ENG 2360: Correspondence
Course Sample
Welcome to

ENG 2360
American Literature since 1865

New to the course? Click the Course Content link at left and proceed through the Get Started materials.

Returning to the course? Click the Course Content link and resume where you left off.

This course has recently been upgraded to improve assignment submission efficiency. Although the course navigation menu has been altered and content pages may appear slightly different, all materials and course requirements are the same.

Additionally, please note that, effective immediately, assignments will no longer be accepted via email. Instead, please submit your assignments via the Assignments tool in the left-hand navigation menu.
Course Content

Get Started

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Lesson 1 - Poetry I

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- Discussion: Reading and Analyzing Poetry
- Assignment 1

Lesson 2 - Poetry II

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Lesson 3 - Poetry III

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When I ask my students in class how many people identify a poem, almost all agree that most people identify a poem as something that rhymes, has stanzas, and has a definite rhythm. While some poems do have these traits, most—especially modern poems—do not; therefore, such a definition is not altogether satisfying. So how does one identify poetry? Sometimes I jokingly tell my classes that poetry is anything which is not prose, or maybe it’s just something that is written by a poet. But those definitions beg the issue.

Perhaps a better way to identify poetry is to say that it is the most compressed form of literature; the poet chooses very carefully each word he or she uses so that exactly the right meaning and emotion are evoked. The poet relies more than any other writer on connotation and the sound of words to create the mood and emotion and to create pictures in the mind of the reader. That’s why poets use so much imagery in their works—to help create those images (pictures) in the reader’s mind.

Because poems are vastly different, no single list of characteristics fits all poems. Some have rhyme (and we analyze their rhyme schemes), some have rhythm and meter, some use sound in special ways, and some use devices that you’ve probably studied before: similes, metaphors, personification, allusion, and symbolism (if you are unclear on any of these terms, you may want to use a search engine to find and visit one of the many Internet sites that define and discuss them). No matter what poetry you read, however, always be aware of how the poet uses the language—making every word count so that each word is packed full of meaning and emotion.

Be aware that all writers—but perhaps poets more than others—use a kind of symbolism that’s often called universal or archetypal symbolism. Universal symbols are symbols that have a widely accepted meaning that both writers and their readers are usually familiar with, though sometimes at a more instinctive than conscious level. Colors, for instance, almost always have universal symbolic meanings attached to them—green is associated with life, fertility, growth; red is associated with passion, anger, violence; white is associated with purity, spirituality, truth; and so forth. Writers use this kind of symbolism as a sort of shorthand. By using universal symbols, writers can suggest to their readers the meanings associated with them without having to actually list or explain those meanings (notice as you read Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself” how he often uses the color green in places where he wants to suggest the importance of fertility or growth). Be aware, though, that universal symbolism is sometimes different within different cultures—in many eastern cultures, for instance, white is not primarily associated with purity, but rather with death.

The best way to read a poem is to read it first for general impression. Ask yourself, “What does the poem convey? What is the overall meaning? What mental pictures does this poem paint?” After you can answer those three questions, then you can examine ways in which the poet achieves his or her effect.

**Three Questions To Ask Yourself When Reading a Poem**

Be aware that though a teacher can guide your reading because the teacher is aware of how literature is often read and has read the work of scholars who have studied the work, a teacher cannot tell you exactly what a poem or any other work of literature means or intends. There is no “one true meaning” where literature is concerned, because every reader brings different experiences, expectations, and ways of seeing the world to the poem. The best we can do is help you see reasonable and useful ways of approaching the poem; in the end, the final meaning is up to you.

Your textbook includes biographical and historical information preceding the poems for most of the poets assigned, and reading these short informational blurbs can help you understand a little more about the context in which the poems were written.

For these lessons, I suggest that you read each poem, ask yourself the three questions above, and then return to the lesson for the rest of the guided study.

**Note**: Be warned, some of the ideas, words, and images used by some of the writers you will be studying are of the sort that some readers might find offensive. Some writers use curse words for authenticity or write about sexual subjects, and some writers assert beliefs that you as a reader might find objectionable. Keep in mind that in studying literature, we are studying the artistry of the writer, and while the ideas a writer propounds are important to the work, it doesn’t mean we have to agree with them or even find them particularly pleasant to contemplate.
Before completing this first assignment, please review the guidelines for submitting assignments in the syllabus. **Also, please recall that you may submit no more than two assignments per week for this course.**

Read each part below and answer the corresponding questions. Compile your answers to each part in a single .doc, .docx, or .rtf document. Be sure to number your answers.

- Part 1: Walt Whitman
- Part 2: Emily Dickinson
- Part 3: Robert Frost

After you have completed all three parts of the assignment, click the link below and follow the instructions to submit.