

# ENGL 6350: Studies in Native American Literature (Online Course)

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES:** This graduate online seminar will examine fiction, poetry, autobiography, and essays by American Indians writing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a primary focus on Renaissance and post-Renaissance writers (from the 1970s to the present). We will be reading a variety of texts by some of the best-known Native American writers, who come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Our studies will be interdisciplinary, including introductions to literary historical/theoretical approaches and controversies, as well as the varying cultural, historical, and political contexts from which these writers and their work emerge.

In spite of the differences among these writers, one important element their work shares is a deep respect for and reliance on centuries-old traditions of storytelling practices and oral narrative. Therefore, we will highlight this element of their work, exploring:

- The role of storytelling and orality in contemporary Native American literatures
- The role of language as creative force in Native American spoken and written literatures
- The literary techniques Native American writers use to translate oral narratives, storytelling modes, and oral consciousness into print
- The cultural and historical contexts in which oral and written texts are embedded
- The centrality of storytelling and oral narratives to individual and national identity and sovereignty

## Some Notes on Course Format:

While the brevity and intensity of the summer school format and the constraints of working exclusively online will limit our personal interactions to an extent, it is my intention to try to reproduce a seminar atmosphere as much as possible. Therefore, online discussion and individual input into the shape and direction the course takes will be very important. I hope that each of you will share with me the responsibility of keeping the course format as flexible and interactive as possible. If you have suggestions for making better use of Blackboard modalities to serve this purpose (or any other recommendations about course format), I hope you will feel free to email me privately or post them in our online discussions.

## Some Tips on Using Blackboard:

If you have used Bb before, you know that on occasion it can be very slow, and it goes down occasionally and is unavailable. I recommend that you download to your personal hard drive or to disc the course documents you will need to have readily available.

You will need to access Bb through the Internet Explorer browser (some Bb features are not compatible with Netscape) and to download the most recent version of Adobe Acrobat to read pdf attachments easily.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

D'Arcy McNickle, Wind From an Enemy Sky  
N. Scott Momaday, The Way to Rainy Mountain  
Leslie Marmon Silko, Storyteller  
Luci Tapahonso, Blue Horses Rush In  
Louise Erdrich, Tracks  
Sherman Alexie, The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven  
Barbara Duncan, Living Stories of the Cherokee

### RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

Joseph Gibaldi and Phyllis Franklin, MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.). New York: MLA, 2003.  
M. Annette Jaimes, Ed. The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance. Boston: South End Press, 1992.  
A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, American Indian Literatures: An Introduction, Bibliographic Review, and Selected Bibliography. New York: MLA, 1990.

### READING JOURNALS

You will keep a reading journal for making notes and recording your personal reflections on course materials. The journal is for your private use, but you will need to draw on your journal responses for discussion and papers. For maximum effectiveness, coordinate your journal with active reading of the texts by underlining key words and phrases, making notes in the margins, and noting page numbers of key quotes and references in your journal.

It is especially important when reading texts from a cultural context different from your own, to read *self-reflexively*, constantly examining your own reactions and questioning the expectations you bring to literature from your own cultural and academic training.

Please refer to the READING JOURNALS AND RESPONSE PAPERS document in this folder for some ideas and suggestions that may help you read more self-reflexively. You will want to begin from your personal reactions to develop more critical reflections for your Response Papers.

## PAPERS

You will be submitting to me several short papers on your reading for this course, including Close Readings and Poetry Critiques (1 ½ pages), and Response Papers (3 to 5 pages). Response papers will compare two or more primary texts, and will trace your personal responses to the books, their associated critical/contextual essays, and discussions. Response papers should be written in the first person (using the word "I"), but should be polished essays centered on a specific theme. A good reaction paper will balance personal opinion and reflection with critical analysis. Even if you are writing a thematic paper or critical comparison, I want to know what your reactions and opinions are and how they contributed to your understanding and analysis. See the handout READING JOURNALS AND RESPONSE PAPERS for suggestions; look at this sheet each time you complete a reading assignment to help stimulate responses for your reading journal. More specific directions for each paper will be given in the Course Calendar, and in separate posts to the Bb Announcements page.

All papers should be grounded in specifics of the texts. Be sure to use plenty of illustrations and quotes to support your ideas (always with page references). The CLOSE READING EXERCISE is useful for helping you think about how to develop ideas using specifics.

All papers should be typed on a computer, double spaced, with standard 1 inch margins, normal 12 point font, using **MLA format**. (If you do not have a copy of the **6th edition of the MLA Handbook**, or a Writing Handbook that includes information on MLA format, you should probably purchase one now.) We are not writing formal research papers for this class, but if you use outside references, you will need to format them properly. Also, the bibliographies that Discussion Leaders prepare for your colleagues should use MLA format. All written assignments should be **titled**, with your name and the date on the first page (no separate title pages please), and each page numbered. Submit all papers to me by email in my Digital Drop Box on Bb, in **Word or Rich Text Format only**.

Please proofread and edit your papers carefully. Sometimes students have the idea that shorter papers or papers that involve personal responses do not need to follow the rules of good writing. On the contrary!!! The shorter a paper is, the clearer, the more concise, the more carefully and tightly organized it needs to be! Every word should be thoughtfully chosen, every sentence polished to crystal perfection! I encourage you to exchange papers by email with your colleagues for proofing and editing assistance.

**Note:** Short papers are due before you enter Discussions; Response Papers are due by midnight of the day they are assigned, with the exception of the Final Paper, which must be turned in by 10 am on the day of the Final Exam (June 23).

## PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE DISCUSSION:

Online discussion will be a key component of this course. Informal Study Questions are provided for each primary text to guide your reading and raise issues for thought. You should consider these questions and take notes on them as you read. On specified days (see CALENDAR), you will be expected to have finished the assigned primary text and any assigned secondary reading (and in some cases, a short paper to turn in to me), and be ready to participate in discussion of several Discussion Questions that will be posted to the Discussion Board. I will post the Discussion Questions for McNickle, which may or may not be drawn from the posted list of Study Questions.

**Discussion Leaders:** After the first discussion (on McNickle), for each primary text thereafter, two or three students in the class will be assigned to be Discussion Leaders for each primary text. Discussion Leaders should develop four appropriate discussion questions for the assigned readings, using, if you choose, some questions you may have developed from my Study Questions, and *at least two questions* that you have developed from your own reading and investigation into the primary text. Good potential sources can be found in the Selected Print and Online Bibliographies in the Syllabus Folder. Recommended starting places are the ASAIL website, which indexes and includes full text versions of almost all articles published in the *Studies in American Indian Literatures* Journal, and the website [www.hanksville.org/storytellers](http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers), where you can find a wide variety of links to information about individual authors and tribes.

The Discussion Questions may impart additional (brief) information to the class as part of the basis for discussion; for example, you might refer to a disagreement among critics as to the interpretation of a text, and ask the class to discuss which they think is correct; or you might introduce a bit of cultural or historical information you have found to raise particular issues for discussion. You will also be responsible for guiding the discussion and any threads that may develop from it. After the discussion is completed, you will email to me and all members of the class a list of the outside sources, with a couple of sentences of annotation, that you used to prepare your questions (three sources). (These might be critical essays, histories, biographies, reviews, etc.)

**Discussion Participants:** Those not leading the discussion are expected to post at least two thoughtful responses to each question. These should be substantial contributions that engage the posts of your colleagues, not brief "I agree with . . ." statements, or random thoughts that don't contribute to the development of ideas. After each team's four questions have been addressed, the Instructor, Discussion Leaders, or other students are of course free to continue discussing whatever issues interest you. If you have a separate question you want to raise that did not come up, please email it to me, and I will post it.

**Discussion Format:** Discussion would be most effective if we could all be online together at the same time. On the days that Discussion is scheduled, I'm going to suggest that we all try to log on in the mornings, between 9 and 12. Please let me know if you think another time (say, evening hours) would work better. Of course, I am well aware that work schedules, Bb downtime, travel, and many other factors may make this impossible much of the time. Try to join the discussion at some point on the day it appears on the

Calendar, but on days when this is not possible, log on whenever you can. However, be sure to read and respond to the discussion before the next Discussion Questions are posted, because I will archive the previous discussion at that time.

GRADING:

Participation in online discussion	20%
Discussion Leadership/research/bibliog.	15%
Short Papers (Close Reading, Poetry Crit, etc.)	20%
Three Response Papers (3 pp)	25%
Final (Comprehensive) Resp. Paper (4-5 pp.)	20%

**COURSE CALENDAR**

DATE	READING/DISCUSSION	PAPERS DUE:
<b>Tues. May 18</b>	<p><b>Discussion: Introductions/ Questions</b> Class members introduce themselves and ask questions about the Course, choose books for which to be Discussion Leaders</p> <p><b>Reading: Begin General Introduction Unit</b> ("Brief Historical Intro," Maps, Outline of Gov't Policies, and Hobson essay)</p>	
<b>Thurs. May 20</b>	<p><b>Discussion: Open Discussion of Gen. Intro. Unit</b> Everyone should be prepared to post a couple of informal questions and/or responses.</p> <p><b>Reading: Begin <u>Wind from an Enemy Sky</u> Unit (Bio., "Intro to Fict.," novel, Study Ques.)</b> Be sure to read over the suggestions for Reading Journals and Response Papers, and begin using your Reading Journal.</p>	
<b>Tues. May 25</b>	<p><b>Reading: Complete <u>Wind</u> Unit</b></p> <p><b>Discussion: <u>Wind from an Enemy Sky</u></b></p> <p>This will be a somewhat more formal discussion of the posted questions, but I hope class members will continue the discussion on your own. (See directions for Discussion in COURSE REQUIREMENTS; prepare for discussion by reviewing Study Questions.) I will post the questions for this discussion.</p>	<p><b>Due: Close Reading Exercise</b> (1½ pp.). Deposit in my Digital Drop Box <b>before</b> entering the Discussion.</p> <p>Select two passages you think express primary themes of the novel, reproduce the passages (with page numbers) and in 1 or 2 paragraphs per quote, develop a close reading according the instructions in the Syllabus folder.</p> <p>Be sure to refresh your memory about the directions for papers in the Course Requirements in the Syllabus folder, and to proofread and edit your paper carefully for clarity, typos, grammatical errors, etc.</p>

<p><b>Fri. May 28</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Complete Momaday Unit</b></p> <p>Read <u>The Way to Rainy Mountain</u> and reflect on it some in your Journal before you read the essay, "The Man Made of Words."</p> <p>- <b>Discussion: Momaday</b></p> <p><b>Discussion Leaders:</b></p> <p>Remember that the day after the official Discussion day, Discussion Leaders should post a short annotated bibliography of the outside sources they read to help them formulate questions and lead the discussion.</p>	<p><b>Due: Journal Summary</b> (1 ½ pp.) Turn in before entering Discussion</p> <p>What were your initial reactions to reading <u>WRM</u>? How did you understand the organization and spatial arrangement of the prose and pictures? How did your reading of <u>WRM</u> change after reading "Man Made of Words"? What new insights did the essay give you into the book?</p>
<p><b>Mon. May 31</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Begin Silko Unit</b></p> <p>Proceed from "Lang. and Lit." to <u>Storyteller</u>, and conclude with "Sacred Hoop"</p> <p>As you read <u>Storyteller</u>, think especially about how the book is organized. What does the physical form of the book remind you of? What shared themes or development of ideas might account for the ways the pieces are arranged?</p>	<p><b>Due: Response Paper I</b> (3 pp.)</p> <p>Compare your responses to <u>Wind</u> and the two texts by Momaday. Focus on the relationships you see between <u>Wind</u> and Momaday's texts. They are very different in many respects, representing different historical periods, cultural contexts, and issues, but maybe some of the things you learned from reading Momaday shed light on aspects of <u>Wind</u>. Reflect especially on issues of language—the different powers and functions of spoken vs. written language, the function of narrative traditions, etc. (Don't forget to include your personal reactions!)</p>
<p><b>Fri. June 4</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Complete Silko Unit</b></p> <p><b>Discussion: Silko and Gunn Allen</b></p> <p><b>Discussion Leaders:</b></p>	<p><b>Due: Poetry Critique</b> (1 to 1 ½ pp.)</p> <p><u>Storyteller</u> contains Silko's most famous and frequently anthologized short stories "Storyteller," "Lullaby," "Yellow Woman," "Tony's Story," and "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." Our online discussion will probably focus on these stories. Silko's poetry gets much less attention, so before entering the Discussion, spend some time with a poem of your choice from the book. Use the Poetry Critique assignment in the Syllabus Folder to give you ideas for thinking and writing about your poem.</p>
<p><b>Tues. June 8</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Complete Tapahonso Unit</b></p> <p>Read the autobiographical essay and <u>Blue Horses Rush In</u></p> <p>- <b>Discussion: Tapahonso</b></p> <p><b>Discussion Leaders:</b></p>	<p><b>Due: Poetry Critique</b> (1 ½ pp.)</p> <p>Choose a poem or prose piece from <u>Blue Horses</u> that you like and that you feel is thematically or structurally central to the book. Using the Close Reading and Poetry Critique exercises to generate ideas, discuss the meaning of the individual piece and its relationship to the structure of the book as a whole.</p>

<p><b>Wed. June 9</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Begin Erdrich Unit</b></p> <p>When you have completed the first two chapters of <u>Tracks</u>, respond in your Reading Journal to the Study Ques. For these chapters before you proceed.</p>	<p><b>Due: Response Paper II</b> (3 pp.)</p> <p>Choose a theme that interests you (gender roles, storytelling, cultural balance/healing, narrative as ceremony, etc.) and compare <u>Storyteller</u> and <u>Blue Horses</u>.</p>
<p><b>Tues. June 15</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Complete Erdrich Unit</b></p> <p><b>Discussion: <u>Tracks</u></b> - <b>Discussion Leaders:</b></p>	
<p><b>Fri. June 18</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Complete Alexie Unit</b></p> <p>Read the whole book (variously referred as a novel or short story collection) if possible. If you don't have time to finish it, concentrate on the following stories: pp. 1-36, 59-75, 93-105, 110-138, 149-170, 181-190.</p> <p>At some point before today, try to see the movie <u>Smoke Signals</u>, directed by Chris Eyre and written and produced by Alexie. A very historically significant movie; it is the first <i>mainstream</i> movie written, produced, directed, and acted (except for the white characters) completely by American Indians.</p> <p><b>Discussion: <u>Lone Ranger</u></b> - <b>Discussion Leaders:</b></p>	<p><b>Due: Response Paper III</b> (3 pp.)</p> <p>Compare <u>Tracks</u> and <u>Lone Ranger</u>. For example, you might consider their use of multiple narrators—what is accomplished by the shifting points of view in the two books? How do they treat gender differently? What does each novel have to say about the importance of oral narrative and the written word to individual and cultural survival?</p> <p><b>Over the weekend</b>, you should begin Duncan and start drafting your Final Paper!</p>
<p><b>Tues. June 22</b></p>	<p><b>Reading: Complete Duncan Unit</b></p> <p>If you don't have time to read the whole book, for sure read pp. xi-73, 143-187.</p> <p><b>Discussion: <u>Cherokee Stories</u></b></p> <p><b>Discussion Leaders:</b></p>	

<b>Wed. June 23</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>Due (By 10 am): Response Paper IV</b> (4-5 pages)  This paper is your chance to summarize important points and ongoing themes from your Reading Journal, to demonstrate what you have learned during this course that means the most to you. Using <b>Duncan</b> and at least <b>two other primary texts</b> and <b>two secondary texts</b> , discuss a theme that you see developed in them. An obvious one is the role of storytelling and the oral narrative tradition— in individual and cultural identity and self-definition, as reflections and shapers of worldviews that are quite different from EuroAmerican worldviews.