

Beginnings to the American Experiment

ENGL 50

Fall 2025 Section 01 In Person 3 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/21/2025

Course Information

Welcome to English 50! In this course we will be reading English language texts from the early and late Middle Ages and the Renaissance in England, as well as the Early Colonial Period of the United States. We will be reading some of the most significant prose, poetry, and dramatic texts from this roughly 1000-year era, paying particular attention to the political, religious, cultural, and historical influences that shaped them.

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

Digital Distractions

Cell phones, laptops, and mobile devices should be stowed and kept out of sight during class in *almost all circumstances*. The only exceptions to this policy apply to those students who require special accommodations and who have contacted the Accessible Education Center and, in the event of a textbook shortage, those students who need to rely on digital editions. **Otherwise, use of any electronic device during class will result in a lowering of your course grade by one full letter.**

Classroom Etiquette

In order to create a productive and supportive learning community, it is imperative that we treat one another with appropriate respect and consideration. To promote this value, I will create a Discussion thread on Canvas where you will be encouraged to post suggestions on how we can all, students and

professor alike, make this the class a welcoming and comfortable learning space. This Discussion thread will be open throughout the semester.

If you have any concerns about the class that you would prefer to share with me privately, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Late Policy

In this course, you are expected to submit your essays on the due date. However, if you experience illness, an emergency, or have a necessary religious obligation, you may submit your essay up to one week late without penalty, provided you document the reason. If you do not have a compelling reason for submitting your essay late, your grade will be reduced by one letter grade for each class period it is late. To avoid any penalties, please contact me as soon as possible if you cannot submit an essay by the posted deadline.

"Ghosting" the Class

The instruction mode for this class is designated as "in person." This means that, despite our use of Canvas, Google, and other online platforms, this is not an "online" or a "hybrid" course. Consequently, classroom activities cannot be made up online at a later time and date.

If you are unable to attend class due to illness, injury, or other circumstances, please contact me as soon as possible.

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 Goals

1. Develop proficiency in reading and understanding older English texts, with attention to linguistic, syntactical, and stylistic features.
2. Enhance close-reading skills by analyzing and interpreting poems with a focus on poetic meter, form, and other formal elements.
3. Explore and articulate the connections between literary texts and their historical, cultural, and religious contexts, fostering a deeper understanding of literature's place in society.
4. Conduct effective literary research, utilizing both primary and secondary sources, to support literary analysis and argumentation.
5. Adhere to MLA guidelines in the citation of sources, ensuring academic integrity and professionalism in written work.

Course Materials

Required Materials

The Norton Anthology of English Literature (ebook). ISBN: 979-9781324062769. Access to this electronic resource can be purchased through the Spartan Bookstore at a discounted rate through the First Day Program.

Purchasing Discounted Materials Through First Day

To enhance your learning experience and provide affordable access to the right course materials, this course is part of an inclusive access model called First Day™. You may easily access the materials at a discounted price and benefit from single sign-on access with no codes required in Canvas. Please note, You should not be prompted to purchase the materials via canvas or the publisher. This will result in double billing (and at a higher cost).

You will see the first day billing on your student account via the Bursar's Office shortly after 2/18/25. However any questions regarding the materials should be directed to your professor or Spartan Bookstore 408-924-1812.

It is not recommended that you Opt-Out, as these materials are required to complete the course. However, you may choose to Opt-Out on the first day of class and no later than 2/18/25. You will see the course materials charge on your Bursar's student account unless you have opted out prior to the deadline.

For more information and FAQs go to customer care.bncollege.com.

Student Tutorial Videos

Accessing Your eTextbook: <https://vimeo.com/304674236>

Opting Out of First Day for your eTextbook: <https://vimeo.com/304674616>

Opting Out of First Day for your courseware: <https://vimeo.com/304674959>

Other Features on the Course Materials page: <https://vimeo.com/304675344>

Customer Care Contact Information

Customer Care is available 24/7 to help students with questions about accessing their course material, using their eTextbook, or opting-out or in to the First Day program. Be sure to share the below information with your students

- Link to Customer Care website: customer care.bncollege.com
- FAQs and Tutorial Videos for the First Day Program: <https://tinyurl.com/firstdayfaq>
- Open a ticket Online for the Customer Care team: <https://tinyurl.com/customer carerequest>
- Email the Customer Care team: bookstorecustomer care@bncollege.com
- Call the Customer Care team: 1-844-9-EBOOKS (1-844-932-6657)

Norton Anthology of English Literature

Author: Stephen Greenblatt (ed.)

Publisher: Norton

Edition: 11th

ISBN: 9781324062769

Availability: Spartan Bookstore

Course Requirements and Assignments

Major assignments and activities for this course include the following:

- Midterm
- Final Exam
- Creative Essay
- Critical Essay
- Sonnet/Speech Performance
- Canvas Discussion Posts
- Participation

Midterm and Final Exam

The **Midterm** will be administered during class on Thursday, October 3rd.

The **Final Exam** will be administered during Final Exams Week on Friday, December 13th.

You are expected to attend both the Midterm and the Final Exam. Make-up exams should only be scheduled in the event of emergency, illness, religious observation, or scheduled SJSU activity.

If you cannot class on either of the above dates due to religious observances, please contact me by September 6th in order to schedule a make-up exam.

Major Essays

Creative Essay:

For your creative essay, you will have a number of options to complete this assignment. I will provide you with a handout with details that will include directions for one of the following options:

1. Writing a poem in the style of one of the poems we have read and providing a writing explanation of your creative choices.
2. Writing down detailed staging guidelines for a play by Shakespeare or one of his early modern contemporaries.
3. Choosing one of the text covered in this class and drafting a lesson plan for how you would teach it to high school students.

Critical Essay:

For your critical essay, you will also have a number of options to complete the assignment. Like the Creative Essay, I will provide you with a handout with details that will include directions; unlike the first essay, your Critical Essay will also require library research. Here are some of the options you may select for this assignment:

1. Engaging with an interpretive problem presented in one of the texts assigned this semester and attempting to resolve it.
2. Providing a detailed manuscript history of one of the readings, from its initial draft to its most recent publication.
3. Identifying a theme present in one or of the texts assigned this semester and examining how different authors treat it.

4. An idea of your own for the Critical Essay. Be sure to approach me about your topic before proceeding with it.

Sonnet/Speech Performance

For this assignment you may choose between one of the following options:

- **Option 1: Memorize and Recite a Poem or Speech.** This option gives you the opportunity to engage with a literary text on a deeper level by memorizing and performing a poem or a speech from a play. This exercise will help you appreciate the sounds and rhythms of language and how they interact with the nuances of emotion and meaning.
- **Option 2: Write a Contemporary Sonnet in Traditional Form.** For this assignment, you will write your own sonnet in a specific form. You can choose to write a Shakespearean (English), Petrarchan (Italian), or Spenserian sonnet. Your sonnet should adhere to the traditional structure and rhyme scheme of the chosen form and explore a theme or subject of your choice.

I will provide the class with written guidelines on Canvas for this assignment.

Canvas Discussion Posts

Before each class, submit a substantive post on Canvas in which you respond to the assigned reading for that day. Your post should identify anything that you feel would be worthy of discussion during class. For example, you may find a particular passage striking for its content, or you may find another one difficult to interpret. By posting your reading responses before class, you help the entire class deepen its comprehension of the text at hand.

I will provide written guidelines for how to complete this activity on Canvas.

Participation

Class sessions will include activities that address the assigned readings. These will include lectures; group presentations; weekly reading quizzes, and small group/whole class activities based on Canvas Discussion Posts. Full credit for participation will require active in-class engagement in all of these activities.

✓ Grading Information

Assignments for the course will each count towards a specific percentage of your final grade.

Criteria

Your grade for English 50 will be determined by the following criteria:

Assignment/Activity	Percentage of Course Grade

Midterm (in-class)	25%
Final Exam (in-class)	25%
Creative Essay	15%
Critical Essay	15%
Sonnet/Speech Performance	10%
Canvas Discussion Posts	5%
Class Participation	5%

Breakdown

A	94% - 100%
A-	90% - 93%
B+	87% - 89%
B	84% - 86%
B-	80% - 83%
C+	77% - 79%
C	74% - 76%
C-	70% - 73%
D+	67% - 69%
D	64% - 66%
D-	60% - 63%
F	≤59%

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

Below are the due dates for the major assignments and readings for this semester. This does not include homework due on Canvas, for which you will be notified through the Canvas LMS. This schedule is subject to change with fair notice via the Canvas messaging system.

When	Topic	Notes
Week 1: Thursday, 8/21	Overview of Course	
Week 2: Tuesday, 8/26	Introduction to the Medieval Period	Before class, read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction to the Medieval Period (3)• Bede's <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i>, including "Cædmon's Hymn" (30)
Week 2: Thursday, 8/28	Language and Prosody of the Medieval Period	Before class, read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Dream of the Rood (33)• The Wanderer (121)• The Wife's Lament (126)• Exeter Book Riddles (129)
Week 3: Tuesday, 9/2	Beowulf	Before class, read <i>Beowulf</i> , lines 1 - 1250
Week 3: Thursday, 9/4	Beowulf	Before class, read <i>Beowulf</i> , lines 1251 - 1798
Week 4: Tuesday, 9/9	Beowulf	Before class, read <i>Beowulf</i> , lines 1799 - 3182

When	Topic	Notes
Week 4: Thursday, 9/11	Anglo-Norman Poetry	Before class, read the following poems from Marie de France: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Bisclavret" (handout) • "Lanval" (171) • "Laustic" (184) • "Chevrefoil" (187)
Week 4: Tuesday, 9/16	Sir Gawain and the Green Knight	Before class, read <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> , fitts 1 and 2
Week 5: Thursday, 9/18	Sir Gawain and the Green Knight	Before class, read <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> , fitts 3 and 4
Week 5: Tuesday, 9/23	Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales	Before class read lines 1-18 from <i>The General Prologue</i> (473) and the <i>Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale</i> (512)
Week 6: Thursday, 9/25	Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales	Before class read <i>The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale</i> (540)
Week 6: Tuesday, 9/30	Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales	Before class read <i>The Nun's Priest's Tale</i> (556)
Week 7: Thursday, 10/2	Review of First Half of Semester: Anglo-Saxon & Medieval Periods	In-class Review session
Week 8: Tuesday, 10/7	Review of First Half of Semester: Anglo-Saxon & Medieval Periods	Midterm exam administered during class
Week 8: Thursday, 10/9	Introduction to Early Modern Period	Writing Activity: In-class Preparation for Research Essay
Week 9: Tuesday, 10/14	Thomas More/Religious Contexts	Before class, read Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i> , Book 1 Research Essay (hard copy) due by class time
Week 9: Thursday, 10/16	Thomas More/Religious Contexts/Elizabethan Sonnet and Lyric	Before class, read Thomas More's <i>Utopia</i> , Book 2

When	Topic	Notes
Week 10: Tuesday, 10/21	Elizabethan Sonnet and Lyric	Selected sonnets to be announced
Week 10: Thursday, 10/23	Sir Philip Sidney	Before class read selections from Sir Philip Sidney's <i>Astrophil and Stella</i> (332)
Week 11: Tuesday, 10/28	William Shakespeare	Before class read selections from William Shakespeare's <i>Sonnets</i> (675)
Week 11: Thursday, 10/30	William Shakespeare	Before class, read Act 1 of William Shakespeare's <i>The Tempest</i>
Week 12: Tuesday, 11/4	William Shakespeare	Before class, read Acts 2 and 3 of William Shakespeare's <i>The Tempest</i>
Week 12: Thursday, 11/6	William Shakespeare	Before class, read Acts 4 and 5 of William Shakespeare's <i>The Tempest</i>
Week 13: Tuesday, 11/11	17th Century Lyric Poetry	Before class, read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst" • other selections tbd
Week 13: Thursday, 11/13	17th Century Lyric Poetry	Before class, read: John Donne, "The Good-Morrow," "The Sun Rising," "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," "To His Mistress Going to Bed," and Holy Sonnets 6 and 7
Week 14: Tuesday, 11/18	Mary Wroth	Before class, read excerpts from Mary Wroth, <i>Pamphilia to Amphilanthus</i> (889)
Week 14: Thursday, 11/20	John Milton	Before class, read the following selections from <i>Paradise Lost</i> : "The Verse" (992), Argument to Book 1 (992), and Book 1 (992-1005).
Week 15: Tuesday, 11/25	John Milton	Before class, read the following selections from <i>Paradise Lost</i> : Argument to Book 9 (1046) and Book 9 (1046-1061).

When	Topic	Notes
Week 15: Thursday, 11/27		<i>Class not held due to the Thanksgiving holiday.</i>
Week 16: Tuesday, 12/2	Anne Bradstreet	Before class, read selections from Anne Bradstreet's <i>The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America</i> (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1589646/files?preview=79803645) (available on Canvas).
Week 16: Thursday, 12/4	Final Exam Review	Critical Essay due by class time
Finals Week	Course Review	Final Exam will be administered during class on Tuesday, December 16th, from 3:15 - 5:15 p.m.