

GEN/ASC2102.3 Introduction to World Literature

Code

GEN/ASC2102.3

Title

Introduction to World Literature

Credits

3

Description

This course serves as an introduction to some of the world's great artistic literature, from across time and around the globe. It is, at best, the tip of a very big iceberg. It will encourage you to engage with some of humanity's best and brightest minds and to entertain in your own mind the same "big questions" that puzzled theirs. It will show you what words can do -- and inspire your own contribution to that often sad but glorious conversation of humanity with itself. Our readings are taken from the most widely used academic anthology in the USA and the UK, the six-volume Norton Anthology of World Literature (Third Edition). They include not only literary texts but also essays on their context. The six volumes are kept on reserve at the Library, but all students will get a free reading packet that contains all the readings. Most readings will also be available in PDF form on the L-Drive. What is "literature" -- and why read it at all? Literature is most broadly defined as any form of high-quality writing. However, some forms of literature -- the artistically ambitious or "belles-lettres" forms -- stand out for their ability to transcend time and space and speak to different audiences than the ones they were intended for. How is that possible? It may come down to a simple dictum: "Truth is beauty." What was true and beautiful a long time ago, even "in a galaxy far, far away," may still be true and beautiful in the here and now. One poet put it this way: "The rhetorician would deceive his neighbors / The sentimentalist himself / While art is but a vision of reality." And he continued in another of his poems: "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, / But out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." Maybe the easiest definition of great artistic literature is that it makes you want to "quarrel" with it. It doesn't wash over you as mere entertainment, but challenges you and provokes you -- makes you wonder, makes you think. It does for your mind what physical exercise does for your body. It hurts a little while you do it, but in the end it leaves your mind more flexible and more energetic. In other words, it makes you more creative -- in both kinds of quarrels, those with other people and those with yourself. That's why it's important not to be passive in this course. You have actively read, write, listen, and contribute. Class discussion is crucial. You'll share ideas with others to the point of understanding them well enough to write them down in your two midterms and your final paper. A reading journal will not be required this semester. However, students are strongly encouraged to keep one! You don't need a lot of background in literature to succeed in this course, but you do need to read the texts, think about them, come to class, and be ready to contribute.

Objectives

By the end of the course, successful students will have: 1. A general understanding of the major literary genres (poetry, drama, and prose) and an introduction to selected sub-genres. 2. An overview of some of the main historical periods in literary study, including Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Post-Modern. 3. An overview of some of the main geographical divisions in literary study, including both Western and non-Western traditions. 4. A general understanding of the terminology used in literary criticism and discussion, including both analytical concepts (plot, theme, character, genre, metaphor, and so on) and common topics (realism, naturalism, symbolism, catharsis, etc.). 5. An exposure to reading across cultures and thus a deeper awareness of the universal concerns that underlie cultural difference. 6. Likewise, a deeper appreciation of language and translation as artistic mediums that both shape and reflect human values. 7. Enhanced critical thinking skills through reading, writing, and discussion, including broadly transferrable skills of interpretation and analysis.

Assessment

60 % -first and second assessments

40 % -final assessment