

ENGLISH 4342: THE AMERICAN NOVEL SINCE 1900

University of Memphis, Spring 2003
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 11:30-12:25
Patterson 307
Dr. L. A. Duck

lduck@memphis.edu

Patterson 433

Office Phone: (901) 678-3400

Office Hourse: Mondays/Wednesdays 12:30-2:00 and by [appointment](#)

DESCRIPTION:

We will examine novels from this century that centrally concern the process of maturation. Topics for investigation include:

- The formal devices that authors use to represent childhood and adolescent perceptions and perspectives
- How children and teens are positioned in relation to particular adults (parents, teachers, neighbors) and in relation to concepts of "adulthood"
- Factors imagined to shape childhood and teen psychology and identity
- Variation in understandings of childhood, adolescence, and family life, particularly in how these are positioned in relation to other aspects of culture

GRADING AND POLICIES:

Your final grade will consist of a weighted average:

- 40% research paper (10-12 pages)
- 20% group presentation and individual report
- 20% web postings
- 20% in-class participation

Attendance and active participation are mandatory. If you miss six or more classes, you will fail the course. More than three unexcused absences will lower your grade.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated, in essays or web postings. You can find further information regarding plagiarism and penalties at <http://www.people.memphis.edu/~lduck/plagiarism.htm>.

While in class, you are expected to pay attention to class discussion; you are not allowed to engage in private conversation or other behaviors that would disrupt class activities.

You are expected to be civil to others, both in the classroom, and on the discussion board. Discussion is important to this course, and our reading presents some unsettling images as well as controversial topics. You are encouraged to express your concerns and opinions, but please be aware that this right is shared by other members of the class. We will be able to work through

the more upsetting elements of this literature most effectively by communicating both candidly and in a manner that demonstrates respect for the classroom community.

PAPERS:

- You will develop your own topics for the final paper. You are highly encouraged to discuss these topics with me, and are **required** to submit a prospectus by **April 11**. The prospectus need not posit a thesis, but should articulate the line of investigation that you plan to pursue, and must cite sources that you plan to consult.
- Papers may be related to the topic of your group presentation, but they may not be the result of group work! Research papers should situate a nuanced reading of the novel in relation to a larger debate in literary criticism or in another field.
- Papers are due **May 5**. More information will be forthcoming on the course website.

PRESENTATIONS:

- You will also develop your own topics for the group presentation, in consultation with me. We will divide into six groups (one per novel). You may schedule your presentation for any date on which we are scheduled to discuss the novel.
- Presentations must involve research. Multimedia presentations are encouraged.
- Presentations should last approximately 15 minutes.
- Presentations, like research papers, should situate the novel in relation to a larger debate in literary criticism or in another field; they need not produce readings of the novel. Be creative and informative, and develop a topic that you find interesting. Options for topics abound, but you might think about topics **like** these (note how these rather general accounts of issues are joined to the title with an "and": this gives you the opportunity to think about diverse kinds of sources, and narrow the topic of your presentation as you go):
 - Urban Landscapes and *The House on Mango Street*
 - Adolescent Rebellion in *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Rebel without a Cause*
 - Theories of Family Dynamics and *The Sound and the Fury*
 - *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and the "Social Protest" Novel
 - Adolescence and Tradition in *Tracks*
 - Theories of Teen Sexuality and [Any of These Novels].
- You will each write a 2-3 page narrative documenting and explaining your participation in the group presentation. This may, to a great extent, consist of notes from your research and from your development of the presentation (which may be included as "appendices"), but it should also provide an overview of the topic's relevance to the class and how decisions concerning how to research and format the presentation were made.
- Think about which novel you want to work on, and begin planning quickly: I suspect that several of you will like *House of Mango Street* best of all these novels, and, if you're going to present on that one, you need to get to work. (After that, think how blissfully your semester will proceed!)

POSTINGS:

Web postings must be made while we are discussing the novel (i.e., during the period allotted to it on the syllabus); initial postings made after we have moved on will not be credited.

You are required to submit at least 150 words to the discussion board on our secured website for each novel. These postings are intended to serve three purposes:

1. to stimulate your thinking about each novel, and thereby to facilitate class discussions, as well as generate ideas for your research paper;
2. to provide me information concerning aspects of your responses to the novels that might not emerge in class; and
3. to demonstrate that you have read the assigned texts. (Note that there are no quizzes or exams in this class.)

You are also required to submit one 150 word introductory posting, to stimulate your thinking about our topic. See end of syllabus.

For each text, I will post very brief study guide, which will help you to situate the novels in literary and cultural history, and also help you to come up with posting topics. You are, of course, encouraged to create your own topic, articulating the aspect of the novel that is most compelling to you as a reader. You may also distribute your "150 words" as you like: as an autonomous posting beginning a thread, or as a response to a classmate, or both. ("150" is, of course, a minimum; feel free to write more. Don't get carried away, though; if you end up posting a page-worth or more for each novel, your classmates may feel pressured to follow your lead, or at least to read all you've written, and, in such cases, resentment occasionally ensues.)

When engaged in this process, don't forget that there are three specified purposes for this activity: it is not a random task, and your responses will be evaluated according to the pedagogic goals above. Postings that demonstrate familiarity with the overarching themes of the novel, independent thought, and reflection on the themes of the course will be rated more highly than will postings that produce relatively empty verbiage related to a statement occurring on, say, page 10 of the novel. (You are, of course, welcome to talk about introductory scenes: just consider them in relation to larger issues posed by the novel.)

To access the course website, go to <http://webct.memphis.edu> and log in, using your UUID and ph password—the same ID and password you would use to access e-mail on the university's system. If you don't know your UUID or ph password, contact the Helpdesk at 678-8888 or go to Admin 124.

SCHEDULE:

All readings should be available at the University Bookstore. If not (this class has exceeded its projected size), many are available at local bookstores, and all are readily available through internet-based booksellers. No specific edition is required. Chapter assignments will be

announced as we go. For 1/27, read through p. 57 ("Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark") of *The House on Mango Street*.

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| 1/22-24 | Introduction (web) |
| 1/27-2/3 | Sandra Cisneros, <i>House on Mango Street</i> |
| 2/5-2/12 | J.D. Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> |
| 2/14-3/7 | William Faulkner, <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> |
| 3/10-3/14 | Spring Break |
| 3/17-3/28 | James Baldwin, <i>Go Tell It on the Mountain</i> |
| 3/31-4/11 | Maxine Hong Kingston, <i>The Woman Warrior</i> |
| 4/14-4/25 | Louise Erdrich, <i>Tracks</i> |
| 4/28-4/30 | Conferences on final papers |
| 5/5 | FINAL PAPERS DUE 5 P.M.! |

INTRODUCTORY ASSIGNMENT:

Log on to the course website (see above, under "postings") and, using the "Discussions" tool (available from the course homepage), write an entry for the introductions board. Your topic is adolescence: what distinguishes it as a stage of life? Briefly describe one such distinguishing aspect. You may use personal experience or observation if you choose. This assignment is due Jan. 29, but those of you who complete it before Jan. 27 will receive extra credit.