've posted the first poetry assignment. Please take the time to do it, as it will help you get a sense of where you stand as our course begins. The assignment included with the Handout is for you to test your own aptitude; you do not need to turn that in. However, please complete the first Journal assignment, as it

states, before Sunday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> at noon. Most weeks, your assignments will be due earlier, but since we've gotten a late start, I thought Sunday was only fair. Don't stress this first Journal. You shouldn't write more than a page between the two parts of the assignment. Try, if you can, to have fun with it, as such an approach should make your semester a little more enjoyable. Good luck!

### **Complementary Cheesy Video:**

Finally, for your optional enjoyment, I'm posting a link to two videos (about 15 minutes total between the two) that gives a "quick and dirty" overview of American literature. If you have time, check it out, if only to get a quick and dirty sense of the periods we will cover.

[Video 1 link](#)

[Video 2 link](#)



Walt Whitman



Sylvia Plath



Ernest Hemingway