Dr. Comer(kcomer@rice.edu)Office: Herring 317; x3207

Office Hours: TWTh 2:30-3:45 & by appointment Classroom: Rayzor 113

**English 200: Critical Reading and Writing**

**Spring 2015, T/Th 4-5:15pm**

This critical reading and writing course serves as an introduction to the English major. It is also open to and appropriate for non-majors. Our emphasis is upon formal principals of literature, specifically genre study, and the practice of close reading. We begin with poetry, reading poems aloud and experiencing them together via YouTube. We move next to drama and then on to various examples of prose. The English language literature we consult is very broad both historically (from medieval times to the present) and geographically (including Native America, the United States, England, the Caribbean, and Australia). Students learn about the structures, forms, and aesthetics specific to genre study, and how the set of critical tools and vocabularies we use to talk about poetry, for instance, differs from tools used to talk about the novel. We also attend to critical writing and strategies of argumentation in literary criticism as well as in students’ essays. Distinguishing between analysis versus plot summary as well as identifying weak versus strong arguments are important critical writing skills students will develop.

 Each semester, English 200 assigns common texts across the sections offered. Group sessions allow us to address the texts together and to build a sense of communal knowledge. In the past the group classes counted among students’ and professors’ favorites. Common texts this semester will be Chaucer’s “Prologue” to “Wife of Bath’s Tale,” Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors,* and Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*. Group session dates are February 2, February 24, and April 7, from 7-8pm. Classes do not meet during the day when they meet in the evening.

Required Texts:

Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (2000)

Chaucer, Prologue to “Wife of Bath’s Tale” from *Canterbury Tales* (1400)

Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors* (1594)

McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992)

Letts, *August: Osage County* (2008)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1862)

Coupland, *Generation X* (1992)

Selected stories (Leslie Marmon Silko & Henry Lawson) \*\*

Cary Nelson, ed. *Modern American Poetry*

OWL-Space critical readings and other materials (denoted by \*\*)

**Assignments**

**Essays.** Three Short Essays (5-6 pages), one of which incorporates literary criticism. The first essay, on poetry, is due Friday, Feb 13. A second essay, on drama or prose, is due Friday, March 20. The third essay, on prose, is due the last day of exams, May 6. I will provide handouts with prompt questions for each essay. The first and second essays are worth 25% of your grade, and the last one is worth 30%.

**Details.** Please note that essays are submitted in hard copy form, except for final essay, which is submitted by email. Hard copies can be handed in to my box in the English Dept. on the second floor of Herring Hall. Emails to kcomer@rice.edu. Late papers require advance permission and receive grade reductions at my discretion unless university policy grants exceptions due to extenuating circumstance. Please note a handout on Writing Papers is posted to OWL-Space. Revisions are allowed, I will announcement guidelines as the semester goes on and post a Revisions handout to OWL-Space.

**Reading Responses.** Reading responses are short (1-2 page) less formal writings that help students stay current with reading and practice reading carefully and writing about it. I get to know students’ writing here in less pressured formats. 10% of your grade.

**Attendance, preparation, and participation** are 10%.

**Group Evening Meetings** are required. Location TBA.

**Disability Accommodation**

Rice University is committed to equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. In keeping with the university's mission to provide an unsurpassed education, Disability Support Services (DSS) provides accommodations and support services. If you have a registered need, please see me and I will accommodate you; also be sure to visit DSS.

**Policy on Electronic Devices in the Classroom**

Refrain from all electronic activities unrelated to our class while the class is in session. I will ask students who violate this policy to leave. The policy allows laptops in the classroom as long as their use is exclusively educational.

**Policy on attendance and late arrival:** ALWAYS COME TO CLASS.

It’s always best to come to class, even if you are tired, late, or underprepared. You will always do better in the class (this or any class) if you attend regularly. This is especially true during the most hectic parts of the semester.

**Office Hours**: Please note office hours on page 1. I have scheduled times that should accommodate most students, if not let me know. If you want to talk about the class, your writing, an upcoming presentation, the English major, or some other matter, you are welcome. Sooner is better than later if you have a concern.

**Week 1**  **Genre Knowledge**

Jan 13 Tu Class Overview: Themes and Requirements

Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool” (1960)\*\*

Jan 15 Th Rhythm & Sound in English Language Poetry

 Shakespeare, Sonnet 73 (1609) \*\*

 Walcott, “A Far Cry from Africa” (1962) \*\*

Attridge, from *Poetic Rhythms* (2002), 1-20 \*\*

 Culler, “Rhetoric, Poetics, Poetry” from *Literary Theory*, 70-82.

Abrams, *Glossary,* “Persona” and “Figurative Language” \*\*

Abrams, *Glossary,* “Blank Verse” \*\*

**Week 2 Lyric Poetry**

Jan 20 Tu Walt Whitman

 Abrams, *Glossary*, “Lyric”

Selected poems from *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

“One’s Self I Sing”

 “I Hear American Singing”

 “As Adam Early in the Morning”

 “I Hear it Was Charged Against Me”

 “A Glimpse”

 “For You O Democracy”

 Critical responses to Whitman on *Modern American Poetry* website

<http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/whitman/whitman.htm>

Jan 22 Th Confessional Poetry

 Anne Sexton, “The Truth the Dead Know,” and “Her Kind”

 John Ashbery, “They Only Dream of America” and “Farm Implements

and Rutabagas in a Landscape”

 Elizabeth Bishop, “The Fish,” and “The Filling Station”

 Sharon Olds, “The Waiting”

Critical responses on *Modern American Poetry* website

**First Reading Response due in class**

**Week 3**  **Selections in 20C Formal Experiment**

Jan 27 Tu US Modernist Poetry: Blues, Image, Philosophy, Community Speech

 Hughes, "Negro" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," “The Weary Blues”

Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask"

Cullen, "Incident"

Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,"& "Anecdote of the

 Jar"

Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “This is Just to Say”

Critical responses on *Modern American Poetry* website

Jan 29 Th **Chaucer’s Literary Vernacular (class ends 4:30 today)**

 Chaucer, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” from *Canterbury Tales*

(1400)

 Chaucer’s *General Prologue*, lines 445-76.

 *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 1-192 (x)

**Week 4**

Feb 3 Tu No daytime class. Evening lecture 7pm.

 Dr. Ellenzweig, lectures “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”

 <http://english.fsu.edu/canterbury/wifepro.html#The>

 *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, lines 193-end

Feb 5 Th conclude discussion “Wife of Bath’s Tale”

**Week 5 Drama: Dark Comedy**

Feb 10 Tu Abrams, “Dramatic Monologue” \*\*

 Begin, Letts, *August: Osage County* (2008)

Feb 12 Th no class (all invited to Chandra Mohanty public lecture)

**Feb 13 Friday First Essay due** on Poetry (my box in English Department).

**Week 6**

Feb 17 Tu finish *August: Osage County* (2008)

Feb 19 Th **Comedy & Farce**

 Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors* (Acts 1 & 2)

**Week 7**

Feb 24 Tu No daytime class. Dr. Skura lectures 7pm

 *Comedy of Errors* (Acts 3, 4, 5)

Feb 26 Th conclude discussion of *Comedy of Errors*

**Reading Response due in class**

**Week 8** **Spring Recess**

**Week 9**  **Short Narrative**

March 10 Tu Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), “Storyteller” (1981)\*\*

 Culler, “Narrative”

 Abrams, “Narrative and Narratology” and “Point of View”\*\*

March 12 Th Henry Lawson, "Shall We Gather At The River?" (1900ish) \*\*

**Week 10 Longer Narrative -- Captivities**

March 17 Tu Begin Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

March 19 Th continue Jacobs (through Part II)

**Friday March 20 Second essay due on Drama or Narrative**

**Week 11**

March 24 Tu finish Jacobs

March 26 Th Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses* (Part I)

**Week 12** **Popular Genres: the Literary Western**

March 31 continue McCarthy (Part II)

April 2 midterm recess

**Week 13**

April 7 Tu Dr. Comer lectures, *All the Pretty Horses* (1992)

April 9 Th finish McCarthy, start Coupland

**Reading Response due in class**

**Week 14 Multimedia Genres**

April 14 Tu Coupland, *Generation X: Tales of an Accelerated Culture*

April 16 Th Finish Coupland

**Week 15**

April 22 Tu Synthesis: How is a Poem Not a Novel?

 Questions about Final Paper

April 24 Th Highlights