

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE  
ENGLISH 301: AMERICAN LITERATURE TO 1860

READINGS FOR THE COURSE  
(books available in the RIC campus bookstore)

*Norton Anthology of American Literature*  
*Volumes A & B. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Two 5-7 page essays: 60%  
Mid-Term: 20%  
Participation and Reading Quizzes: 25%

Please come to class on time, and please come to class prepared. Ask questions, offer insights, participate in discussion. Informal WebCT postings are a part of your class participation. Please check into the WebCT site at least once a week and respond to the prompts and/or posts. Participation includes attendance and I cannot stress enough how important regular attendance is. Make sure to attend every class and demonstrate your engagement with the reading. We meet once a week, so you may miss one week of class, no questions asked. Two absences—two weeks of missed class—begins to affect your grade negatively, and more than two—three weeks of missed class or more—will significantly impact your final grade for the worse and may result in no-credit for the course. Please do your best to be on time. Please turn off digital equipment unless otherwise cleared with me.

American Literature Beginnings to 1860

When the first European settlers arrived in North America other Europeans had already been trading along the east coast for nearly one hundred years. Europeans traded with Native American tribes from the Caribbean to Canada. Along the way European traders made money because the Indians would exchange simple items like axes, beads, and other European crafted implements for furs. *Furs*—especially beaver furs—were in high demand in Europe and in England. Lumber too was in especially high demand at the beginning of the seventeenth-century in England, for *lumber* was quickly disappearing from Britain due to, among other things, the production of the vaunted English navy, a navy that would, finally, rule the oceans for two centuries. To keep the military build-up going England needed raw-material and the “new” world promised what seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of resources, if only they could be extracted.

Traders made money during the sixteenth-century, but in the long run merchants realized the need for established settlements. The land was too rich. The natives were seemingly passive. Why pay for what you could steal? It was clear to the European of the day that the “savages” of North America figured no where in God’s Law Book and so they were, as it were, “fair game.” They could either be “civilized” which meant “Christianized” or they could be wiped out. At best the aboriginal inhabitants of North America were a curiosity—and so they were occasionally kidnapped and brought to England (Squanto is an example. More on Squanto in class) At worst the natives were a living manifestation of demonic forces set against “God’s people.” In either case, and with few exceptions, the early settlers understood themselves to be involved in THE cosmic drama of the universe. It was *they* who had God’s word and were attempting to follow His plan.

For example, when Plague wiped out 90% of the Wampanaug tribe only four years before the first Puritan settlers arrived at Plymouth Rock, the Pilgrims saw it as a sign of God’s Providence. The empty huts and tilled fields—left idle by other Wampanaug out of respect and as a *memento mori*—the Puritans saw as “God’s gift.” When the settlers found buried corn, they saw it as “God’s gift.” To them, each was a sign that He was clearing the way for His people. Meanwhile, the Spanish, the French, the English and others, claimed territory from the tip of Florida to Virginia as their own, sometimes making treaties with Natives, sometimes trading or buying land, and sometimes simply taking what they wanted. All of this to make Winthrop’s “city on a hill” a reality.

When we read the documents left by the early settlers, especially New England Puritans, their journals, their jeremiads, and especially their poetry reveals to us a culture with a singular vision that gave the seventeenth-century colonist a way to make sense of the world, of their life in the world, and of the life after this world. Not all shared the Puritan vision, though, and not even its exponents practiced what they

preached all the time but even so, the Puritans of the seventeenth-century believed in a *story* that preached community yet led to radical discrimination, even to the point of understanding the death of an entire native people as a reason to praise God. Suffice to say that worshipping God—and living the Godly Life as a result—was a chief aim of the early New England settlers. To the south, however, the Virginia settlers—armed with Christian justifications—came first to make money. Ever since the two impulses—the religious and the economic—have been in an often tense, often contradictory relationship in American culture. The Puritans braved hardship so that they might make a community that would please the God they worshipped. That such noble aims could have such ignoble outcomes—genocide, slavery, religious intolerance, and so on—is a foundational irony in American literary history and one worth pausing over this semester, for to a great degree it forms a cornerstone upon which the American literary tradition built its house.

#### OUR CALENDAR

##### WEEK 1: BACKGROUNDS OF RELIGION, CONQUEST AND DISCOVERY

Mon: Introductions

Wed: From Old World to New World

Vol A. pgs 1-14 pgs 35-39. pgs 55-72.

##### WEEK 2. PURITANS, PILGRIMS AND PUTUXET

Mon: William Bradford pgs 104-137. View: *We Shall Remain*

Wed: Thomas Morton pgs 138-146. John Winthrop pgs 147-166. Roger Williams 173-186

##### WEEK 3: PURITAN POETRY.

Mon: Anne Bradstreet—“The Prologue.” “The Flesh and the Spirit.” “The Author to Her Book.” “Verses Upon the Burning of Our House.”

Wed: Michael Wigglesworth pgs 217-234.

##### WEEK 4: THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Mon: Ben Franklin—“The Way to Wealth” pgs 449-456. pgs 468-471.

Wed: Ben Franklin—*The Autobiography* pgs 472-518

##### WEEK 5: THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Mon: Ben Franklin—*The Autobiography* pgs 518-534

Wed: Ben Franklin—*The Autobiography* pgs 535-587

##### WEEK 6: SLAVERY IN AMERICA

Mon: Phillis Wheatley pgs 751 and following: “On Being Brought from Africa to America.” “Thoughts on the Works of Providence.” “To His Excellency General Washington.”

Wed: Thomas Jefferson, pgs 651-656.

##### WEEK 7: SLAVERY IN AMERICA

Mon: Frederick Douglass pgs 2060-2091.

Wed: Frederick Douglass pgs 2091-2129.

#### Spring Break

##### WEEK 8: TRANSCENDENTALISM

Mon: Read: pgs 1106-1110 and Emerson “The American Scholar” pgs 1138-1150.

##### **Paper One Due**

Wed: Emerson “Self-Reliance.” Pgs 1163-1179.

WEEK 9: TRANSCENDENTALISM

Mon: **Mid-Term Exam**

Wed: Thoreau "Resistance to Civil Government" pgs 11853-1871.

WEEK 10: HAWTHORNE

Mon: "*Young Goodman Brown*."

Wed: "*The Minister's Black Veil*"

WEEK 11: EDGAR ALLEN POE

Mon: 1528-1532, intro and "Sonnet—To Science" and "To Helen."

Wed: "The Cask of Amontillado" pgs 1612-1215.

WEEK 12: POETRY

Mon: Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life" pg 1497-98.

Wed: Walt Whitman 2190-2194. 2209-2254

WEEK 13: POETRY

Mon: Whitman, continued.

Wed: Whitman, continued

WEEK 14: POETRY

Mon: Emily Dickinson

Wed: Emily Dickinson

WEEK 15: HERMAN MELVILLE

Mon: "Bartleby the Scrivener." Pgs 2363-2388

Wed: conclusions

**Final Essay Due May 10<sup>th</sup>, noon.**