

Beginnings to the American Experiment

ENGL 50

Fall 2025 Section 02 In Person 3 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/20/2025

Course Information

Format

Class will meet in person, twice a week. Additional materials will be available on Canvas. All assignments to be submitted to Canvas.

Description

This course covers foundational works of English literature from around 1000 A.D. to the middle of the 17th century, a time span renowned for the proliferation of Arthurian legends, the creation of the English sonnet, the rise of public London theatre, visions of utopias in the wake of new world discoveries and settlements in North America, and much more. Together, we will examine our selection of English literature as a way to think about how our pre-modern ancestors envisioned past, present, and future worlds and manifested them into print for leisurely and scholarly learning.

Following an exploration of Anglo-Saxon and Medieval heroic legends to begin the semester, the rest of the course is bookended by two utopian texts. Thomas More's *Utopia* launches us into a "new world" that is both satirically paradise-like and insidious. Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* at the end of the semester will have us revisit an oddly prescient "heaven on earth" island across the Atlantic. Woven between these texts is an array of some of the most celebrated poetry, literary criticism, and drama from the English Renaissance, as well as two works exploring Britain's slightly lesser-known legendary history. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* digs deep into the imaginative past and details the pseudo-historical founding of Britain by Brutus the son of Trojan hero Aeneas. Many descendants of the Aeneas–Brutus bloodline appear on the late-Elizabethan and early-Jacobean stage (*Lochrine*, *King Lear*, and even *King Arthur*) and offer an interesting contrast to the more well-known English chronicle history plays. Geoffrey will prime us for arguably the most offbeat text in our course about the first legendary native-born King of Britain: the play *The Tragedy of Lochrine* authored by the cryptic and still unidentified "W. S." *Lochrine* will then shepherd us into the complex world of early English playwriting, professional performance, and print publication.

In addition to becoming more acquainted with the literary and cultural worlds of the distant English past, this course will provide a critical background for humanities-based studies, help develop analytical (close reading) skills, and sharpen critical thinking skills and academic argumentation.

Course Description and Requisites

Exploration of Anglo-Saxon, Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Colonial

Writings in Britain, Europe, and America. Class engages literary text, literary history, and historical events that shape the literature and social constructs of the period.

Prerequisite(s): ENGL 1A.

Letter Graded

Classroom Protocols

Classroom Etiquette

We will be spending a lot of time together in our classroom and engaging each other in thoughtful discussion. With that in mind, we need to be mindful of how we behave and treat each other.

- Please NO phones
- Please come to class with course texts read and be prepared to discuss them
- Please be open-minded and respectful of each other's ideas, opinions, and questions

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's ideas and writing as long as you cite them. But submitting work from online or other secondary sources without attribution is a form of plagiarism. Any assignment containing plagiarism will receive a failing grade, which may lead to failure of the course. Further disciplinary action may also be taken by the University per policy [E 15-7](#).

AI/LLMs

In many ways, the act of writing is a way to think further on a topic and to organize or clarify those thoughts. The connection between writing and thinking is crucial to your development as a communicator, and it is a skill that will serve you well in all your future endeavors. Using AI to respond to essay prompts is cheating; it is cheating you out of the education you are paying for. If I find that you used AI for any significant percentage of any written assignment, I will not provide feedback, nor will you receive a passing grade for the assignment.

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to pre-modern British literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively.
4. Develop and carry out research projects.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Course Materials

Texts

1. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature Package 1: Volumes A, B, C*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Julie Crawford, Julie Orlemanski, Courtney Weiss Smith, Tiffany Stern, James Simpson, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and James Noggle. Eleventh edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2024. ISBN: 978-1-324-07280-5.

*We will primarily use Volumes A and B in this course.

2. Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Edited by Michael D. Reeve. Translated by Neil Wright. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-1843834410. (Available on Canvas)
3. *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Jane Lytton Gooch. New York: Garland, 1981. ISBN: 978-0824094072.

(Available on Canvas)

4. *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Suzanne Gossett, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015. ISBN: 978-0393938609.

(Available on Canvas)

5. *New Atlantis* in Thomas More, Francis Bacon, and Henry Neville. *Three Early Modern Utopias*. Edited by Susan Bruce. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. ISBN: 978-0199537990.

(Available on Canvas)

Course Requirements and Assignments

Assignments

Project #1—Literary Analysis: In a 4–6-page, double-spaced close reading, you will assume the role of a literary critic and investigate an overlooked aspect in one of our course texts. Emphasis will be on improving your understanding of pre-modern English literature and its themes, manifold contexts, and meaning-making, while honing your skills in close, careful observation.

Project #2—Modern Re-Mediation: For this assignment, you will assume the role of an adapter and re-mediate or “translate” one of our course texts into a new form and then produce a short artist’s statement (2–3 double-spaced pages) explaining your creative choices. Emphasis will be on understanding how pre-modern texts evolve and accrue meaning as they move across generic, linguistic, temporal, national, and cultural lines.

Final—Research Paper: For the final, you will be asked to conduct research on one of the course texts. Your task will be to create a deeper understanding of something that is under-examined or something most people engage with uncritically in your selected text. You will produce a 5–7-page, double-spaced paper that engages with and integrates research in at least two scholarly sources.

Discussion Posts & Questions: To sharpen skills in grappling difficult ideas, critical thinking, and generating intellectual conversations, you are expected to respond to each reading with **(1) a short discussion post** and **(2) a question for discussion** on our Canvas site by the beginning of class. Discussion posts & questions do not need to be exhaustive—aim for around 150 words—but I would like you to spend some time writing out your thoughts, ideas, opinions, insights, and a genuine question that you have. Summarization, however, should be avoided. Four times over the course of the semester you can “pass” and not write up a discussion post and question (please use this to your advantage). The Canvas discussion posts are opportunities for you to highlight points you find interesting and meaningful in our course texts. The discussion posts are also a chance for you to reflect on and challenge the ideas we encounter over the semester. This may also serve as a way for you to boil down and organize your thoughts before small-group and whole-class discussion.

Late Work Policy: Keeping in mind the many unforeseen events that can occur in the average SJSU student’s life, I have a generous extension policy. Provided you give me a request in writing (complete with a new deadline) before a paper’s due date, most requests for an extension will be granted. If the original deadline is passed by a student who has not received an extension or an extended deadline has been passed, 10% of the total points possible will be taken off for lateness up to one week. After the first week, 10% will be taken off the top of the paper score for each day late (i.e. 8 days late = -20%, 9 days = -30%, 10 days = -40%, and so on). After 16 calendar days, no paper will be accepted. The Late Work Policy, however, does not apply to Canvas Discussion Posts & Questions and the Final Research Paper.

Paper Format

Please submit all papers in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. Please include a heading in the upper left-hand corner (your full name, my full name, the class name, and the due date of the respective assignment) and page numbers in the top right header of your document. Make sure to add a centered assignment name or a creative title. Papers are to be submitted on Canvas in the Assignments tab.

Participation

“Participating” is defined in this class as *doing the reading* and *being able and willing to respond* to the comments and questions of both the professor and your fellow students on a daily basis. As a large portion of this course involves discussion, active participation will be imperative. In addition, because the exchange of diverse ideas is so important to this class, it is necessary for everyone to be respectful of one another. In our class discussions, it is normal and even expected that we will disagree. Differences can and should be discussed, but these discussions should maintain the academic spirit of respect. Disrespectful language and behavior will not be tolerated in our classroom.

Grading Information

Evaluation

Your final course grade will be weighted as follows:

<u>Project #1</u>	<u>20%</u>
<u>Project #2</u>	<u>20%</u>
<u>Final Research Paper</u>	<u>20%</u>
<u>Discussion Posts & Questions</u>	<u>20%</u>
<u>Presence and <i>active</i> participation in all class sessions</u>	<u>20%</u>

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

Course Calendar

This is an outline of the semester which contains some key dates to remember (holidays, readings, assignment due dates, etc.). This calendar is subject to change, but you should consider it to be accurate unless I inform you otherwise. Remember, it is your responsibility to ask me or a classmate about missed assignments if you are absent.

Week 1	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Thu 8/21	Hello, introductions, syllabus, course overview		
Week 2	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 8/26	<i>Beowulf</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 37–78	Discussion post & question #1 on Canvas

Thu 8/28	<i>Beowulf</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 78–109	Discussion post & question #2 on Canvas
Week 3	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/2	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>The History of the Kings of Britain</i>	Reeve and Wright, <i>The History of the Kings of Britain</i> , pp. 4–48	Discussion post & question #3 on Canvas
Thu 9/4	Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>The History of the Kings of Britain</i>	Reeve and Wright, <i>The History of the Kings of Britain</i> , pp. 160–222 (OPTIONAL: pp. 222–52)	Discussion post & question #4 on Canvas
Week 4	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/9	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 412–32 (top of page)	Discussion post & question #5 on Canvas
Thu 9/11	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 432–67	Discussion post & question #6 on Canvas
Week 5	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/16	Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i>	Norton Vol. B, pp. 43–87	Discussion post & question #7 on Canvas
Thu 9/18	Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i>	Norton Vol. B, pp. 87–120	Discussion post & question #8 on Canvas, Project #1 due Friday 9/19

Week 6	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/23	<i>The Tragedy of Locrine</i> Acts I–II	Gooch, <i>Locrine</i> , pp. 20–27, Acts I–III	Discussion post & question #9 on Canvas
Thu 9/25	<i>Locrine</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Locrine</i> Acts III–IV	Discussion post & question #10 on Canvas
Week 7	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 9/30	<i>Locrine</i> Act V	<i>Locrine</i> Act V	Discussion post & question #11 on Canvas
Thu 10/2	Philip Sidney, <i>The Defence of Poesy</i>	Norton Vol. B, pp. 514–15, 524–40	Discussion post & question #12 on Canvas
Week 8	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/7	In-class book exhibit		
Thu 10/9	Catch-Up Day (NO CLASS)		
Week 9	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/14	Edmund Spenser, <i>The Faerie Queene</i> , Book I, Cantos i–ii, vii–ix	Norton Vol. B, pp. 254–56, 263–94, 343–81	Discussion post & question #13 on Canvas

Thu 10/16	Christopher Marlowe, <i>Doctor Faustus</i> , Scenes 1–4	Norton Vol. B, pp. 561–62 (top of page), 581–93 (top of page)	Discussion post & question #14 on Canvas
Week 10	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/21	<i>Doctor Faustus</i> , Scene 5–Epilogue	Norton Vol. B, pp. 593–617	Discussion post & question #15 on Canvas
Thu 10/23	Sonnets: Petrarch, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Henry Howard Earl of Surrey, Mary Sidney Herbert, William Shakespeare	Petrarch Sonnet 90 (Canvas), Norton Vol. B, pp. 120–25 (top of page), 134–37 (top of page), Herbert, "To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney" (Canvas), Shakespeare's Sonnets 3, 12, 18, 19, 130, 144 (Norton Vol. B, pp. 624, 625, 626–37, 637, 638)	Discussion post & question #16 on Canvas, Project #2 due Friday 10/24
Week 11	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 10/28	William Shakespeare, <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts I–II	Norton Vol. B, pp. 620–24, <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts I–II (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #17 on Canvas
Thu 10/30	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts III–IV	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Acts III–IV (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #18 on Canvas
Week 12	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/4	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act V	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> Act V (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #19 on Canvas

Thu 11/6	William Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i> Acts I–II	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts I–II (Norton Vol. B, pp. 726–59)	Discussion post & question #20 on Canvas
Week 13	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/11	Veteran's Day (NO CLASS)		
Thu 11/13	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts III–IV	<i>The Tempest</i> Acts III–IV (Norton Vol. B, pp. 759–77)	Discussion post & question #21 on Canvas
Week 14	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/18	<i>The Tempest</i> Act V	<i>The Tempest</i> Act V (Norton Vol. B, pp. 777–85)	Discussion post & question #22 on Canvas
Thu 11/20	Francis Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i>	Norton Vol. B, p. 1156, Bruce, <i>New Atlantis</i> , pp. 151–69 (top of page) [Canvas]	Discussion post & question #23 on Canvas
Week 15	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 11/25	Catch-Up Day (NO CLASS)		
Thu 11/27	Thanksgiving (NO CLASS)		
Week 16	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due

Tue 12/2	Francis Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i>	<i>New Atlantis</i> , pp. 169–86 (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #24 on Canvas
Thu 12/4	Final review, evaluations, farewells		
Week 17	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Thu 12/11	Final Research Paper due		Final Research Paper due Thu 12/11 by 11:59pm