

AML3041: American Literature 2
The Way We Weren't: The Myths of American Life
Fall 2015 | Section 25F2
MWF Period 6 | Pugh 120

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Course Description

The overarching myth of life in America is a story told in phases. Childhood is innocent and carefree; adolescence is turbulent and rebellious; adulthood is mature and productive. The family, idyllic and stable, accompanies each of these three phases, offering support along the journey. While the full reality of lived experience in the United States has long belied this particular fantasy, we as a nation have been reluctant to embrace or acknowledge anything that might challenge our perception of these stages. The images they invoke are powerful and hard to resist; they speak of life as many believe it should be, rather than as it actually is.

In this course, then, we will seek to complicate our understanding of the myth of the “traditional” life experience in America that these phases exemplify. To that end, the course will consist of four units, each of which takes up an important figure in American society: the child, the adolescent, the adult, and the family. Throughout these units, we will read broadly, encountering novels, plays, short stories, comics, and other writings from the early 20th century to the present day, with an emphasis on the late 20th and 21st centuries. More importantly, our readings will reflect a diverse range of perspectives, as we consider the ways in which questions of race, religion, sexuality, and gender play important roles in determining how – and even if – one can survive and thrive in this country. Together, we will seek an answer to the question of what it truly means to live in America.

Required Texts

The following texts are required; any complete version is acceptable. They have been ordered at the UF bookstore and are readily available online. I have included ISBN numbers for reference. Additional readings listed on the course schedule will be available either online or via course reserves.

Akhtar, Ayad. *The Who & The What: A Play*. (2014). 0316324493.

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. (1880). 1503280292.*

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. (1953). 0345806549.

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. (2006). 0618871713.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. (1984). 0679734775.

Fraction, Matt and Chip Zdarsky. *Sex Criminals: Vol. 1*. (2014). 1607069466.

Gino, Alex. *George*. (2015). 0545812542.

Jackson, Shirley. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. (1962). 0143039970.
Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. (1929). 149499111X.
Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. (1970). 0307278441.
Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. (1999). 0064407314.
Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. (1885). 0486475840.*

*Also available for free online.

Assignments

Archival Document Presentation: Throughout the semester, students will present on an archival document (newspaper article, advertisement, photograph, etc.) related to the themes of the course. Presentations will be 3-5 minutes each; order will be assigned randomly. Students will also submit a 2-3 page analysis of their chosen document and its significance. (15% of final grade)

Short Essay: Early in the semester, students will be assigned to one of our major texts. On the day we begin discussing the material in class, students will submit a 4-5 page paper in which they craft an interesting and original argument about their assigned text. (15% of final grade)

Midterm Exam: The midterm exam will be given in class approximately halfway through the semester. It will consist of some combination of true/false, multiple choice, matching, short answer, and essay questions, all of which will be based on our readings and in-class discussions. (25% of final grade)

Final Exam: The final will be a take-home exam that consists of a series of brief essays related to the subjects and themes we have taken up in our class discussions across the semester. (35% of final grade)

Participation: Students are required to actively participate in class every day. The rubric for participation will be posted to Canvas early in the semester for reference. (10% of final grade)

Grading Rubric

A brief overview of how I arrive at the grades for all major assignments is below. We will discuss each assignment in more detail as it arrives.

In each paper, I will evaluate:

- 1) content, including argument, development, and support
- 2) organization, including paragraph structure, overall flow of ideas, transitions
- 3) mechanics, including grammar and style.

You should strive to excel in all three areas; more specific grade breakdowns are as follows:

The A-range essay has strong content, strong organization, AND strong mechanics. An “A” is not the baseline. It is earned.

The B-range essay has one key area (content, organization, mechanics) notably in need of revision.

The C-range essay has two key areas (content, organization, mechanics) notably in need of significant revision.

A D-range essay has two or more key areas in need of substantial revision.

An “E” is usually reserved for students who do not do the assignment or fail to attend class. However, an “E” may also be given if an essay blatantly ignores all three areas of evaluation.

Course Policies

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory for the success of this course. You may miss **three** classes without penalty; each absence after three will lower your final grade by 5%. If you miss **more than six** classes, you cannot pass the course. I consider all absences equally excused. The only exception to this policy is for university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays. If you anticipate having a prolonged absence for any reason, please speak to me in advance.

If you are absent, it is still your responsibility to make yourself aware of all class discussion and announcements. You are also still responsible for turning in assignments on time. Any in-class assignments – including quizzes – cannot be made up.

Late Arrival: Our class is discussion-based, and as such late arrival is highly disruptive. Class starts sharply at **12:50 PM**, and anyone not in the room at that time will be counted as tardy. Early departures from class will also count as a tardy; any student missing more than ten minutes of class may be marked absent at the instructor’s discretion. Two tardies count as an absence.

Technology: E-readers will be allowed; this does not include cell phones, which must be put away and on silent during class. Other devices, such as laptops and tablets, will be allowed on a provisional basis. I reserve the right to ban them from the classroom at any time.

Paper Submission: I do not accept late assignments. Failure of technology (hard drive crashes, printer out of ink, etc.) is not an excuse.

All written assignments must follow MLA format. Papers submitted via hard copy must be stapled, and electronic submissions must include your last name in the document title. Failure to follow any of the above criteria will result in the loss of a letter grade on the assignment. Papers without a works cited page will not be accepted.

Final Grade Appeals: Concerns about grading on individual assignments should be addressed to the instructor. A student who is sure his or her final grade is inaccurate may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, English Department Program Assistant. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower grade; the decision is final.

Statement of student disability services: The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Statement on harassment: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

Statement on academic honesty: All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Course Schedule

The following schedule is tentative and subject to change throughout the semester. All assignments and readings are due the day they are listed. Check your email and Canvas daily for announcements and updates.

Unit One: Beyond the White Picket Fence: The American Family

Week One

8/24/15: Course Introduction

8/26/15: What is the American Family?

8/28/15: The American Family Through the Years

Read: Selections from *Homeward Bound: American Families During the Cold War Era* by Elaine Tyler May and *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* by Stephanie Coontz

Week Two

8/31/15: *Little Women*

Read: Selection from *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

9/2/15: *Little Women*

9/4/15: *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Read: *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, Parts One and Three

Week Three

9/7/15: No Class

9/9/15: *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Read: Selection from *Notes on a Native Son* by James Baldwin

9/11/15: *Fun Home*

Read: *Fun Home*

Week Four

9/14/15: *Fun Home*

Read: “Closing the Gap in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*” by Jennifer Lemberg

9/16/15: *The Who & The What*

Read: *The Who & The What*

9/18/15: *The Who & The What*

Unit Two: Not That Innocent: The American Child

Week Five

9/21/15: What is the American Child?

Read: “Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths” by Henry Jenkins;
“Playing Innocent: Childhood, Race, and Performance” by Robin Bernstein

9/23/15: The American Child Through the Years

9/25/15: Teaching the Child

Read: Selections from *Lives of Girls Who Became Famous* and *Lives of Poor Boys Who Became Famous* by Sarah K. Bolton

Week Six

9/28/15: *The Bluest Eye*

Read: *The Bluest Eye*

9/30/15: *The Bluest Eye*; Visit the Baldwin Library

10/2/15: *The Bluest Eye*

Week Seven

10/5/15: *The House on Mango Street*

Read: *The House on Mango Street*

10/7/15: *The House on Mango Street*

10/9/15: *The House on Mango Street*

Week Eight

10/12/15: *George*

Read: *George*

10/14/15: *George*

10/16/15: Midterm Exam

Unit Three: More Than Rebels: The American Adolescent

Week Nine

10/19/15: What is the American Adolescent?

Read: TBA

10/21/15: The American Adolescent Through the Years

10/23/15: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Read: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapters 1-23

Week Ten

10/26/15: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Read: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Chapter 24-43

10/28/15: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

10/30/15: *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Week Eleven

11/2/15: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

Read: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

11/4/15: *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

11/6/15: No Class

Week Twelve

11/9/15: *Monster*

Read: *Monster*

11/11/15: No Class

11/13/15: *Monster*

Read: “The Politics of Respectability” and “On the Death of Sandra Bland and Our Vulnerable Bodies” by Roxane Gay; Selection from *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Unit Four: Never Grow Up: The American Adult

Week Thirteen

11/16/15: What is the American Adult?

Read: Selection from *The Prime of Life: A History of Modern Adulthood* by Steven Mintz

11/18/15: The American Adult Through the Years

Read: “The Death of Adulthood in American Culture” by A.O. Scott; “The Birth of Adulthood in American Culture” by Maria Bustillos

11/20/15: American Adulthood

Read: “The Passing of Grandison” and “The Wife of His Youth” by Charles W. Chesnutt

Week Fourteen

11/23/15: American Adulthood

Read: Selection from *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years as a Slave and Four Years in the White House* by Elizabeth Keckley

11/25/15: No Class

11/27/15: No Class

Week Fifteen

11/30/15: *Passing*

Read: *Passing*

Assign: Final Exam

12/2/15: *Passing*

Read: “Reading Race in Nella Larsen’s *Passing* and the Rhinelander Case” by Rebecca Nisetich

12/4/15: American Adulthood

Read: “What You Pawn I Will Redeem” by Sherman Alexie; “Lullaby” by Leslie Marmon Silko

Week Sixteen

12/7/15: American Adulthood

Read: “This Blessed House” by Jhumpa Lahiri; “Clothes” by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

12/9/15: *Sex Criminals*

Read: *Sex Criminals*

Final Exam due to Canvas by 2PM on Monday, December 14