

# English 529: American Fiction Since 1945

Dr. Susan Farrell  
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Office Hours: Tu/Th 1:30-3:00 and by appt.

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## Course Description

This course examines a selection of contemporary American fiction in historic, aesthetic, and social contexts. In other words, we will explore the relationship between contemporary American literature and the world we live in. We'll discuss topics such as post-war alienation, literary and cultural postmodernism, metafiction, formal experimentation, and the use of myth, folklore, and history in the novels we read. We will explore as well how contemporary literature is shaped by identity issues including race, gender, class, and sexuality. While the range of contemporary American fiction is extremely broad and varied, and impossible to cover in one semester, students will become acquainted with significant and influential American novels from each decade beginning in 1950.

## Books

- J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)
- Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962)
- Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969)
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)
- Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990)
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (1977)
- Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (1988)
- Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (1991)
- Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (2006)
- Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)
- Charles Yu, *Interior Chinatown* (2020)

## Coursework

Required work for the course includes careful reading of all assigned material and active participation in class discussions. Please come to class prepared with questions and comments about the assigned reading for each day—the success of the course depends on your involvement. Here's a brief description of the papers and presentations that will be required in the course.

### **Critical Reception Paper (20%) and Presentation (10%):**

Early in the semester, you will choose (or be assigned) one of the fictional works on the syllabus. Your first paper will analyze the critical reception of this work. You will be required to present your research findings to the class as well. The critical reception paper and presentation are both due on the day we discuss your novel in class.

**Researched Analysis including Draft and Final Version (30%):**

Each of you will write a 10-12 page researched analysis of the novel you have been assigned. This paper will first be turned in as a draft, which will be commented on by other students and by myself. Drafts are not graded, but failure to turn in a draft on time will result in an automatic 20-point deduction on the final paper. The due dates for these drafts are staggered throughout the semester, with each being two weeks after your critical reception paper. You will receive readers' reports from fellow students the following week. Your final researched analysis is due at the end of the semester. See the assignment due date schedule for specific dates.

**Readers' Reports (10%):**

Each draft will be treated like a submission to an academic journal. It will be sent to two anonymous readers (classmates) who will prepare detailed readers' reports that make suggestions for revision. Each student in the class will be responsible for serving as anonymous readers on two other students' drafts.

**Class Blog (15%):**

In order to make sure you keep up with the reading and in preparation for in-class discussion, I will ask you to respond to the various novels on a class blog 8 times throughout the semester. For every novel, I will provide several prompts to get you started thinking. You may respond to the prompt if you like, but you may also respond to other students' comments, or to anything else that interests you in the work. Blog posts must be at least 150 words to receive full credit for the day, and they must be posted **before** class discussion for the day. Blog posts will not receive letter grades, but you will receive credit for the number of comments you post, with 8 posts equaling 100%.

**Final Novel Evaluation (15%)**

In lieu of a final exam, I will ask you to complete a fun assignment (purloined from Kurt Vonnegut) in which you assess the novels we read in class according to your specific tastes and inclinations.

**Reading and Assignment Schedule**

You will be responsible for having read the works listed below before coming to class for that day. Staggered due dates for critical reception papers, research paper drafts, and readers' reports are included in the schedule as well. All items listed as due should be turned in to the OAKS assignment folder before class (5:00).

	Reading Assignments	Critical Reception Due	Draft of Analysis Due	Readers' Reports Due
W Jan 10	Course Introduction			
<b>Post-War Angst</b>				
W Jan 17	J.D. Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> (1951)	Jan 17	Jan 31	Feb 7
W Jan 24	Shirley Jackson, <i>We Have Always Lived in the Castle</i> (1962)	Jan 24	Feb 7	Feb 14
<b>Post-War/Postmodernism</b>				
W Jan 31	Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (1969) Mary Klages, "Postmodernism"	Jan 31	Feb 14	Feb 21
W Feb 7	Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> (1985) "Simulation and Simulacra" Lena Broditsky, "Lost in Translation"	Feb 7	Feb 21	Feb 28
W Feb 14	Tim O'Brien, <i>The Things They Carried</i> (1990)	Feb 14	Feb 28	Mar 6
<b>Race and Gender in Contemporary Fiction</b>				
W Feb 21	Toni Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> (1977) Virginia Hamilton, "The People Could Fly"	Feb 21	Mar 6	Mar 13
W Feb 28	Louise Erdrich, <i>Tracks</i> (1988) Erdrich & Dorris, "Who Owns the Land?"	Feb 28	Mar 13	Mar 20
W Mar 6	<b>Spring Break</b>			
W Mar 13	Jane Smiley, <i>A Thousand Acres</i> (1991)	Mar 13	Mar 27	Apr 3
W Mar 20	Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home</i> (2006)	Mar 20	Apr 3	Apr 10
<b>Contemporary National Book Award Winners</b>				
W Mar 27	Jesmyn Ward, <i>Sing, Unburied, Sing</i> (2017)	Mar 27	Apr 10	Apr 17
W Apr 3	Charles Yu, <i>Interior Chinatown</i> (2020)			
W Apr 10	<b>Discuss Research and Writing Issues</b>			
W Apr 17	<b>Last Day--Class Wrap-Up Final Researched Analysis Due</b>			
W Apr 23	<b>Novel Evaluation Due</b>			