

# English 346: Contemporary American Fiction

Dr. Susan Farrell  
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Office Hours: M 3:30-4:30; Th 3:00-4:30  
and by appointment

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Class Website: <http://blogs.cofc.edu/engl346>

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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. Topics may include literature and postmodern culture, how aesthetic style may be influenced by social and historic conditions, the blurring of fact and fiction in contemporary literature, and how literature is affected by issues of race, class, and gender. While the range of contemporary American fiction is extremely broad and varied, and impossible to cover in one semester, students will become acquainted with several of the major trends in American literature since 1965. The course is divided into three main units: 1) Post-W.W.II and Postmodernism; 2) Race and Gender; 3) Graphic Memoir. As students will discover, these categories are not mutually exclusive. They overlap and intersect one another.

## BOOKS

- Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-5*
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*
- Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*
- Louise Erdrich, *Tracks*
- Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres*
- Art Spiegelman, *Maus I* and *Maus II*
- Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

## GENERAL EDUCATION HUMANITIES

This course fulfills part of your general education humanities requirement. All courses that meet this requirement include the following learning outcomes:

1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

These outcomes will be assessed using the final research paper.

## 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.

### Papers, Presentations

Early in the semester, you will choose (or be assigned) one of the books on the syllabus. Your two major papers and your class presentation will revolve around this text. The first paper will be an annotated bibliography that summarizes at least ten outside sources and two or three of the dominant themes or recurring concerns in the criticism regarding the book. You will present your research findings to the class on the presentation day scheduled for your book (usually the last day we spend on the book). Your final annotated bibliography will be due on the day of your class presentation. The second essay is an approximately 8-10 page research paper that should build on both your own reading of the book and what you discovered in your research. I will expect you to place your reading of the work within a critical context relevant to it. A full draft of your research paper is due two weeks after your annotated bibliography. I will give more detailed instructions about each of the papers and the presentation well in advance of their due dates.

### Position Papers

In addition to the two major written assignments (the annotated bibliography and the research paper), I will ask you to write five short (approximately 500 words) position papers. For each of the books, I will provide several discussion questions, and you may choose which question to answer for each position paper. These short papers will be due on scheduled days. They may be turned in early, but will not be accepted late. You will choose which five books to write position papers on and which books to skip.

**Note:** You may **not** write one of your position papers on the book that you're writing your research paper on. This will be one you skip.

### Exams

There will be a mid-term and a final exam. Each exam will have a take-home essay component. I will give you more information about the exams before you take them.

## **GRADING**

Your final grade will be determined according to these percentages:

Letter grades assigned will have the following numerical values:

Class Participation	5%	
Position Papers	20%	A+/98 B+/88 C+/78 D+/68
Annotated Bibliography	10%	A /95 B /85 C /75 D /65
Presentation	5%	A-/92 B-/82 C-/72 D-/62
Research Paper	25%	
Mid-Term Exam	15%	F = 50 Paper not turned in = 0
Final Exam	20%	

## **ATTENDANCE**

Regular attendance and participation are requirements to pass the course. You may take 3 absences without being penalized (although I don't recommend it--it's best for you to be in class every meeting). I don't distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so you should save your 3 absences for when you're really sick or out of town. For each absence over 3 (for any reason--excused or unexcused), I will automatically subtract 3 points from your final course average. You are responsible for all work covered during your absence.

## LATE PAPERS

Late papers will be penalized five points for each day or fraction of a day they are late. Your presentation **must** be given on the scheduled date. If you're not prepared on your scheduled day, you will receive a zero for this assignment.

## PLAGIARISM

All work submitted must be your own. You may discuss writing assignments and prepare for tests with your classmates (in fact, I strongly **encourage** you to do so), but all that you write should be yours. Incorporating others' words or ideas in your essays without proper acknowledgment, or any other form of academic dishonesty, will result in an "F" for the entire course.

## READING SCHEDULE

You will be responsible for having read at least the portions of the works listed below before coming to class for that day. Background reading material and articles can be found online on the class website.

<b>Week 1:</b>	W 22 Aug	Course Introduction
		<b>Post W.W.II / Postmodernism</b>
<b>Week 2:</b>	M 27 Aug W 29 Aug	Klages, "Postmodernism" (web) <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (Chapters 1-3)
<b>Week 3:</b>	M 3 Sept W 5 Sept	<i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (Chapters 4-6) <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> (Chapters 7-10) <b>presentations; position papers due</b>
<b>Week 4:</b>	M 10 Sept  W 12 Sept	<i>White Noise</i> (Part I: "Waves and Radiation") "Simulation and Simulacra" (web) <b>Hurricane Day</b>
<b>Week 5:</b>	M 17 Sept W 19 Sept	<b>Hurricane Day</b> <i>White Noise</i> (Part II: "The Airborne Toxic Event") Boroditsky, "Lost in Translation" (web)
<b>Week 6:</b>	M 24 Sept  W 26 Sept	<i>White Noise</i> (Part III: "Dylarama") <b>presentations; position papers due</b> <i>The Things They Carried</i> (through "Friends") <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> )
<b>Week 7:</b>	M 1 Oct W 3 Oct	<i>The Things They Carried</i> (through "Style") <i>The Things They Carried</i> (finish the book) <b>presentations; position papers due</b>

## Race and Gender

<b>Week 8:</b>	M 8 Oct	<i>Song of Solomon</i> (Chapters 1-3) <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>White Noise</i> )
	W 10 Oct	<i>Song of Solomon</i> (Chapters 4-9) "The People Could Fly" (web)
<b>Week 9:</b>	M 15 Oct	<i>Song of Solomon</i> (Chapters 10-15) <b>presentations; position papers due</b>
	W 17 Oct	<b>Mid-Term Exam</b>
<b>Week 10:</b>	M 22 Oct	<i>Tracks</i> (Chapters 1-3) "Who Owns the Land" (web) <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>The Things They Carried</i> )
	W 24 Oct	<i>Tracks</i> (Chapters 4-6)
<b>Week 11:</b>	M 29 Oct	<i>Tracks</i> (Chapters 7-9) <b>presentations; position papers due</b> <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>Song of Solomon</i> )
	W 31 Oct	<i>A Thousand Acres</i> (Books I and II)
<b>Week 12:</b>	M 5 Nov	<b>Fall Break—No classes</b>
	W 7 Nov	<i>A Thousand Acres</i> (Book III)
<b>Week 13:</b>	M 12 Nov	<i>A Thousand Acres</i> (finish book) <b>presentations; position papers due</b> <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>Tracks</i> )

## Graphic Memoir

	W 14 Nov	<i>Maus I</i> and <i>Maus II</i>
<b>Week 14:</b>	M 19 Nov	<b>No Class—I'll be out of town</b>
	W 21 Nov	<b>Thanksgiving</b>
<b>Week 15:</b>	M 26 Nov	Continue <i>Maus</i> <b>presentations; position papers due</b> <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>A Thousand Acres</i> )
	W 28 Nov	<i>Fun Home</i> <b>Presentations; position papers due</b>
<b>Week 16:</b>	M 3 Dec	Class Wrap-Up; Discuss/Review for final exam <b>Draft Research Papers E-Mailed by Midnight</b> ( <i>Maus</i> and <i>Fun Home</i> )

**Final Research Papers Due: Friday, Dec. 7 (e-mailed to me by midnight)**

**Final Exam: Wednesday, Dec. 12, 12-3**