

Course Syllabus—English 376
Teaching Literature in the Secondary School
Spring 08—Tuesday-Thursday, 11:00-12:20—Evans 417

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.. Other times by appointment. NOTE: I am director of the Elliott T. Bowers Honors Program, and I spend most of MWF in that office. I'm not really available for student appointments over there, but I can see you on those days if necessary. Just make an appointment.

My Evans Office Phone: 294-1426 (If I'm not there, leave a message. Please don't call the Honors office with ENG 376 business.)

Required Texts/Supplementary Readings/Course Materials:

- *Thinking about Literature*, by Robert McMahon. Heinemann, 2002.
- *All the Pretty Horses*, by Cormac McCarthy, any edition.
- Other online and electronic texts as required

Catalogue Course Description.

Teaching Literature in the Secondary School. Theory and practice of teaching literature in the secondary school. The course will examine various critical approaches to literature and how those approaches are put into practice in the classroom and according to existing curriculum standards for the State of Texas. Prerequisites: English composition (6 hr), 200- or 300-level ENG (6 hr). Credit 3.

General Course Goals.

- To give you a thorough introduction to contemporary methods of teaching literature to high school students
- To underscore how teaching “English” has changed in recent years and to stress the integration of the various language arts into a coherent whole
- To get you to think about what you want to be as a teacher and to help you formulate some basic approaches (or “core beliefs”) for the craft of teaching literature
- To provide a classroom forum for discussing issues and practices in the teaching of literature
- To help you understand the connections among the Texas state English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Standards, the secondary English Language Arts and Reading TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) curriculum and to understand how they affect you as a teacher of literature and the English Language Arts
- To help you prepare for the state certification examination in English (TExES)

Course Objectives (or Learning Outcomes). This list of outcomes is not exhaustive, but after this course you should be able to

- ✓ Explain the major features and exemplified practices of Reader Response Theory and how these features and practices relate to the other chief critical approaches to literature
- ✓ Articulate the principles of teaching literature outlined in the Texas English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) Standards
- ✓ Be able to name the other components (besides literature) of the English language arts and to explain in writing how literature interacts with these components
- ✓ Design classroom activities (including a thematic unit) that reflect best teaching practices and that align with Texas ELAR standards
- ✓ Lead an effective classroom discussion of a selected piece of literature
- ✓ Achieve a passing score on the literature section and the essay section of the 8-12 ELAR TExES examination

Course Requirements:

Daily Work/Participation (30%). This portion of the grade is a measurement of how actively you participate in the class, including how well you do on any in-class writings, mock exam questions, out-of-class assigned responses, the Blackboard discussions, and such. It also takes into account class attendance. The bulk of your daily grade will come from the informal journal writings you do, which you will submit via Blackboard. This participation grade is not going to be based on grinding out lots of numbers. In fact, it will be a relatively “subjective” (but I think a fair and thorough) judgment, much like the “subjective” evaluations that are a part of any English/Language Arts teacher’s professional life.

Papers (40%). You will write three papers for this class, all of which you will submit through the “Assignments” feature of Blackboard. The first two (10% each) will be oriented more toward a language-arts/literature teaching issue raised in the chapter readings. The third (20%) will be a thematic unit, which will be much more involved than the first two. You should start thinking about these papers soon.

Exam (30%). The final will come mostly from the textbook readings, but it will include material from the Texas ELAR Standards and possibly from the Language Arts section of TEKS and the TExES preparation guide. I also plan to give you some in-class (or on-line) responses to questions from the chapter readings. These will help you prepare for the exams.

Attendance Policy. University policy allows three hours of absences, which in the summer means two classes. I’ll give you two free absences (although this does not excuse you from any course requirements). If you have fewer than two, I’ll credit you in your participation grade. If you miss more than three classes, it will cost deductions (10 points per absence) from your participation grade. If you have a legitimate reason for missing class, write me a detailed description; I might (or might not) be able to excuse the absence.

Make-ups for Absences. Any time you are absent (whether or not it is excused), you will need to write a make-up consisting of a one-page summary of the assigned reading for the day you

missed. You will in this make-up in hard copy, not through Blackboard. The make-up is due in the day you return to class. (Please include “make-up” and the date you missed somewhere in your heading.) This make-up is in addition to any assigned journal response. If you don’t do the make-ups, it will hurt your daily grade.

E-mail and Computer Use: Another requirement for this class is that you have an e-mail account (either a Sam student account or one with your own provider) and that you know (or learn) how to send messages. It is important that we establish a network of communication in this class, not just between you and me but among the other students in the class as well. Also, you will need to have or develop a modest set of computer skills—enough to make use of Blackboard, which includes using the drop box and taking part in online discussions. This is fairly simple stuff—mostly things you can figure out intuitively. You’re not going to have to be a geek., and I’ll help with any difficulties you might have.

Class Issues. I don’t mind if you eat in class, and it doesn’t upset me if you forget to turn your cell phone off. If you have to be late sometimes, that’s OK, but be sure and check with me after class to see that I marked you present. What I really don’t like is students leaving before class is over (and not returning). If you just HAVE to leave class early (and sometimes there are good reasons to), let me know in advance (and sit over by the door). But don’t make a habit of leaving class early. Finally, come prepared to talk and to take part in the class. If you do, it’ll be a much better class for you and for all of us.

Computer Skills and Using Blackboard. We will be making fairly considerable use of Blackboard this semester. I will load several websites and other material, and you will be responsible for viewing them. You should go online and begin to familiarize yourself with the features of Blackboard (especially “Assignments,”) if you’re not already familiar with it. You aren’t going to have to be a computer nerd to take part.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism means taking words or ideas from a source without giving proper credit to that source. There are different types of plagiarism, ranging from relatively innocent to serious. However, plagiarism is—generally—taking ideas or statements (whether quoted or not) from a source without properly and clearly citing or crediting that source. The opportunities and temptations to plagiarize (especially on the internet) have become much more available, but there are also increasing ways for plagiarists to be caught at it. Whatever the case, plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and I do not take it lightly. (Neither does the University. See the student guidelines for a discussion of the penalties of plagiarism.) The long and short of this message is simple: Don’t do it. If you work hard and do the work yourself, I’ll give you every benefit of the doubt, and I’ll help you as much as you need it. It won’t be hard to write your own papers, and you’ll have plenty of help with them. Just sweat it out and do the work yourself. I guarantee it’s better that way.

Course Assessment. Toward the end of the term, you will do an “IDEA” assessment of the course. These evaluations are a part of our faculty evaluation system, but even if we didn’t do them, I take student evaluation seriously. In addition to the formal university teaching evaluation, I will be seeking feedback from you about the course. I never begin planning a course until I have considered student feedback from previous classes.

Guidelines for Academic Conduct and Classroom Procedures. Below are official University statements on other aspects of academic conduct and classroom procedures (with a link to the full guidelines). The material in italics is official university language. The non-italicized material is my own clarifications or comments on these policies. If you have any questions about any of this, please ask.

Student Syllabus Guidelines: Following are some official university guidelines for students to know about. There are more detailed descriptions online, as well as links to the specific university policy or procedure:

<https://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

Academic Dishonesty: All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. See also the statement on plagiarism, above.

Classroom Rules of Conduct: Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process. Besides these university rules, I have some guidelines of my own. I am not too much bothered when a cell phone goes off (though the rule in my class is that I get to answer it). What does bother me is students who leave class early. I have also had some issues with laptops in class. If you use a laptop in my class, just don't let me discover you checking your e-mail (or, worse yet, surfing the internet). Don't be offended if I ask you for an explanation or justification of your laptop use. You definitely may not use laptops, cell phones, or any other electronic device during exams. For the university statement on classroom conduct, see the following:

<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days: Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Students with Disabilities Policy: *It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.*

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Visitors in the Classroom: *Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to preclude visitors altogether. If you want to bring a visitor with you to class, please just check with me first.*

Some Ground Rules and Some Food for Thought.

- This course is about teaching language arts in the contemporary high school classroom. In many respects the approaches we study will diverge significantly from the teaching you have encountered in your university career. This department has some excellent teachers, from whom you should feel free to take important lessons in classroom teaching, but bear in mind that teaching in high school and teaching in college are two vastly different things. The models for effective high school teaching—and those presented in this class—are not largely your university professors. That is not meant to slight the fine teaching in this and other departments; it is merely to face up to the facts.
- This course is geared toward language arts teaching, but I know that some of you might not ever end up in a high school English classroom. Don't worry about it. The teaching principles in this course are good ones no matter what the subject or what level you teach. Whether you end up as a football coach, a history teacher, or even a college professor or corporate trainer, there are lessons for you to take from these approaches. (Besides, you can't be 100% sure you won't end up teaching language arts. What if your football team goes 0-10 or your company goes bottom up?) I just ask that you bring a

good attitude to the enterprise. Also, don't be concerned if you are an English minor rather than major. Past experience has shown that minors do fine in this course and on the English TExES (certification exam); in fact, in some ways English majors have a tougher time adapting to this course than do others in the class.

- You are not going to agree with everything you read or hear in this class. That's fine. I don't expect you to. But do resolve to bring a positive, open mind to the class. Do keep in mind that the basic approaches presented in the textbook align with the Texas English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) standards and the mandated state curriculum (the TEKS, pronounced "Tex"). They are also aligned with the domains and competencies of the secondary English certification examination (the TExES). All these documents present approaches that you will have to know to be certified and to be successful as a teacher in the state of Texas. There will be times when you'll need to know the "book" answer, but you'll have plenty of opportunities to express your independent thoughts, both in class and in writing. Don't be reluctant to do so. Also, there is a good deal of "pie-in-the-sky" idealism in the textbook and the course in general. It will never do us harm to have an occasional "reality check." If we spend significant class time in "Yeah, but. . ." discussions, it is not time wasted. We'll also spend a good amount of time talking about the realities—and the rumors—about teaching certification in the state and here at Sam, and I'll try to keep you informed of any late developments.
- Many of the educational principles we study this semester won't necessarily be brought to bear in how this course is put together or conducted. For instance, we will spend a good amount of time discussing how the writing process involves significant one-on-one class time and drafting workshops. If this were a composition course—English 380, for instance—those features would be embedded into the class structure. We will be doing a good deal of workshop activity, for sure, but mostly our concern will be dealing with the material and trying to absorb it. This does not mean that you can't get the same or similar kind of help from me. All it means is that you have to take the initiative. For example, I am always happy to review drafts and give you feedback, but it will be up to you to initiate the contact. If this were English 380, you would be required to go through such procedures; in this course it's strictly optional and strictly up to you.