

**Modern American Authors:
The Western & the West**

**ENLT 2514
Pavilion VIII 108
TR 12:30PM – 1:45PM**

**Ethan Reed
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Office hours: TBD**

Key dates & policies

Writing assignments

Writing Project 1: 5-6 pages, due Friday February 24th.
Writing Project 2: 6-8 pages, due Wednesday April 5th.
Writing Project 3: 6-8 pages, due Sunday May 7th. Includes research (cite 3 academic sources).
Rewrite of Writing Project 1 or 2 + self-assessment letter: due Sunday May 7th.
Late policy: For every 24 hours past due date, lose 1/3 of a letter grade on writing project.
Weekly Collab posts: Allowed to make up two missed posts during the semester.

Attendance

Attendance for this course is mandatory. Students are permitted two unexcused absences without penalty. Each absence beyond these two results in a 1/3 letter grade reduction of final grade (NOT participation grade). If more than four absences I ask that you withdraw or will give you a failing grade for the semester.

Final Exam

Saturday, May 6, 2:00PM—5:00PM.

Evaluation

Writing Portfolio: 60%
Final Exam: 20%
Participation: 20%

Course Description

Posses, shootouts, and the frontier—loners, violence, and the law. Or is it family, legacy, and society—storytellers, safety, and a warm hearth? What is a western? What is the West, and why do we keep writing stories about it? This course explores where myth and reality meet on the horizon of the American West, the staying power of the stories that have been imagined out of it, and how modern writers adapt, challenge, and disrupt the legacies of both. Themes include: the frontier, violence, gender, indigeneity, legacies of colonialism, legacies of slavery, and the present-day consequences of American colonial expansion.

In addition to introducing students to modern and contemporary American authors, this course will introduce students to the field of literary study as a discipline. This means we will consider perspectives from the professional communities that study these cultural objects, as well as the methodological tools they use to do so. Readings drawn from scholarly sources are not “experts” you will be asked to agree with and emulate, but rather resources to help us think about the problems we will address in this course *as well* as how to write about them. If you feel like being critical of something I have assigned, I encourage you to do so.

This is also a course that emphasizes academic writing. It is intended to develop students' abilities to write about cultural formations like novels, poems, plays, and films, but it aims also to develop their academic writing skills more generally. While different departments and disciplines require students to write in different ways, writers in all fields must make critical inquiries into what they study. They research, observe, question, argue, revise and present – and writing is crucial to every step of this process. Persuasive, articulate, and vivid writing is a technical skill for life. In this course we will learn to better articulate and justify arguments in our own writing, as well as how gainfully revise these arguments after drafting them. We will also learn to examine and respond to the writing of others. By the end of this course, each student will have produced at least 20 pages of writing.

Course Requirements

Writing projects: You will be required to write three writing projects over the course of the term. The first will be 5-6 pages in length, while the second and third will be 6-8 pages in length. The third writing project will also require a small amount of research, in the form of three scholarly citations. All papers must have 1-inch margins, be 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced, and include a works cited page.

Revision: Revision is an integral step in the writing process. Students will choose to workshop, revise, and resubmit one of the first two writing projects. This rewrite must be submitted with a self-assessment letter detailing the areas in which your writing has developed and where it needs to develop further with regards to the practices we will work on in class. Revision does not mean turning a draft into a final product. It means re-writing and re-structuring significant portions of what is already a complete first version of a piece of writing: fixing a comma splice and getting rid of some passive voice is not enough. Those are corrections to be made before turning any assignments in. These revisions should incorporate in-class workshops as well as my own comments.

Workshops: On certain days we will workshop each other's writing in class. In these workshops you will be expected to give ample feedback to the work or your classmates. More information will be given as to the kind of feedback expected as the first workshop approaches.

Final Exam: This course will have a final exam. More information will be given later in the semester as to the details of the exam itself.

Final Portfolio: At the end of the semester, your three writing projects as well as your rewrite of Writing Projects 1 or 2 will constitute a final portfolio. See the "Evaluations" section to understand how your final portfolio will bear on your final grade.

Participating in a Seminar: This class will be a relatively small seminar. Unlike a lecture, it allows me to give close attention to your work and that of your classmates. However, unlike a lecture, it also means you are required to be not only present in class, but also prepared with readings and assignments. You are required to participate. I am not a lecturer. I will be guiding discussion. This means that what we gain from class every day will be greatly informed by the ideas that you and your classmates bring to discussion.

Facilitating Discussions: Students will be required to co-lead a discussion throughout the semester. These facilitations are an opportunity for students to become more familiar with what goes into a college-level discussion, and how the discussion of cultural objects operates in a seminar context with a cohort of their peers. I will pass around a sign-up sheet in the first few days of class detailing this.

Assignments:

Readings: This is a writing as well as a reading course, so reading has been kept thin but protein-rich. There will usually be no more than ~80 pages of reading per class in this course. However, these readings will be the basis for all writing assignments and in-class discussions. If the readings for a week are on Collab, please print them out beforehand and bring them to class.

Written Assignments: Before every class you are required to submit a response to the assigned reading for the day. I will detail the nature of these assignments from class to class throughout the semester. Assignments must be submitted by 9AM the morning of class. They are designed to get us thinking about the assigned materials, formal writing skills, as well as topics about which you will write your papers. These responses count towards your participation grade as they are necessary for the work we will do in class.

Film Viewings: We will watch three films throughout the term. The films will be on reserve at Clemons Library. You are required to watch them in their entirety, and there will be a short quiz at the beginning of the class in which we discuss the film (see schedule). We will schedule a class viewing for each film. If you cannot make this viewing, you will be required to view these films on your own time outside of class.

Course Policies

Attendance: All students are allowed two unexcused absences for this class. For every class a student misses after the first two without documented excuse, their final letter grade (NOT their participation grade) will be reduced by one third (from “A” to “A-” for example). If a student misses more than four classes without documented excuse (that is more than two weeks’ worth of class), I will request that they drop the course or will give them a failing grade for the semester.

Late Work: All essays are due by midnight of the assigned day. For every 24 hours that a paper is late, it is docked a third of a letter grade. Under exceptional circumstances extensions can be given, but they must be requested 24 hours in advance. All written responses to readings must be submitted by 9AM the day of class. Throughout the term, you will have the opportunity to turn in two smaller writing assignments (exercises, forum posts and the like) without penalty.

Tardiness: If you are more than 15 minutes late to class it will count as one half of an absence. This means that if you are late twice, and have already used both unexcused absences, your final letter grade (NOT your participation grade) will be reduced by one third of a letter. If you are late enough that you miss more than half of the class, it will count as an absence.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: This is a class about your writing, and all writing you submit should be yours. If you quote or paraphrase someone else's writing they must be cited accordingly. Plagiarism is a serious offence – it will result in a failing grade for the assignment, potentially for the course, and perhaps even dismissal from the university. If you are unsure of how to cite sources, or have any questions regarding what is meant by academic integrity, please ask me – I'm here to help. If you are unsure what counts as plagiarism, or would like a link to the University's policies on it, I direct you to these pages:
<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/what-is-academic-fraud-2/> and
<http://www.virginia.edu/honor/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/PlagiarismSupplement2011.pdf>

Laptops: I find laptops to be un conducive to a seminar setting, so I ask that you do not use them in class. This means that you should print out the assigned readings everyday so that you can refer to them during class. Note-taking is always a good idea and a skill that requires practice, but I ask that you do so with pen and paper in this class. If you have your laptop out I will ask you to put it away.

Phones: If you are using your phone in class, I will not ask that you put it away but will reduce your participation grade.

Evaluation

Writing Portfolio: 60%

Final Exam: 20%

Participation: 20%

To receive an A in this course, a student will need to have done three things: produced college-level writing consistently, demonstrably improved their writing as well as their ability to analyze literary texts, and participated in making our class a collegial learning space. At the end of the course, in addition to your final exam, I will review your writing portfolio as well as smaller writing assignments and notes on classroom participation to determine your grade according to the above three criteria. During office hour meetings halfway through the semester, I can provide a provisional grade to give you a sense of where you stand based on your work so far.

Writing Center

The Writing Center is a great resource and I strongly suggest you use it. Located at 314 Bryan Hall, it offers assistance in essay writing by trained graduate students, free of cost. Check their website out to learn more and sign up for an appointment:
<http://www.engl.virginia.edu/undergraduate/writing/center>.

Thanks and Acknowledgments

I want to take a moment to thank and acknowledge the many people who have helped me, in various ways, to produce this syllabus: Professor Jim Seitz (UVa), Adriana Streifer (UVa), Brandon Walsh (UVa), Annie Swafford (SUNY New Paltz), Eva Latterner (UVa). DeVan Ard (UVa), and my colleagues in 14F ENPG 8800.

Required Texts

Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993)
E.L. Doctorow, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960)
Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (2012)
Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (1985)
Michael Ondaatje, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970)
Simon Ortiz, *from Sand Creek* (1981)
Robert Schenkkan, *The Kentucky Cycle* (1998)
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

SCHEDULE

Thurs, Jan 19 – Introduction

Selections from: J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur, “What is an American?” in
Letters from an American Farmer (1782)

Selections from: Fredrick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in
American History” (1893)

Tues, Jan 24 – E.L. Doctorow, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960)

Thurs, Jan 26 – Doctorow, *Welcome to Hard Times*

Tues, Jan 31– Doctorow, *Welcome to Hard Times*

Linda Hutcheon, “Historiographic Metafiction: ‘The Pastime of the Past Time’”
in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988)

Thurs, Feb 2 – Robert Schenkkan, *The Kentucky Cycle* (1998)

Tues, Feb 7 – Schenkkan, *The Kentucky Cycle*

Thurs, Feb 9 – John Ford, *The Searchers*, (1956)

Robert B. Pippin, “What Is a Western? Politics and Self-Knowledge in John
Ford’s *The Searchers*” (2009)

Roger Ebert review: <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-searchers-1956>

Tues, Feb 14 – Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (2012)

Thurs, Feb 16 – Erdrich, *The Round House*

Send me: a few potential topics for your upcoming writing project

Tues, Feb 21 – Erdrich, *The Round House*

Thurs, Feb 23 – Writing Project 1 workshop

DUE Friday, February 24th: **Writing Project 1**

Tues, Feb 28 – Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* (1985)

Thurs, March 2 – McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

Tues, March 7 – Spring recess—no class

Thurs, March 9 – Spring recess—no class

Tues, March 14 – McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

Thurs, March 16 – Michael Ondaatje, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970)

Tues, March 21 – Ondaatje, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*

Kathleen I. Bethell, “Reading Billy: Memory, Time, and Subjectivity in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*”

Send me: a few potential topics for your upcoming writing project

Thurs, March 23 – Simon Ortiz, *from Sand Creek* (1981)

Tues, March 28 – Ortiz, *from Sand Creek*

Thurs, March 30 – Paul Thomas Anderson, *There Will Be Blood* (2007)

Roger Ebert review, <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/there-will-be-blood-2008>

Christopher Sharrett, “American Sundown: *No Country for Old Men*, *There Will Be Blood*, and the Question of the Twilight Western” (2010)

Tues, April 4 – Writing Project 2 workshop

DUE, Wednesday April 5th: **Writing Project 2**

Thurs, April 6 – Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

Tues, April 11 – Silko, *Ceremony*

Thurs, April 13 – Silko, *Ceremony*

Patrick Wolfe, “Structure and Event: Settler Colonialism, Time, and the Question of Genocide” in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (2008)

Tues, April 18 – Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993)

Thurs, April 20 – Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Tues, April 25 – Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*

Alexie, selected poems

Thurs, April 27 – TBD

Tues, May 2– Chris Eyre, *Smoke Signals* (1998)
Richard Gilmore, “Regeneration through Stories and Song: The View from the Other Side of the West in *Smoke Signals*” (2010)

Thurs, May 4 – Writing Project 3 workshop

DUE, Sunday May 7th: **Writing Project 3 & revision of Writing Projects 1 OR 2**

Further Reading/Viewing

Literature:

Sherman Alexie, *Reservation Blues* (1995)
Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves* (2008)
Joy Harjo, *She Had Some Horses* (1983)
Blake Hausman, *Riding the Trail of Tears* (2011)
Linda Hogan, *Mean Spirit* (1990)
LeAnne Howe, *Shell Shaker* (2001)
Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006)
Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men* (2005)
Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (2008)
Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (1997)
Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969)
James Welch, *Fools Crow* (1986)

Film:

Avatar, James Cameron (2009)
True Grit, Ethan Coen and Joel Coen (2010)
Dances With Wolves, Kevin Costner (1990)
Reel Injun, Neil Diamond, Catherine Bainbridge, Jeremiah Hayes (2010)
Dirty Harry, Clint Eastwood (1983)
The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, John Ford (1962)
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, George Roy Hill (1969)
The Seven Samurai, Akira Kurosawa (1954)
A Fistful of Dollars, Sergio Leone (1964)
For a Few Dollars More, Sergio Leone (1965)
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, Sergio Leone (1967)
Once Upon a Time in the West, Sergio Leone (1969)
The Wild Bunch, Sam Peckinpah (1969)
High Noon, Fred Zinnemann (1952)

Television:

Westworld (2016-present)
Longmire (2012- present)
Hell on Wheels (2011- present)
Justified (2010- present)
Deadwood (2004-2006)
Firefly (2002-2003)
Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman (1993-1998)

Little House on the Prarie (1974-1983)
Bonanza (1959-1973)
Gunsmoke (1955-1975)
The Lone Ranger (1949-1957)

Scholarship:

John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (1999)
Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (1998)
Gerald Graff, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (2006)
Shari Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (2001)
Jennifer L. McMahon et al, eds, *The Philosophy of the Western* (2010)
Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800* (1973); *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of Frontier in the Age of Industrialization* (1985); *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992).
Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992)