

## Brief Course Outline

**Course Title:** Seminar in American Literature

**Course Number and Section:**

ENGLISH

4472F 550

**Instructor Name(s):** Dr. Blanchette

**Instructor Email(s):** sarah.blanchette@uwo.ca

Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

### Course Description:

The most infamous line of the Declaration of Independence sets up a quintessential paradox within the American imaginary that all people “are created equal,” and, yet, that citizens also possess the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” While equality and liberty might seemingly appear to be mutually compatible (and desirable) goals, this seminar examines influential 20th century American novels that take up the fight for equality and the dangers of unfettered liberty. It will examine the ways in which rhetoric of liberty has shifted from Patrick Henry’s notorious call to “Give me liberty, or give me death!” in 1775 during the Revolutionary War to Malcolm X’s declaration that 1964 was the year of “the Ballot or the bullet” to former President Donald Trump’s claim in 2020 that “Republicans are the party of Liberty, Equality, and Justice for All.” How is discourse of liberty used to both promote civil rights’ agendas and to counteract them? This seminar explores the tension between equality and liberty by considering novels that are both catalysts for, and products of, the major socio-political transformations of the 20th century in the United States, including the women’s liberation movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the gay liberation movement, the Native American Renaissance, and the Mad movement. Students will be introduced to some of the major thematic concerns of American literature, as well as study the formal elements of the novel as a medium, in order to develop their own individualized research project.

### Learning Outcomes:

- Closely examine the medium and formal elements of the novel
- Study canonical American authors to understand their impact on the American literary tradition and be introduced to major literary movements (ex. naturalism)
- Explore key themes of liberty/freedom and the tensions between liberty and equality as it relates to American ideology from a wide variety of positionalities and perspectives
- Recognize the relationship between literary texts and major socio-political transformations of the 20th century, as well as how these texts remain relevant in the contemporary moment
- Practice articulating your close-reading and research of texts with peers and engaging in respectful dialogue about disparate interpretations

- Execute a research agenda from start to finish developing transferrable skills for project management
- Develop your critical voice as a researcher and early scholar, who can meaningfully add to ongoing theoretical debates and conversations
- Perform a professional research presentation
- Complete a formal MLA-style research-based essay on a self-directed topic

**Textbooks and Course Materials:**

Nella Larsen’s Quicksand  
 Louise Erdrich’s The Night Watchman  
 Kate Chopin’s The Awakening  
 John Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath  
 James Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room  
 Viet Thanh Nguyen’s The Sympathizer  
 Toni Morrison’s Beloved  
 Sylvia Plath’s The Bell Jar  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby

**Methods Of Evaluation:**

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
Participation	ongoing	20
Journal	ongoing	10
Seminar	sign-up sheet	30
Research Proposal	11/05/2024	5
Research Presentation	12/03/2024	10
Research Essay	TBA	25

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.

Friday, August 9, 2024