

# Frontier Literature

English 341: American Literature. Spring 2006



**PROFESSOR:** Laura Leibman (503 771-1112 x7329); Leibman@Reed.edu

**TIME:** Tuesday Thursday 10:30-11:50 Library 203

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In 1893, historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared that "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward explain American development." He also declared that the frontier was closed. In this course we will investigate the ways nineteenth-century American writers used the frontier to formulate notions of America, Americans, and American manhood. How did the myth of the frontier evolve as it traced the movements of explorers, sailors, gold miners, and cowboys? What role did women and the dispossessed play in this romance? We will cover both classical representations of the frontier, as well as views from the dispossessed. We will address the frontier's legacy in American popular and literary culture in the 20th century.

## REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS:

- Attend, Prepare for, and Participate as a Speaker and Listener in Conference
- Complete all Assignments (See end of syllabus)

**Group One:** 1.26 (Précis); 2.9 (Comparative Analysis); 2.23 (Close Reading); 3.9 (Comparative Analysis); 3.30 (Close Reading); 4.18 (Final Paper)

**Group Two:** 1.31 (Close reading); 2.14 (Close Reading); 2.28 (Comparative Analysis); 3.21 (Close Reading or Comparative Analysis); 4.4 (Précis) 4.18 (Final Paper)

**Group Three:** 2.2 ([Comparative] Analysis); 2.16 (Comparative Analysis); 3.2 (Précis); 3.23 (Close Reading); 4.6 (Close Reading); 4.25 (Final Paper)

**Group Four:** 2.7 (Close Reading); 2.21 (Comparative Analysis); 3.7 (Close Reading); 3.28 (Comparative Analysis); 4.11 (Précis); 4.27 (Final Paper)

## Schedule of Readings

### Week 1-3 Enlightenment, Romanticism & the Frontier

T 1.24 Introduction: The Frontier as a Usable Past

In-class: *Last of the Mohicans* (1920)

R 1.26 Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel" (Handout)

Richard Slotkin, "Myth and the Production of History" (*Ideology & Classic American Literature*, ed. Bercovitch, 70-90; On Reserve PS217.P64 I36 1986)

Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (*The Frontier in American History*; On Reserve E178 .T94)

Group One: Précis. This paper is due in-class **not** 36 hours ahead of time!

T 1.31 Rhonda, *Lewis & Clark Among the Indians*, Chapters 1 & 4  
Journal Excerpts Packet #1 (Handout)  
Group Two: Close Reading

R 2.2 Rhonda, *Lewis & Clark Among the Indians*. Chapter 8  
Journal Excerpts Packet #2 (Handout)  
Group Three: Analysis (See the instructions for the “Comparative Analysis paper. Since this is the first work we are reading, you don’t need to compare it to another work, you just need to analyze a theme or stylistic element.)

T 2.7 Melville, *Typee*  
Group Four: Close Reading

R 2.9 Melville, *Typee*  
Group One: Comparative Analysis

T 2.14 Ridge, *The Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*  
Group Two: Close Reading

R 2.16 Ridge, *The Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*  
Group Three: Comparative Analysis

T 2.21 Paz, *The Adventures of Joaquin Murieta* (pp. ix-xcvii, 1-12)  
Group Four: Comparative Analysis

R 2.23 Clappe, *Shirley Letters*  
Group One: Close Reading

T 2.28 Clappe, *Shirley Letters*  
Group Two: Comparative Analysis

### **Realism and the Frontier**

R 3.2 Harte, “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” *The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories*  
Eric Sundquist, “Introduction: The Country of the Blue,” *American Realism: New Essays*, pp. 3-24. (Reserve PS374.R37 A47 1982; also there are multiple copies in the stacks)  
Group Four: Three

T 3.7 Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
Group Four: Close Reading

R 3.9 Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
Group One: Comparative Analysis

### SPRING BREAK 3.11-19

T 3.21 Love, *Nat Love*  
Group Two: Close Reading or Comparative Analysis

R 3.23 Wister, *The Virginian*  
Group Three: Close Reading

T 3.28 Wister, *The Virginian*

Group Four: Comparative Analysis

R 3.30 Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux*

Group One: Close Reading

T 4.4 Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux*

Arnold Krupat, "The Indian Autobiography: Origins, Type, and Function," *Smoothing the Ground*, ed. Brian Swann, pp. 261-80. (On Reserve: PM156 .S6 1983)

Group Two: Précis

R 4.6 Calof, Rachel Calof's Story

Group Three: Close Reading

### The Frontier in the Twentieth Century

Sunday 4.9.06 Movie Presentation: *The Searchers* 7:00-9:15pm (Bio 19).

T 4.11 Ford, *The Searchers* (Movie on Reserve in IMC, please watch before class if you do not go to the showing on Sunday)

Lee Clark Mitchell, "Popular Appeal," *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*. 14-27.

(On Reserve: PS374.W4 M55 1996)

Group Four: Précis.

R 4.13 PASSOVER (no class)

T 4.18 Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

Group One and Two: Final Paper (2-3 pages). Comparison of the frontier as presented in the *Into the Wild* to one other work we have read this semester.

R 4.20 PASSOVER (no class)

T 4.25 Berry, *Trask*

Group Three: Final Paper (2-3 pages). Comparison of the frontier as presented in the *Trask* to one other work we have read this semester.

R 4.27 Berry, *Trask*

Group Four: Final Paper (2-3 pages). Comparison of the frontier as presented in the *Trask* to one other work we have read this semester.

## Assignments

All of the assignments for this class (except the final paper) are short ones: 1-2 pages each. The final paper is 2-3 pages. You will be asked to sign for a group and each group will turn in their papers for the above assigned days. Each group is asked to do three types of papers: précis, close reading, and a comparative analysis. All papers should be emailed to the class via the class email list at least **36 hours** before the assigned conference. You should **paste** these into the body of your email and **NOT** send them as an enclosure because enclosures can spread viruses and make your paper difficult to open. Please make sure you read your classmates' papers before class, as these will be the starting point of our discussion. The three types of papers (and the final paper) are described below:

### **i. Précis.**

Write an analysis of the article. This paper **MUST** include both a short paragraph summarizing the argument of the article and a long paragraph discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the

argument. For more help on writing a précis, see <http://academic.reed.edu/english/courses/Eng213/CriticalArticleSynopses.html>

## 2. Close Reading

For your close reading, choose a short passage (one paragraph to one page) of text and analyze the details of the passage. **Make sure you indicate the page number of your passage in your paper.** You may want to think about all or some of the following:

1. **PURPOSE.** What is the purpose of the passage in the work as a whole? Does it introduce the work? Provide closure? Provide the emotional climax? Serve as a bridge? What elements help it achieve this function and how?
2. **LANGUAGE.** What kind of language is used? High or low? Figurative or literal? What does the language tell us about the audience and speaker? How does the style enhance the message?
3. **TONE.** What is the tone of the passage? How is this tone conveyed?
4. **SPEAKER.** Who is speaking? How does the speaker establish his or her authority or deference?
5. **NARRATEE.** Who is the ideal audience? Is anyone excluded (deliberately or not) from this audience?
6. **CHARACTERS.** Who are the characters appearing in the passage? What are their main attributes? Are we meant to sympathize with them or not? How does the writer create (or dispel) sympathy?
7. **GENRE.** What is the genre in which the passage or longer work was written? How do the details of the passage relate to our expectations for genre?

## 3. Comparative Analysis

Please compare one aspect of the day's work to the same aspect in a work we have already read. The comparison can be either thematic or stylistic. For example, you may want to compare how two authors represent masculinity, Native Americans, or the American nation. Alternatively, you may want to compare the use of point of view, prose style, or the genre of autobiography. You should spend at least one paragraph analyzing the aspect you have chosen in the day's work and second paragraph comparing it to a work we have already read.

### Final Paper: Comparative Analysis (2-3 pages)

For your final paper please write a more extensive comparison of the day's work of literature to an earlier work we have read. You may cover more than one attribute or theme, but you don't have to do so. How has the frontier changed from the nineteenth to the twentieth century?

#### Group One:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

#### Group Two:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

#### Group Three:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

#### Group Four:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.