

Beginnings to the American Experiment

ENGL 50

Spring 2026 Section 01 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/26/2026

Contact Information

Classroom: Sweeney Hall 311

Class Days/Time: Tuesday, Thursday 10:30–11:45 a.m.

Instructor: Andreas P. Bassett

Email: andreas.bassett@sjsu.edu

Office Location: FOB 128

Office Hours: Thursdays 1:50–3:50 p.m.

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 (Locrine, 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 Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* authored by the cryptic and still unidentified "W. S." *Locrine* 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.

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

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 (CLOs)

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-based 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. 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. Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*. Translated by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Eleventh printing. Baker Academic, 2008. ISBN: 978-0801020315. (Available on Canvas)
4. *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Jane Lytton Gooch. Garland, 1981. ISBN: 978-0824094072. (Available on Canvas)
5. *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. W.W. Norton & Co., 2015. ISBN: 978-0393938609. (Available on Canvas)
6. *New Atlantis* in Thomas More, Francis Bacon, and Henry Neville. *Three Early Modern Utopias*. Edited by Susan Bruce. 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. In weeks 15 and 16, you will deliver a max. three-minute “Shark Tank” style pitch to showcase your re-mediation. Your peers will “invest” in their favorite projects, with prizes awarded to the most successful pitches. Further details will be shared as we approach those dates. Emphasis will be on understanding how pre-modern texts evolve and accrue meaning as they move across generic, linguistic, temporal, national, cultural, and thematic lines.

Final Exam: A closed-book exam covering all lectures, discussions, and readings, to be given in finals week at the university-appointed time. The Final Exam will be a mix of identification, multiple choice, and short answer. It will be easy if you attended class and did the reading. We will have a short review session in the last class.

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 100 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: I will generally grant extension requests provided they are submitted in writing with a proposed new deadline *before* a paper's due date. 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. To ensure timely grading for the rest of the class, written feedback will only be provided for work submitted on time or with an approved extension. The Late Work Policy, however, does not apply to Canvas Discussion Posts & Questions.

Paper Format

Please submit all papers in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and in MLA format. Make sure to add a centered assignment name or a creative title. Remember to include a Works Cited page, too. 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>	20%
<u>Project #2</u>	20%
<u>Final Exam</u>	20%
<u>Discussion Posts & Questions</u>	20%
<u>Presence and active participation in all class sessions</u>	20%

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. *Note: all page numbers and page ranges below pertain to internal page numbers of the books themselves, *not* pages of the PDFs.

Week 1	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Thu 1/22	Hello, introductions, syllabus, course overview		
Week 2	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 1/27	<i>Beowulf</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 37–78	Discussion post & question #1 on Canvas
Thu 1/29	<i>Beowulf</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 78–109	Discussion post & question #2 on Canvas
Week 3	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 2/3	Modern Re-Mediation Case Study #1: <i>Beowulf</i> (2007)	Watch <i>Beowulf</i> (2007)	Discussion post & question #3 on Canvas
Thu 2/5	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 #4 on Canvas

Week 4	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 2/10	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 #5 on Canvas
Thu 2/12	Marie de France, "Lanval"	<i>The Lais of Marie de France</i> , pp. 1–27, 105–25	Discussion post & question #6 on Canvas
Week 5	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 2/17	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 412–32 (top of page)	Discussion post & question #7 on Canvas
Thu 2/19	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	Norton Vol. A, pp. 432–67	Discussion post & question #8 on Canvas
Week 6	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 2/24	Modern Re-Mediation Case Study #2: <i>The Green Knight</i> (2021)	Watch <i>The Green Knight</i> (2021)	Discussion post & question #9 on Canvas
Thu 2/26	<i>The Tragedy of Locrine</i> , Acts I–II	Gooch, <i>Locrine</i> , pp. 20–27, Acts I–II	Discussion post & question #10 on Canvas
Week 7	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 3/3	<i>Locrine</i> , Acts III–IV	<i>Locrine</i> , Acts III–IV	Discussion post & question #11 on Canvas
Thu 3/5	<i>Locrine</i> , Act V	<i>Locrine</i> , Act V	Discussion post & question #12 on Canvas
Week 8	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due

Tue 3/10	Thomas More, Book II of <i>Utopia</i>	Norton Vol. B, pp. 43–45, 71–120	Discussion post & question #13 on Canvas
Thu 3/12	Philip Sidney, <i>The Defence of Poesy</i>	Norton Vol. B, pp. 514–15, 524–40	Literary Analysis due Friday 3/13 by 11:59 p.m.
Week 9	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 3/17	Edmund Spenser, <i>The Faerie Queene</i> , Book I, Cantos i–ii, vii– viii	Norton Vol. B, pp. 254–56, 263–94, 343–68	Discussion post & question #14 on Canvas
Thu 3/19	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 #15 on Canvas
Week 10	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 3/24	<i>Doctor Faustus</i> , Scene 5–Epilogue	Norton Vol. B, pp. 593–617	Discussion post & question #16 on Canvas
Thu 3/26	Sonnets: Petrarch, William Shakespeare; Shakespeare, <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Acts I–II	Petrarch Sonnet 90 (Canvas), <u>OPTIONAL</u> : Shakespeare's Sonnets 3, 12, 18, 19, 130, 144 (Norton Vol. B, pp. 624, 625, 626–37, 637, 638); <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Acts I–II (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #17 on Canvas
Week 11	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 3/31	Spring Recess (NO CLASS)		

Thu 4/2	Spring Recess (NO CLASS)		
Week 12	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 4/7	Shakespeare, <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Acts III–IV	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Acts III–IV (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #18 on Canvas
Thu 4/9	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Act V	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Act V (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #19 on Canvas
Week 13	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 4/14	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
Thu 4/16	<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 4/21	<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 4/23	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 4/28	Francis Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i>	<i>New Atlantis</i> , pp. 169–86 (Canvas)	Discussion post & question #24 on Canvas

Thu 4/30	Modern Re-Mediation: Shark Tank pitches		Come to class prepared to deliver your Modern Re- Mediation: Shark Tanks pitches
Week 16	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 5/5	Modern Re-Mediation: Shark Tank pitches		Come to class prepared to deliver your Modern Re- Mediation: Shark Tanks pitches
Thu 5/7	Evaluations, final exam review, farewells		Modern Re-Mediation due Fri 5/8 by 11:59 p.m.
Week 17	Class Topic	Reading Due	Homework Due
Tue 5/12	Finals Week (NO CLASS)		
Thu 5/14	Final Exam, 10:45 a.m.–12:45 PM		