

LITT 2109-001 Fall 2012
Contemporary American Fiction—Survival!
M/W 3:35-5:25pm, H116

Instructor: Dr. Kristin Jacobson (aka Dr J)
Office phone: (609) 626-5581
Email: Please use our Blackboard email
Office Hours: MWF 1-2pm and by appointment

Office Location: F-243
Mailbox: Arts and Humanities, K-150

Course Description: This course explores what constitutes the contemporary American experience by surveying fiction written since 1990. Specifically we will be reading and analyzing a range of novels that feature survival as a primary theme. Like much American literature before it, these stories are deeply concerned with what it means to be American. In doing so, they engage defining American concepts, such as: home, family, community, nation, security, borders, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. The novels also frequently employ experimental techniques and fantastical content. As a result, they may challenge our conventional notions of high and low cultural forms and our understanding of what it means to be American. **NOTE:** Some novels have explicit descriptions and graphic content; students should be prepared discuss novels with difficult and—for some—potentially offensive content (such as, drug use, murder, sexual abuse, and genocide).

The course also focuses on learning and practicing the fundamentals of literary analysis: close reading. Students will be expected to learn close reading terms and skills. The course assignments provide opportunities to demonstrate these close reading abilities. This is a reading, writing, and discussion intensive course: our tasks will include reading, discussing, researching, and writing about these novels in order to characterize and understand better their literary, historical, and cultural significance.

The course has two aims: to broaden your understanding and appreciation of contemporary American fiction and to develop your close reading skills. In particular, you will:

- **Develop skills in expressing yourself orally and in writing** (e.g., the written and oral presentation assignments give you practice in these skills and opportunities to show what you have learned)
- **Learn to apply course material** (e.g., you will hone your close reading skills and demonstrate your understanding of the genre of cotemporary American fiction)
- **Learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas** (e.g., you will use close reading techniques to analyze and evaluate critically contemporary American fiction and culture)

Email Policy:

1. Use Blackboard email for all course-related correspondence.
2. I usually check email each day in the morning. Please plan your email questions accordingly and, while I often respond immediately, allow a twenty-four hour time frame for my reply.
3. Always visit my office hours with specific questions about course material. If you were absent, contact a classmate with questions about missed material first and then visit office hours if you still have questions.
4. Visit instructor office hours to discuss grades. This includes final grades. Grades should be discussed in person during office hours or other arranged meetings. I do not discuss grades via email.

Office Hours: Think of my office as an extension of the classroom and use my office hours to discuss any aspect of the reading and material covered during class: come chat with me about your class assignments, writing, questions about the reading, quizzes, lecture or discussion, ideas you wish to develop, reading and interpretive strategies you'd like to try, career and academic goals, and so on. Students who visit office hours tend to perform better.

Accommodation for Students with Special Needs: Stockton College complies with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations should contact the Learning Access Program located in the West Quad Building, Suite 110 or by call 652-4988. Additional information on the program may be obtained from Stockton web site <http://www2.stockton.edu/wellness/lap.html>.

Academic Dishonesty: Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and risk failing the course. Other sanctions may also apply and all cases will be reported to Academic Affairs. You are responsible for knowing this college policy:
<http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=14&pageID=62>. Contact your instructor if you have questions.

Course Requirements: In this course, expect to:

- (1) **Attend class:** you are allotted 4 absences without penalty for illness, cocktail flu, personal reasons, malfunctioning alarm clocks, doctor's appointments, etc. (Note: I do not distinguish between excused or unexcused absences. If you miss 4 days and then get the flu and miss another day, you will lose 50 points for the 5th absence.) **Students entering class after the instructor records attendance, who leave before class ends, or who disappear for a substantial part of any class will be considered absent.** For each absence after your first 4, your final grade **will be reduced 50 points per additional absence**, down to and including "F." Regular, spirited class attendance is a crucial component to passing this course. I will not give incompletes at the end of the semester unless arrangements are made well in advance and you have the appropriate reasons outlined by College policy;
 - (2) **Attend class meetings prepared:** expect to devote a **minimum of ten hours per week outside of class** completing the reading, research, and writing. Unless otherwise indicated, there is a reading assignment for every class (usually about 100 pages per class). **ALL students** are expected to do the assigned reading for every class, prior to class, as preparation for class discussions. I am very text-based in my approach, and you should bring the assigned reading to every class. In other words, DO THE READING WITH GUSTO. This is a discussion-based class and if you haven't done the reading, thought a little about it, and have ready access to it, you will not be able to contribute and the class (as well as your grade) suffers accordingly;
 - (3) **Participate in large and small group discussions and assignments:** this course is what you make of it and will work *only* if everyone actively contributes;
 - (4) **Complete all assignments:** Passing the course requires timely completion of ALL assignments, long and short, in-class and out-of-class. No late/incomplete assignments will be accepted after the last day of class;
 - (5) **Unplug and Single Task:** Silence cell phones, cease text messaging, and do not surf the web or check email during class. An inability to use technology appropriately will negatively impact your final grade: **You will lose five points every time your phone disrupts class, you text message in class, and/or are asked to cease inappropriate uses of technology during class.** All disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping in class, inappropriate language directed at students/instructor, perpetual lateness, regularly leaving class, leaving class for extended periods of time, etc.) constitutes grounds for grade reduction and/or dismissal from class.
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Required Texts:

- ***The Road***, Cormac McCarthy, Publisher: Vintage Books, 2007 ISBN-10: 0307387895
- ***Through the Arc of the Rain Forest***, Karen Tei Yamashita, Publisher: Coffee House Press, 1990 ISBN-10: 091827382X
- ***A Friend of the Earth***, TC Boyle, Publisher: Bloomsbury Paperbacks 2001 ISBN-10: 0747553467
- ***Zone One***, Colson Whitehead, Publisher: Doubleday, (2011) ISBN-10: 0385528078 (please order paperback, if available)
- ***Flight***, Sherman Alexie, Publisher: Grove Press, Black Cat, (2007) ISBN-10: 0802170374
- ***The Tree Bride***, Bharati Mukherjee, Publisher: Hyperion, 2005 ISBN-10: 0786888660
- ***All Over Creation***, Ruth Ozeki, Publisher: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2004 ISBN-10: 0142003891
- ***The Hunger Games***, Suzanne Collins, Publisher: Scholastic Press, 2010 ISBN-10: 0439023521
- **Blackboard:** If you have questions about using Blackboard, consult a lab assistant or your instructor during office hours.

Recommended Text: MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Edition

Grades:

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| • In-Class Essay Quizzes (8 total, lowest score dropped) | 700 |
| • Final Close Reading Paper (6-8 typed pages) | 100 |
| • Class Presentation | 100 |
| • Class Participation | 100 |

Total: 1000

Grading Scale

100-95: A	89.9-87: B+	79.9-77: C+	69.9-67: D+
94.9-90: A-	86.9-83: B	76.9-73: C	66.9-63: D
	82.9-80: B-	72.9-70: C-	62.9-60: D-
			59.9 & below: F

Assignments:

Class Participation (100 points total): Class participation includes verbal comments and active listening to your peers. Aim to contribute **at least** one verbal comment or question during each class discussion. You may also wish to post to our message board in Blackboard to boost or maintain your participation. I recommend that you post a comment or question on the days you miss class. In addition to your daily contributions to class discussion, this category evaluates your comprehensive approach to the rough draft, peer review, and revision process and your exposure to Stockton's literary community. **NOTE: to receive a "C" or better participation grade you are required to attend at least one of the Visiting Writers readings. (Check Blackboard for dates and times.)**

Final Close Reading Paper (6-8 typed pages, 100 points): The close reading of literature is the fundamental skill this course asks you to hone. We will practice this skill in class during discussion and you will demonstrate your close reading proficiency during the quizzes and in this final close reading paper. In the paper you will select 2-4 passages from one novel to craft an argument about the novel's theme, its setting, or one of its characters. Your close reading analysis should not simply repeat class discussion. *See assignment description for more information.*

In-Class Essay Quizzes (8 total, lowest score dropped, 100 points each, 700 points total): The last day of discussion for each novel will begin with a 45-minute essay quiz. The quizzes pose a question and ask you to select a passage from the reading to close read that addresses that question, or the quiz will frame a topic and present a passage for you to close read based on that topic. Your essay should begin with a clear thesis and use close reading to support that argument. You will have the first 45 minutes of class to complete the quiz. Students entering class late will not be given additional time. You may use your book/notes while working on the quiz. The best preparation for the quizzes will be careful reading of the novels and active participation in class discussion. **No make up quizzes will be offered. (A missed quiz will count as your dropped score.)**

Class Presentation (100 points): The presentation will inform the class about an assigned literary, historical, or cultural element significant to our understanding of the assigned reading. You may sign up in a team of 2 students or do an individual presentation. The presentation must use some type of visual aide (for example, a PowerPoint presentation and/or handout) and provide to the class and instructor with a typed bibliography of at least 3 scholarly sources on the assigned topic. Individual presentations should be at least 10 minutes and no more than 15 minutes; team presentations should be at least 20 minutes and no more than 30 minutes. Presenters may focus these broadly defined topics so they best augment our understanding of the assigned reading. Teams must work together to produce a cohesive presentation. See the presentation rubric for more information on how this assignment will be graded.

Late Assignment and Revision Policy:

I understand that life is full of surprises and sometimes those surprises influence your coursework and your ability to complete assignments. As a community of learners, we also recognize that we have a responsibility to the group, to our instructor, and to ourselves. We understand that every action has a consequence—even when circumstance may limit our power to act. To balance individual and community needs, we have the following guidelines for late assignments.

In-Class Essay Quizzes: No make up quizzes will be offered. If you miss a quiz due to illness or a planned absence, this quiz will count as your dropped quiz score.

Papers: *Papers are due at the beginning of class.* Late papers will be docked 5 percentage points per day late. So, if a B (85%) paper due on Tuesday at 8:30am were passed in on Monday at 4:30pm, the recorded grade would be B- (80). If it were passed in on Tuesday, the paper would earn a 75. And so on and so forth.

I also strongly encourage all students to keep a personal copy of every assignment and to keep all returned assignments with my feedback until the end of the term.

Paper Extensions: Any student who asks the instructor **prior to** the due date may receive a 2-day extension from the due date listed on the syllabus. After 2 days the late paper penalty will go into effect. No exceptions. *Due to the College's grade submission deadline for graduating seniors, no graduating senior may receive an extension for the final paper.*

Of course, the extension policy will only help students who have drafted a paper and follow the expected practice of backing up documents. Back up all your files and you will be a much happier and successful individual. You may not be happy when your computer explodes or disk crashes, but at least you will not be despondent. I also strongly encourage all students to keep a personal copy of every assignment and to keep all returned assignments with my feedback until the end of the term. **No assignments will be accepted after the last class meeting.**

Paper Revisions: This course is based on the principle that revisions take place **before** the instructor evaluates a paper for a grade. To this end, consider dropping in during office hours or other arranged meetings to discuss your papers in advance of due dates. Drop in at any stage of the writing process: from your initial brainstorming to nailing down those final brass tacks. The instructor will happily read and comment on thesis statements (usually between 1-3 sentences) via Blackboard email. If you wish the instructor to read longer drafts, drop by her office hours. Additionally, Dr. J encourages you to use your peer resources during the draft and revision process, including Stockton's Writing Center: <http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=70&pageID=2>.



Thomas Doyle, 'firing for effect,' 2010, mixed media, 44 inches diameter

Syllabus—LITT 2109*

Week 1: Introductions, Themes and Questions

Sept 05: Introduction to course, assignments, students and instructor. Sign up for Presentation.

Week 2: *All Over Creation* & Genre

Sept 10: *All Over Creation*: First-Second (pp. 1-107) **Presentation 1:** Characteristics of Contemporary Fiction.

Sept 12: *All Over Creation*: Third-Fourth (pp. 108-242) **Presentation 2:** Cultural Context: Genetically Modified Food.

Week 3: *All Over Creation* & Setting

Sept 17: *All Over Creation*: Fifth (pp. 243-309) **Presentation 3:** Critical Responses to Ruth Ozeki's Work.

Sept 19: *All Over Creation*: Sixth-Seventh (pp. 310-417) **Quiz 1.**

Week 4: *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* & Point-of-View

Sept 24: *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*: chapters 1-16 (pp. 1-102) **Presentation 4:** Critical Responses to Karen Tei Yamashita's Work.

Sept 26: *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*: chapters 17-32 (pp. 103-212) **Quiz 2.**

Week 5: *A Friend of the Earth* & Characterization

Oct 1: *A Friend of the Earth*: Prologue & Part 1 (pp. 1-102). **Presentation 5:** Characteristics of Environmental Literature. **Presentation 6:** Characteristics of the Post-Apocalyptic Fiction.

Oct 3: *A Friend of the Earth*: Part 2 (pp. 103-195) **Presentation 7:** Critical Responses to T.C. Boyle's Work.

Week 6: *A Friend of the Earth* & Characterization

Oct 08: *A Friend of the Earth*: Part 3 & Epilogue (pp. 196-275) **Quiz 3.**

Oct 10: Reading & Research Day: **No formal class meeting: Dr J will be away at a conference, Oct. 9-14.**

Week 7: *The Tree Bride* & Symbolism

Oct 15: *The Tree Bride*: Prologue, Part 1, Part 2 Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-99) **Presentation 8:** Cultural Context: Hinduism. **Presentation 9:** Cultural Context: Brahmins.

Oct 17: *The Tree Bride*: Part 2 Chapter 3-Part 3 Chapter 2 (100-195) **Presentation 10:** Critical Responses to Bharati Mukherjee's Work.

Week 8: *The Tree Bride*, *The Road* & Plot

Oct 22: *The Tree Bride*: Part 3 Chapter 3-Epilogue (196-293) **Quiz 4.**

Oct 24: *The Road*: (pp. 1-156) **Presentation 11:** Critical Responses to Cormac McCarthy's Work.

Week 9: *The Road*, *Flight* & Tone

Oct 29: *The Road*: (156-287) **Quiz 5.**

Oct 31: *Flight*: Chapters 1-11 (1-97) **Presentation 12:** Critical Responses to Sherman Alexie's Work.

* Class Schedule subject to changes with notice. Readings and assignments are listed on the day they are due.

Week 10: *Flight & Satire*

Nov 05: *Flight*: Chapters 12-21 (98-181) **Quiz 6**.

Nov 07: **Preceptorial Advising**: classes resume at 3:35pm. **Reading & Writing Day: No formal class meeting: Dr. J will be away at a conference, Nov. 6-11.** Begin draft of close reading paper; begin *Hunger Games*.

Week 11: *Hunger Games* & Close Reading Popular Forms

Nov 12: *Hunger Games*: Part I **Presentation 13**: Characteristics of Young Adult Fiction.

Nov 14: *Hunger Games*: Part II **Presentation 14**: Critical Responses to Suzanne Collins.

Week 12: *Hunger Games* & Endings

Nov 19: *Hunger Games*: Part III **Quiz 7**

Nov 21: **Thanksgiving Holiday. No classes after 3:35pm**

Week 13: Close Reading Paper, *Zone One* & Putting All the Close Reading Skills Together

Nov 26: **Due: Draft of Close Reading Paper.** Peer Workshop Close Reading Paper.

Nov 28: *Zone One*: Friday (pp. 1-103) **Presentation 15**: Characteristics of African American Fiction. **Presentation 16**: Characteristics of Speculative Fiction.

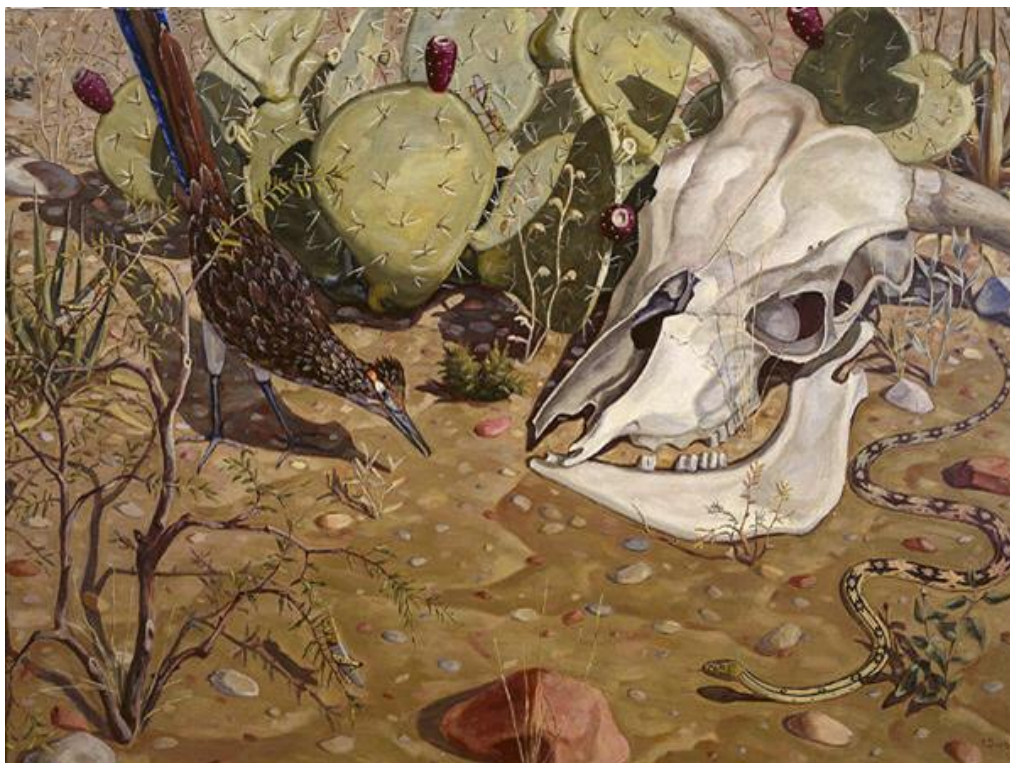
Week 14: *Zone One* & Putting All the Close Reading Skills Together

Dec 03: Catch up Day. **Due: Close Reading Paper.**

Dec 05: *Zone One*: Saturday (104-217) **Presentation 17**: Critical Responses to Colson Whitehead's Work

Week 15: *Zone One* & Contemporary American Fiction

Dec 10: *Zone One*: Sunday (218-259) **Quiz 8**



Fred Darge, "Survival of the Fittest," n.d., Dallas Museum of Art, anonymous gift