

**English 384**  
**Literature of the American West**  
**Fall 2008**

**Section 001**  
**MWF 12:40-1:30**  
**LA 105**

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**Description**

The purpose of English 384 is to examine the literature of the “American West,” but one of the central questions we will tackle this semester is what constitutes “the West.” What is the West? Where is it? Who owns it? Why has it been identified as such a distinct region? We will investigate such questions by studying a variety of literatures spanning several centuries, covering several genres, and representing many cultural and ethnic backgrounds; our approach to these texts will be to read them as objects of artistic expression in addition to looking at the ways they reflect the cultural and historical issues of their time and region. By the end of the semester, we should all have a deeper understanding of the how the American West both influences and is influenced by its literature. However, students should not expect to leave this class with a single, unified definition of “western American literature”—instead, a central goal will be to explore the richness, complexity, and contested nature of this literature.

**Objectives:**

- Gain appreciation for and understanding of literature written in and/or of the American West
- Investigate historical, social, and cultural contexts of western American literature
- Understand key issues and debates in western American literary criticism
- Develop and refine skills in written and oral communication, literary analysis, argument, and research

**Required Texts**

- Abbey, Edward. *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990. ISBN: 9780671695880
- Brown, Charles Brockden. *Edgar Huntly: Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*. New York: Penguin, 1988. ISBN: 0140390626
- Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!* Norton Critical Ed. New York: Norton, 2007. ISBN: 9780393924664
- McCarthy, Cormac. *No Country for Old Men*. New York: Random, 2006. ISBN: 9780375706677
- Rowlandson, Mary. *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. Ed. Neal Salisbury. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1997. ISBN: 9780312111519
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin, 1986. ISBN: 9780140086836
- Snyder, Gary. *Turtle Island*. New York: New Directions, 1974. ISBN: 9780811205467

- Wister, Owen. *The Virginian*. Oxford World Classics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. ISBN: 9780192832269

### Course Policies

- **Attendance and Participation:** At Boise State University attendance is mandatory. While I will lecture occasionally, class time will be devoted primarily to discussions about the readings for each day. It is essential that you come to class prepared, having read the materials and ready to discuss what strikes you as interesting and important about them. *The success of this class depends largely on your preparation and participation.* Therefore, you should not be late and should not miss class. More than three absences will hurt your course grade. *Missing nine (9) or more classes will result in failure of the course.* Per Boise State attendance policy, it is the student's responsibility to find out and make up what was missed while absent, regardless of the reason for the absence.
- **Late Policy:** Assignments are due by the dates and times given. Late assignments will drop one letter grade per day late unless arrangements have been made with me *prior* to the deadline. I do not accept electronic submission of assignments unless prior approval is given.
- **Class Conduct:** All students are expected to know and adhere to the Boise State University Student Code of Conduct, including the policy on Academic Dishonesty. The Student Code of Conduct can be accessed online at <http://www.boisestate.edu/osrr/>. Please be courteous and turn off all cell phones/pagers/electronic devices while in class.

### Assignments & Grades

- **Participation & Attendance:** 20% The success of this class depends upon the participation of all students. I will do my part to prepare for class each day; because so much of the class will be devoted to discussion, students also need to show up on time, having read the appropriate assignments and ready to talk about the topics at hand. Any informal assignments in or out of class are also included in this portion of the grade. See the attendance policy above.
- **Short Analyses:** 20% Students will write two short analytical papers, 2-3 pp (and 10% of the course grade) each. Topics will be provided in advance of each deadline.
- **Biographical Sketch:** 10% Students will write a short (2-3 pp) biographical sketch of a western author of their choosing (in consultation with me).
- **Annotated Bibliography:** 10% Students will compile an annotated bibliography of scholarly secondary sources about a western literary text of their choice (in consultation with me).
- **Final Paper:** 25% The final paper will be a research-based critical analysis of a western literary text (or texts). Length: 5-8 pp. The final draft is due on December 10.
- **Final Exam:** 15% Monday, December 15, 1:00-3:00.

Further details about each assignment will be provided throughout the semester.

**Class Schedule**  
(subject to change)

Aug 25	Intro: Frontiers, borders, and the literary West
Aug 27	Early Frontiers: Roanoke and John Smith (online/handouts)
Aug 29	Rowlandson, <i>Sovereignty</i> 1-60 (“Part One”)
Sept 1	No Class – Labor Day
Sept 3	Rowlandson, <i>Sovereignty</i> 63-111
Sept 5	Rowlandson, continued
Sept 8	Crèvecoeur (reserve)
Sept 10	The Early National West: Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> 1-54
Sept 12	Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> 55-94 <b>Short Analysis #1 due</b>
Sept 15	Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> 95-142
Sept 17	Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> 143-194
Sept 19	Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> 195-241 <b>Biographical Sketch due</b>
Sept 22	Brown, <i>Edgar Huntly</i> 242-281
Sept 24	Closing of the Frontier: the Turner Thesis (handout)
Sept 26	Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> 1-62
Sept 29	Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> 63-112
Oct 1	Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> [WLA]
Oct 3	Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> [WLA]
Oct 6	Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> 112-275
Oct 8	Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> 275-327
Oct 10	Cather, <i>O Pioneers!</i> 9-36 <b>Annotated Bibliography due</b>
Oct 13	Cather, <i>O Pioneers!</i> 37-78
Oct 15	Cather, <i>O Pioneers!</i> 79-111
Oct 17	Cather, <i>O Pioneers!</i> 112-125
Oct 20	The Contemporary West: Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> “Author’s Intro” and 1-38
Oct 22	Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> 39-94
Oct 24	Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> 95-136 <b>Short Analysis #2 due</b>
Oct 27	Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> 137-195
Oct 29	Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> 196-231
Oct 31	Abbey, <i>Desert Solitaire</i> 232-269

Nov 3	Snyder, <i>Turtle Island</i> 1-38
Nov 5	Snyder, <i>Turtle Island</i> 39-76
Nov 7	Snyder, <i>Turtle Island</i> 77-114
Nov 10	
Nov 12	Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> 1-54
Nov 14	Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> 54-106
Nov 17	Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> 107-159
Nov 19	Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> 159-213
Nov 21	Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> 214-262
Nov 24	No Class – Thanksgiving
Nov 26	No Class – Thanksgiving
Nov 28	No Class – Thanksgiving
Dec 1	McCarthy, <i>No Country for Old Men</i> 1-89
Dec 3	McCarthy, <i>No Country for Old Men</i> 90-143
Dec 5	McCarthy, <i>No Country for Old Men</i> 143-215
Dec 8	McCarthy, <i>No Country for Old Men</i> 216-309
Dec 10	<b>Final Paper due</b>
Dec 12	Conclusions, Final exam study

**Final Exam:** Monday, December 15, 1:00-3:00.