

Seminar in Genre Studies of American Literature

ENGL 254

Spring 2026 Section 80 Fully Online 4 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/20/2026

The American Novel, Beginnings to 1900

Prof. Alli Johnson

Contact Information

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Course Information

This course charts the development of the novel in the early republic, its growth as a vehicle of social change and forum for marginalized voices and groups, and its portrayal of racial and gender identities.

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (3 hours per unit per week) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities. Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments.

Monday, 7:00 PM to 9:45 PM, online

Course Description and Requisites

Focuses of a genre of American Literature such as poetry, the novel, the short story, drama, autobiography, the personal and/or philosophical essay. With prior permission of graduate advisor may be repeatable once for credit.

Prerequisite: Classified standing or instructor consent.

Note: This course satisfies graduate-level GWAR in this master's program.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Every student will come to class prepared for a critical discussion. Every student will read all of the assigned readings, come to every class meeting, engage with the texts and participate in the discussion, offer interpretations, ask and answer questions, and be respectful to other students. Please email me if you are unable to attend.

Paper Regulations

Write your papers in double-spaced 12pt. Times New Roman font, and format them according to MLA guidelines. The OWL site produced by Purdue (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>) provides good examples of MLA citations. **Late papers will be marked down 1/3 letter grade per day (including weekends).**

Office Hours and Email Policies

I encourage you to meet with me during my virtual office hours to receive assistance on assignments and papers, and ask me questions. You can email me if you are unable to meet me during my designated hours.

Plagiarism Policy

If you plagiarize, you will receive an automatic 0 grade. Please make sure you cite your sources using proper MLA format! **If you use AI to write your paper, you will receive an automatic 0 grade.** Please do old-fashioned research and proofreading.

"San José State University defines cheating as the act of obtaining credit, attempting to obtain credit, or assisting others to obtain credit for academic work through the use of any dishonest, deceptive, or fraudulent means."

"San José State University defines plagiarism as the act of representing the work of another as one's own without giving appropriate credit, regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements."

For full definition, see <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/F15-7.pdf>

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

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

Upon successful completion of the MA English program, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
2. Demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research
3. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
4. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to
 - a. organize and present material in a cogent fashion,
 - b. formulate and defend original arguments,
 - c. employ effectively the language of their discipline and
 - d. write under time constraints.
5. Demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

Upon successful completion of the MFA in Creative Writing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a high level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Demonstrate high level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 - a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 - b) formulate and defend original arguments;
 - c) employ effectively the language of their discipline;
 - d) write under time constraints.

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@sjtu.edu (<mailto:english@sjtu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Materials

All books are available at SJSU Bookstore.

Little Women

Author: Louisa May Alcott

Publisher: PENG RAND

ISBN: 9780142408766

Clotel or, the President's Daughter

Author: William Wells Brown

Publisher: PENG RAND

ISBN: 9780142437728

Iola Leroy

Author: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

ISBN: 9780143106043

House of the Seven Gables

Author: Nathaniel Hawthorne

Publisher: Dover

ISBN: 9780486408828

Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life

Author: Herman Melville

Publisher: PENG RAND

ISBN: 9780140434880

Course Requirements and Assignments

Discussion Posts and Participation

15% [PLO 3-4]

Scholarly Article Response Worksheet and discussion leading

25% [PLO 1-4]

Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography, 4/10

25% [PLO 2-4]

Paper Presentation (10 minutes), 5/11

5% [PLO 1-4]

Research Paper, (10-20 pages), 5/15

30% [PLO 1-4]

Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography. Your proposal should describe the question you hope to answer about a pre-twentieth-century American novel (from the class or not) and list five peer-reviewed sources in an annotated bibliography. See prompt for more details.

Research Paper. Your research paper should be ten to twenty pages in length and include a "Works Cited" with at least four peer-reviewed sources (academic books or journal articles). Write in clear, correct English and create logical paragraph breaks, an introduction that frames your argument, and a conclusion. Appropriate use of textual evidence from the novel and from your research are key to successful research papers. See the prompt for more details.

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

Complete assigned readings prior to attending class.

Find links to some texts in their respective modules.

When	Topic	Notes

When	Topic	Notes
Week 1 01/26/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM		Pre-class reading from Cathy N. Davidson, <i>Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America</i>
Week 2 02/02/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Susanna Rowson	<i>Charlotte Temple</i> (1791), volume 1
Week 3 02/09/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Susanna Rowson	<i>Charlotte Temple</i> (1791), volume 2
Week 4 02/16/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Edgar Allan Poe	<i>Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym</i> (1838)
Week 5 02/23/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Herman Melville	<i>Typee</i> (1846), chapters 1-17
Week 6 03/02/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Herman Melville	<i>Typee</i> (1846), finish
Week 7 03/09/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Nathaniel Hawthorne	<i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> (1851), chapters 1-10
Week 8 03/16/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Nathaniel Hawthorne	<i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> (1851), finish
Week 9 03/23/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	William Wells Brown	<i>Clotel</i> (1853), "The Negro Sale" to "A Free Woman Reduced to Slavery"
Week 10		Spring Break!

When	Topic	Notes
Week 11 04/06/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	William Wells Brown	<i>Clotel</i> (1853), finish
Week 11, 4/10	Research Proposal/Annotated Bibliography	Submit via Canvas by 11:59 PM
Week 12 04/13/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Louisa May Alcott	<i>Little Women</i> (1868), Part 1
Week 13 04/20/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Louisa May Alcott	<i>Little Women</i> (1868), Part 2
Week 14 04/27/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Frances Ellen Watkins Harper	<i>LoLa Leroy</i> (1892), Chapters 1-17
Week 15 05/04/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Frances Ellen Watkins Harper	<i>LoLa Leroy</i> (1892), finish
Week 16 05/11/2026 7:00 PM - 9:45 PM	Paper Presentations	
5/15	Research Paper due	Submit via Canvas by 11:59 pm