



Poetry in America: From the Mayflower Through Emerson

Harvard Extension School: ENGL E-182a (CRN 15383)

SYLLABUS | Fall 2018

COURSE TEAM

Instructor

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Teaching Instructor

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ABOUT THIS COURSE

This course, an installment of the multi-part Poetry in America series, covers American poetry in cultural context through the year 1850. The course begins with Puritan poets—some orthodox, some rebel spirits—who wrote and lived in early New England. Focusing on Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and Michael Wigglesworth, among others, we explore the interplay between mortal and immortal, Europe and wilderness, solitude and sociality in English North America. The second part of the course spans the poetry of America's early years, directly before and after the creation of the Republic. We examine the creation of a national identity through the lens of an emerging national literature, focusing on such poets as Phillis Wheatley, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allan Poe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others. Distinguished guest discussants in this part of the course include writer Michael Pollan, economist Larry Summers, Vice President Al Gore, Mayor Tom Menino, and others. Many of the course segments have been filmed in historic places—at Cape Cod; on the Freedom Trail in Boston; in marshes, meadows, churches, and parlors, and at sites of Revolutionary War battle.

Led by Harvard Professor Elisa New, Poetry in America surveys nearly 400 years of American poetry. Through video lectures, archival images and texts, expeditions to historic sites, interpretive seminars with large and small groups, interviews with poets



and scholars, and conversations about poems with distinguished Americans, Poetry in America embarks on a journey through the literature of a nation. Distinguished guests, including President Bill Clinton, Elena Kagan, Henry Louis Gates, Eve Ensler, John McCain, Andrea Mitchell, Michael Pollan, Drew Faust, Tony Kushner, and Nas, among others, bring fresh perspectives to the study of American Poetry.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In addition to offering students an in-depth look at the work of two iconic American poets, Poetry in America is anchored in four approaches to close reading literary texts:

1. **Making Observations**, with a focus on such skills as gathering and drawing conclusions from textual evidence; noticing patterns; tracing the development of central ideas and themes; detecting shifts in voice, tone, and point of view; and drawing comparisons across texts.
2. **Understanding Structure and Form**, with a focus on analyzing structural features and patterns, such as the relation of structural sub-units (the sentence, the stanza) to one another and to the whole; and the impact of formal choice (rhymed couplet or free verse, sonnet or limerick, lyric or narrative) on a given text.
3. **Situating Texts in History**, with a focus on analyzing the relation of authors and texts to particular cultural, historical, and geographical contexts.
4. **Enjoying Language**, with a focus on cultivating the pleasure and fun of poetry in the classroom, and on analyzing the function of such elements as figurative language, word choice, sound, and imagery within a literary text.

COURSE EXPERIENCE

Poetry in America for Teachers features a combination of video tutorials and conversations, archival images and texts, expeditions to historic literary sites, and practical exercises designed to support skills development. In this course, you will:

- Learn and practice the course's four approaches to reading a poem, which can also be applied to reading literary texts more broadly (see **Course Objectives**).
- Enhance literary analysis skills by engaging in conversation with your peers and members of the course Teaching Staff through online discussion forums,

POETRY IN AMERICA

where you will have the opportunity to apply the skills demonstrated in the course.

- Experience the power of place through video excursions to the actual sites where our poets lived and wrote.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS & ASSESSMENTS

Note: Assignments and due dates listed in the syllabus are subject to change.

Requirements for All Students

This course can be taken for graduate credit, for undergraduate credit, or for Professional Development (non-credit option). No specialized knowledge of American poetry is required.

Each week of the course runs from Wednesday at 12:00 PM EST to the following Wednesday at 11:59 AM EST. All students should plan to complete the following assignments on a weekly basis:

- **Readings:** Students are responsible for reading the poems assigned in each week. Poems will be made available as PDFs.
- **Videos:** Each week will also feature a series of videos, including tutorials by Professor New and conversations with guest discussants. Students are responsible for keeping up with the video content as well as the readings.
- **Weekly Discussion Posts:** Students will engage in conversation about individual poems and course themes with peers and course Teaching Staff through the section discussion boards.
- **Weekly Quizzes:** Students will complete weekly quizzes gauging their mastery of the content presented and demonstrating that they are staying on pace. Students should aim to complete each quiz during the content week in which it is assigned.

Non-credit / Professional Development

Students enrolled in the course for Professional Development (non-credit option) must complete Weekly Discussion Posts, required surveys, and the Weekly Quizzes; they must also attend at least one of the live sessions (Annotation Workshop or Live Poetry Seminar), or complete the make-up work, to receive their certificate. Professional Development students who meet the requirements and earn an overall score of 75% or greater will receive a certificate.

Although you will not receive a letter grade upon completion of the course, your score will be calculated as follows:

POETRY IN AMERICA

50% Discussions and Participation (due every Wednesday at 11:59 AM EST in YellowDig)*

10% Live Zoom Session (either Annotation Workshop or Live Zoom Session)

40% Weekly Quizzes

Undergraduate or Graduate Credit

Students pursuing undergraduate or graduate credit will receive a letter grade upon completion of the course.

Grading is broken down as follows:

40% Discussions and Participation (discussion posts due every Wednesday at 11:59 AM EST in YellowDig)*

10% Annotation Workshop (You will *choose ONE session* offered by Teaching Staff via the Zoom web conference tool; dates TBD)

30% Weekly Quizzes**

20% Essay (1200-1700 words [3-5 pages] for undergraduate students; 1500-2000 words [4-6 pages] for graduate students)

*Discussion Posts receive points on the basis of completion and should be completed within one calendar week (by 11:59 AM EST Wednesday each week). **We will not offer extensions on discussion posts**; please note that the discussion requirement has some flexibility (so that you can participate less fully some weeks while still receiving full credit at the end of the term).

**Weekly Quizzes should be completed during the content week in which they are assigned.

COURSE POLICIES

HES Plagiarism Policies

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-conduct/academic-integrity) and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting "the wrong draft", or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism (www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-plagiarism), where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two, free, online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

Note on Accessibility



The Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Disability Services Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. Please visit www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-accessibility for more information.

Note on Writing Assignments

There are two writing assignments for this course: a thesis paragraph assignment (in which you will draft the opening paragraph of an essay that you will later write in full), as well as a final essay. The thesis paragraph assignment is considered a draft, and so, while you will receive brief comments on your submission from your TF to help you in writing your final essay, *your grade on the thesis paragraph assignment will be entirely completion-based*. You will receive a *content-based grade* alongside brief comments on your *final essay*.

Please note: This course does not make expository writing its focus; your paper grade is a relatively small part of the overall grade in this course. ***Because of the high enrollment (and low cost) of the course, we are not able to respond in detail to writing assignments; however, you can expect to receive brief, focused, overall comments on your submissions from your Teaching Fellow. But grades and the writing feedback you will receive in this course can give you valuable insight into how your expository writing looks relative to the standards and norms of college writing, and we encourage you to use our feedback as a guide to your own growth as a writer.***

For additional guidance on writing a persuasive literary essay, please consult the Harvard College Writing Center's **A Brief Guide to Writing the English Paper** (https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/bg_writing_english.pdf). Professor New has created two resources that you can look to, as well. (We'll provide these to you during the course.) Her self-editing checklist is a document that she has distributed to students over the years. You can also watch her four-part tutorial on what it's like to grade essays (developed for the Poetry in America for Teachers course).

POETRY IN AMERICA

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: List of readings subject to change.

Unit 0 | Orientation: Introduction to Poetry in America: From the Mayflower Through Emerson (9/5 - 9/11)

No assigned reading.

Part 1: The Poetry of Early New England

Unit 1 | New Accounts of a New World

(9/12 - 9/18)

Mourt's Relation (excerpt)

Anne Bradstreet, "Contemplations"

Anne Bradstreet, Meditation 38

Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan* (excerpts)

Thomas Morton, "The Song"

Samuel Sewall, Plum-Island Passage (excerpt from *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica*)

Roger Williams, Verses from *A Key into the Language of America*

Unit 2 | Faith and Fate in Puritan Society

(9/19 - 9/25)

Cotton Mather, *A Poem Dedicated to the Memory of the Reverend and Excellent Mr. Urian Oakes, the Late Pastor to Christ's Flock, and President of Harvard College in Cambridge*

Urian Oakes, *An Elegie upon the Death of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Shepard, Late Teacher of the Church at Charlstown in New-England: By a Great Admirer of His Worth, and True Mourner for His Death*

Michael Wigglesworth, Selections from *God's Controversy with New England*

Michael Wigglesworth, Selections from *Day of Doom* (Stanzas 5, 18, 209, 189-205)

⇒ **Live Annotation Workshop:** Session dates and times TBD (between 9/24 - 10/12)

Unit 3 | Anne Bradstreet

(9/26 - 10/2)

Anne Bradstreet, Prologue

Anne Bradstreet, Bradstreet, "A Letter To Her Husband, Absent Upon Publick Employment"

Anne Bradstreet, "The Author to Her Book"

Anne Bradstreet, "Before the Birth of One of Her Children"

Anne Bradstreet, In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who Deceased August, 1665, Being a Year and Half Old

Anne Bradstreet, In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Anne Bradstreet Who Deceased June 20, 1669, Being Three Years and Seven Months Old

POETRY
IN AMERICA

Anne Bradstreet, On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet, Who Died on 16
November, 1669, Being But a Month and One Day Old

Unit 4 | Edward Taylor
(10/3 - 10/9)

Edward Taylor, Huswifery

Edward Taylor, Prologue to *Preparatory Meditations*

Edward Taylor, Meditation 1

Edward Taylor, Meditation 8

Edward Taylor, Meditation 22

Edward Taylor, Meditation 34

Edward Taylor, Meditation 45

Part 2: Nature and Nation: American Poetry 1700–1850

Unit 5 | Before the Revolution
(10/10 - 10/16)

Ebenezer Cook, *The Sot-weed Factor*

James Grainger, "Sugar-Cane"

Royall Tyler, Prologue to *The Contrast*

Unit 6 | Patriot Verse: Poetry and the Meaning of Freedom
(10/17 - 10/23)

Philip Freneau, "To Sir Toby"

Philip Freneau, "On Mr. Paine's Rights of Man"

Philip Freneau, *On the Rising Glory of America* (excerpt)

"Volunteer Boys"

"Yankee Doodle"

"To the Ladies"

Mercy Otis Warren, "Articles Which Female Vanity Has Comprised as Necessaries"

Mercy Otis Warren, *The Group* (excerpt)

Mercy Otis Warren, *The Motley Assembly* (excerpt)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Paul Revere's Ride"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Concord Hymn"

P O E T R Y
I N A M E R I C A

Unit 7 | Phillis Wheatley
(10/24 - 10/30)

Phillis Wheatley, "To the University of Cambridge, in New England"

Phillis Wheatley, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitfield, 1770"

Phillis Wheatley, "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth"

Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America"

Phillis Wheatley, "To S.M., a Young African Painter, On Seeing His Works"

Unit 8 | Symbols of the Nation and Its Leaders
(10/31 - 11/6)

Phillis Wheatley, "His Excellency General Washington"

Joel Barlow, "Hasty Pudding"

Timothy Dwight, "Greenfield Hill"

Philip Freneau, "The Wild Honeysuckle"

Philip Freneau, "On the Emigration to America and People of the Western Country"

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (excerpts)

Mercy Otis Warren, "Simplicity"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Village Blacksmith"

William Cullen Bryant, "Thanatopsis"

William Cullen Bryant, "To a Waterfowl"

William Cullen Bryant, "Sonnet to an American Painter Departing for Europe"

⇒ **Thesis Paragraph Due: 11/5 by 11:59 PM ET**

Unit 9 | The Fireside Poets
(11/7 - 11/13)

James Russell Lowell, "A Fable for Critics"

Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The One Hoss Shay"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Bridge,"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Fire of Driftwood,"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Cross of Snow"

Unit 10 | Edgar Allan Poe
(11/14 - 11/20)

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Conqueror Worm"

P O E T R Y
I N A M E R I C A

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven"

Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabelle Lee"

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Sleeper"

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition"

Edgar Allan Poe, "To Helen"

Thanksgiving Week (11/21 - 11/27)

No coursework in Canvas; no assigned readings

Unit 11 | Emerson, Week 1

(11/28 - 12/4)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (Ch. 1)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Snow Storm"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Blight"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Days"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Hamatreya"

Unit 12 (12/5 - 12/11)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Each and All"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Rhodora"

William Wordsworth, "The Immortality Ode"

⇒ **Essay Due: 12/7 by 11:59 PM ET**

Unit 13 (12/12 - 12/18)

No coursework in Canvas; no readings

***Note:** The Registrar's office will make grades available to students (via Online Services) on January 8.