



Course Syllabus:
Introduction to Reading and Writing about Culture
Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities and Social Sciences
English Department
ENGL 1153 Section 201
Spring 2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Kevin W. Johnson

Instructor's Office: BW 234

Student Office hours: MW 11:00am -12:00pm; TR 9:00am – 10:30am

E-mail: kevin.johnson@msutexas.edu

Course Description

This course will provide students an opportunity to develop critical reading and cultural analysis skills to achieve a deeper understanding of a variety of texts and artifacts. Students will explore the various factors informing the production of texts and learn how to conduct research in order to gain experience exploring different perspectives on select works and themes. The course will include several opportunities for students to articulate their interpretations and insights in essay assignments, which will be assessed for clarity, insight, and understanding.

Course Goals

- Read various literary texts united by a common theme or topic
- Apply knowledge of literary analysis to interpret literary texts
- Engage in a writing process that includes invention, drafting, and revision
- Write various genres of academic essays
- Find, evaluate, and synthesize credible sources in support of a research paper
- Use sources ethically and in contextually appropriate ways and follow a designated style guide
- Demonstrate proficient use of Standard Written English

THECB Core Course Objectives and Assessments

- Critical Thinking Skills
 - To assess the student's critical thinking skills, the Research Project rubric will be applied to the the Literary Research Project.
- Communication Skills
 - To assess the student's written communication skills, the Research Project rubric will be applied to the Literary Research Project.
- Personal Responsibility
 - To assess ethical use of sources as a measure of personal responsibility, the

Research Project rubric will be applied to the Literary Research Project.

- Teamwork
 - To assess the student's teamwork, the Peer Review Teamwork rubric will be used to assess each student's preparation for and participation in Peer Review workshops.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

- Lawn, Beverly & Joanne Diaz, eds. *40 Short Stories: A Portable Anthology*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2025.
- Gardner, Janet E. & Joanne Diaz. *Reading and Writing about Literature*. 6th ed. Bedford/St. Martins, 2025.
(Note--The digital copies of these Bedford Bookshelf textbooks have been made available to you through the MSU Texas Access & Affordability Program {aka the Follett Access Program}. For more information, please see the note from Jenny Denning at the MSU Bookstore, which is posted on D2L.)
- Wier, Andy. *Project Hail Mary*. Ballantine, 2021. Probably best to order online (through Amazon, Half-Priced Books, etc.)

Grades & Assignments

The following numerical equivalents for final grades are used: A = 100-90%; B = 89-80%; C = 79-70%; D = 69-60%; F = 59-0.

- **20% -- Writing Project One: Exploratory (Context/Text) essay** -- Paper (3-4 pages) that explores a literary element related to a work of fiction.
- **20% -- Writing Project Two: Literary Research essay** -- Paper (4-5 pages) and oral report that explores a research question related to literary or artistic work.
- **20% -- Writing Project Three: Exploratory (Summary/Response) essay** -- Paper (3-4 pages) that summarizes a work and then responds to its treatment of a theme or themes.
- **10% -- Drafting & Peer Review workshop** sessions, including working outlines and intro drafts for all papers.
- **10% -- Final Essay Exam**
- **20% -- Process & Participation** (including but not limited to reading response quiz/assignments, short writing & editing assignments, homework, class discussion activities, in-class drafting & planning exercises, or other low-impact assignments)

Tutoring Assistance

Tutoring and Academic Support Programs (TASP) provides free drop-in tutoring and homework help for MSU students. Located on the first floor of Moffett Library, TASP's Learning Center provides tutoring support in a number of core courses and subject areas. Remember that you don't need an appointment to utilize these services. Check the [TASP webpage](#) for times.

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support students' studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and

research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism, Academic Dishonesty, and AI

Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons or AI without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work, not the individual to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

Since writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the goals and objectives of this course, all writing assignments should be prepared by the student. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare students for a competitive workplace. Therefore, AI-generated submissions are not permitted and will be treated as plagiarism.

All papers will run through Turnitin for an Originality Report and an AI Report. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, including on the daily assignments. If you deliberately plagiarize on any assignments or papers or engage in any other form of academic dishonesty as defined by the MSU Student Handbook and the university Academic Dishonesty Policy, ***you will get an F in the course and disciplinary proceedings will be initiated.***

Mid-Term Grades

To help students keep track of their progress toward course objectives, I will provide a Midterm Progress Report through Navigate. Midterm grades will not be reported on your transcript; nor will they be calculated in the cumulative GPA. They simply give students an idea of where they stand at the midpoint of the semester. Students earning below a 'C' at the midway point should make an appointment with me and consider visiting the Learning Center for tutoring services.

Late Work

Late assignments (defined as work not submitted by the designated date and time posted in the D2L Dropbox/Submission folder) will be accepted within 48 hours of the original deadline, but a 10% penalty will be assessed upon the final grade of the assignment. Additionally, late work more than 48 hours after the original deadline will only be accepted with the instructor's assent (via email). A 15% penalty will be assessed in these cases. Late work submitted over three weeks after the assignment due date will not be accepted (no exceptions). If you are unable to come to class on the day an assignment is due, you should still upload it into the D2L Dropbox folder on time to avoid late paper deductions.

Submission Format and Policy

All formal assignments are to be typed, formatted, and outside sources documented according to MLA style. All formal papers will be uploaded into the appropriate D2L Dropbox folder.

By enrolling in this class, students expressly grant MSU a "limited right" in all intellectual property created by students for the purpose of this course. The "limited right" shall include but shall not be limited to the right to reproduce the student's work product to verify originality and authenticity, and for educational purposes. Please note that the D2L Dropbox folder will automatically run papers through Turnitin.com. Turnitin provides both an Originality Report and an AI Report.

Note: Students may not submit a paper for a grade in this class that already has been (or will be) submitted for a grade in another course.

Important Dates

Last day for term schedule changes/late registration: **January 28**

Deadline to file for graduation: **February 22**

Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" **April 29**. Check this date on the [Academic Calendar](#).

For more information, refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Students are expected to be familiar with this platform as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. Students can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU homepage or the portal. For assistance, submit a help ticket [here](#).

Attendance

It is important that you attend class and arrive on time, as missed class sessions reflect upon your participation in discussions and assignments, participation which will impact your final grade. Students who miss over two weeks of class will see a grade penalty. Specifically, if you have an absence total (excused or not) of more than two weeks (5 or more class sessions), you will receive a grade penalty of 7.5% off of your overall grade. Each week beyond that will incur an extra 5% off of your overall grade.

If you need to miss several classes because of personal reasons (illness, death in the family, etc), you should alert the Dean of Students office and provide them with the necessary documentation so that they can verify the situation for all of your instructors. The instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences. Please understand that a student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor after a verbal or written warning.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Withdrawal dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees, and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. However, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans, and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. Two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Other College Policies

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in designated smoking areas at each location outside.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibit the unlawful possession, use, or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state, and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License-to-carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by the MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#).

Academic & Disability Accommodations

If you require special accommodations, please contact [Disability Support Services](#), 168 Clark Student Center, (940) 397-4140. It is best that you do so at the beginning of the semester so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

Other Class Policies

Safe Zone statement

The professor considers this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect as a human being – regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Additionally, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged, provided you can agree to disagree. It is the professor's expectation that ALL students consider the classroom a safe environment.

Code of Student Conduct in class

Please keep in mind that all members of our class are investing time and money to attend Midwestern State University. MSU is required by the state of Texas to enforce a [Code of Student Conduct](#), one that asks us to work together to maintain an academic atmosphere equally beneficial and fair to all students.

The MSU Code of Student Conduct will be strictly followed in this course. Briefly, this means that any student conduct that is rude, disruptive, threatening, harassing, or has the purpose or result of interfering with an individual's academic or work performance will not be tolerated. This includes any behavior that interferes with the instructor's ability to conduct class. Such behavior undermines University Policy and interferes with the educational process. For example, if two or more students disrupt class with a noisy side-conversation during class (for instance, while the professor is explaining the details of an assignment or while another participant is contributing to the class discussion), then those students are in violation the MSU Code of Student Conduct. This is so because they are plainly interfering with the academic experience of other students.

At the discretion of the instructor, violation of the MSU Code of Student Conduct may include dismissal from the course without credit, a final course grade of "F," and disciplinary action from the appropriate University officials.

University computer lab access

The University provides four open computer labs throughout the week. These four labs feature access to Microsoft Office Suite for writing and internet access for research. The computer labs are located in **Clark Student Center (room 130)**, **Moffett Library (second floor)**, **the Dillard College of Business (room 146)**, and **Legacy Hall (room 102)**. For hours, see [MSU Lab Hours and Contact Info](#).

Microsoft Office 365

All students are able to download Microsoft Office 365 free of charge using their MSU Texas student email address. To acquire Office 365, please visit [Get Office 365](#) (educational institute access) and create an account with your login credentials.

Contacting your instructor

Email is the best way to contact me: kevin.johnson@msutexas.edu.

ENGL 1153 (Spring 2026) Course Schedule

(This schedule is subject to revision if needed)

Week 1

1/20- Introductions and Syllabus Discussion

1/22- Read & Discuss: “Reading Short Stories Closely” (Lawn & Diaz 3-9)
Begin Comparative Lit exercise: “The Tortoise” -- **Chuang Tzu** & “Wild Plums” --
Grace Stone Coates (texts provided by instructor)

***Reading Response assignment posted Thursday after class and due next Monday at 11:59 PM.**

Week 2

1/27- Read: **Grace Stone Coates**, “Wild Plums” -- (text provided by instructor)

1/29- Read: **John Updike**, “A&P” (text provided by instructor)

Week 3

2/3- Read: **Isabel Allende**, “And of Clay Are We Created” (text provided by instructor)

2/5- Read: **Alice Walker**, “Everyday Use” (Lawn & Diaz 227)

***Reading Response assignment posted Thursday after class and due next Monday at 11:59 PM.**

Week 4

2/10- Read: **Shirley Jackson**, “The Lottery,” (Lawn & Diaz 110)

2/12- Read: **William Faulkner**, “A Rose for Emily,” (Lawn & Diaz 115)

Week 5

2/17- Read: **Yvette Lisa Ndlovu**, “Home Became a Thing with Thorns,” (Lawn & Diaz 494)

2/19- Read: **Gabriel Garcia Marquez**, “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” (Lawn & Diaz 144)

***Reading Response assignment posted Thursday after class and due next Monday at 11:59 PM.**

Week 6

2/24- Read: TBA
Discuss: Example outline for Essay One

2/26- In-Class: writing workshop (including drafts and peer reviews)

***Writing Project One – due to D2L on Sunday (3/1/2026) at 11:59 PM.**

Week 7

3/3- Read: **Andy Weir**, *Project Hail Mary* (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

3/5- Read: Andy Weir, Project Hail Mary (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

3/10 & 3/12 Spring Break (no class)

Week 8

3/17- Read: Andy Weir, Project Hail Mary (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

3/19- Read: Andy Weir, Project Hail Mary (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

****Reading Response assignment posted Thursday after class and due next Monday at 11:59 PM.**

Week 9

3/24- Read: Andy Weir, Project Hail Mary (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

3/26- Read: Andy Weir, Project Hail Mary (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

Week 10

3/31- Read: Andy Weir, Project Hail Mary (novel reading schedule to be announced later.)

4/2- In-Class: writing workshop (including drafts and peer reviews)

*** Writing Project Two -- due to D2L on Sunday (4/4/2026) at 11:59 PM.**

Week 11

4/7- Read: *Ursula K Le Guin*, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (*text provided by instructor*)

4/9- Read: *James Baldwin*, "Sonny's Blues" (Lawn & Diaz 172)

Week 12

4/14- Read: *Julio Cortázar*, "Bestiary," Part I (*text provided by instructor*)

4/16- Read: *Julio Cortázar*, "Bestiary," Part II (*text provided by instructor*)

***Reading Response assignment posted Thursday after class and due next Monday at 11:59 PM.**

Week 13

4/21- Read: *Lauren Groff*, "At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners" (Lawn & Diaz 344)

4/23- Read: *Franz Kafka*, "A Hunger Artist" (Lawn & Diaz 101)

Week 14

4/28- Read: *Louise Erdrich*, "The Red Convertible" (Lawn & Diaz 255)

4/30- Read: *Ernest Hemingway*, "Hills Like White Elephants," (Lawn & Diaz 110)

***Reading Response assignment posted Thursday after class and due next Monday at 11:59 PM.**

Week 15

5/5- TBA

5/7- In-Class: writing workshop (including drafts and peer reviews)

***Writing Project Three -- due to D2L on Saturday (5/9/2026) at 11:59 PM.**

Week 16

Final Exams