

## English 3723: The 80s

Fall 2026

Professor Todd Giles

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Class meets 12:30-1:50 TR in DB 342

Office Hours: 10:00-11:00 MWF & 11:00-12:00 TR

### Required Texts

- Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Vintage, 1992. (9780679738565)
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*. Penguin, 1998. (9780140274981)
- Bret Easton Ellis, *Less than Zero*. Vintage, 1985. (9780679781493)
- William Gibson, *Neuromancer*. Ace, 2000. (9780441007462)
- Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights Big City*. Vintage, 1984. (9780394726410)
- Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen*. DC Comics, 1987. (9780930289232)

### Course Description

The 80s was a decade highlighted by Wall Street greed, Cold War fears, Reaganomics, the social and political conservatism of the New Right, conspicuous consumption, and the outbreak of the AIDS and crack epidemics. It was also the decade that launched Cable TV, Yuppies, MTV, Madonna, New Wave, the Walkman, personal computers, and teen movies like *The Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink*. We will take a cultural studies approach to 80s literature by exploring it through the lens of popular culture and postmodern theory as we read it in conversation with the music, film, television, and art of the era.

### Suggested Readings

(For a more diverse and inclusive sense of literature written during the 80s, see the following):

- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller* (1981)
- Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
- Sonia Sanchez, *Homegirls and Handgrenades* (1984)
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
- Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)
- Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)
- Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989)

## Course Requirements

| Assignments                    | Grade Percent |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| In-Class Participation         | 10%           |
| Daily Writing/Homework/Quizzes | 70%           |
| Final Self-Reflection Essay    | 20%           |

## Grading Policy

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

## Daily Writing and Class Activities

Your course grade is directly tied to keeping up with the readings, which means we will have daily in- and out-of-class writings, including brief in-class writing prompts, reading quizzes, in-class small group work, and various short homework assignments. These will be graded on a plus/x/check/minus scale: **(+)** for doing a thorough job (100%); **(x)** for a good job (85%); **(√)** for completing the work in an acceptable fashion (70%); **(-)** for not completing the work or for obvious lack of effort (0%). On occasion, some assignments might, depending on length, count for more than one daily grade. As your grade is determined by your presence and attention to the daily readings, you cannot make up in-class writing or homework.

## Class Preparation and Participation

To succeed at your daily writing, you must show that you've closely read, have at least a cursory understanding of the material, and address, to the best of your ability, the writing prompts. I do not expect you to remember exact quotations, but specific examples from the work always help get the point across. It is also good to try to tie in any relevant terminology or critical concepts from class discussions. As you read, take notes and underline/highlight what you believe are key passages in the text (a climactic scene, crucial lines for understanding the work, a summary of the argument, etc.), or things you have trouble understanding. **\*Come to each class with comments and questions!**

## Plagiarism / Artificial Intelligence Policy

Plagiarism (including AI-generated writing) is the use of someone else's thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument in your own work without appropriate documentation, whether you use that material in a quotation, paraphrase, or summary. **\*All incidents of plagiarism will an automatic F, be reported to the department chair, and kept on file. A second incident of plagiarism in class by the same student will result in the student receiving an F for the course.**

## Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If

you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Disability Support Services at the Student Wellness Center. Phone: 940-397-4140. Email: [disabilityservices@msutexas.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@msutexas.edu). Website: [DSS Webpage](#)

### **Attendance Policy**

Because this is a discussion-oriented course and the work we do in class is designed to help you understand the readings and improve your critical reading, thinking and writing skills, you must attend class to do well. By failing to regularly attend class you will not understand the critical terminology and concepts necessary to successfully complete the daily writing assignments. You are in college; come to class.

### **Tardiness Policy**

Your behavior in the college classroom should be no different than what will be expected of you as a working professional. Regularly arriving late to class is disruptive to your instructor and your classmates; as such, it will not be tolerated. Students who arrive after the daily writing assignments have begun will automatically receive a minus.

### **Electronics Policy**

Cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. If a student is caught using an electronic device during a quiz, they will automatically receive a zero. Likewise, each time a student is seen playing with their cellphone or iPod during class, they will automatically lose credit for any in-class writings, quizzes, homework assignments due that day. I will tell students they are losing credit for the day for the first few weeks of class, after which time it is not my responsibility to alert them.

Other disruptive behavior, including coming in late on a regular basis, chatting with classmates during class discussion or in-class writing, sleeping, or any other behavior not conducive to a mature learning environment, will first receive a warning; if the behavior continues, an instructor drop will be initiated.

### **Recording Devices**

The use of recording devices, including cellphones, is strictly prohibited during class unless it is part of a reasonable accommodation under ADA guideline. Reason: academia should provide a space for free-flowing ideas and discussion; surveillance of any sort infringes upon your classmates' and your professor's freedom of expression.

### **Grade Appeals**

I will be happy to try to explain the rationale behind any grade; however, I absolutely do not negotiate, haggle, or argue about grades. Part of my job is to evaluate your work and to assign a written grade to it. I do that to the best of my ability the first time.

### **Tutoring Support**

Tutoring and Academic Support Programs (TASP) provides free drop-in tutoring 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. Please see our schedule for more information about times and offerings. Remember that you don't

need an appointment to utilize these services. Some departments also provide tutoring. Check the “Tutoring at MSU” tab in the portal for more information about all campus tutoring opportunities. For Distance Education students, TASP has partnered with Thinkingstorm, an online tutoring company that provides you with high-quality, 24/7 tutoring support. Located at the top of your D2L course page, select the Distance Education Tutoring course to book an appointment with a tutor. If you are a distance education student (i.e. you live more than 50 miles from MSU and are in all online courses), but you do not see this course pop up under your courses, please contact Ashley Hurst.

### Access to Microsoft 365

All students are able to [download Microsoft Office 365](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/products/office?ms.officeurl=getoffice365?ms.officeurl=getoffice365) free of charge using their MSU Texas student email address. (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/products/office?ms.officeurl=getoffice365?ms.officeurl=getoffice365>)

### University Computer Labs

The University provides four open computer labs throughout the week that feature access to Microsoft Office Suite for writing and internet access for research.

| Location             | Hours                                                                    |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clark Student Center | 24 hours (Mon-Sun)                                                       |
| Dillard 146          | Mon-Thurs 6:00 am–7:00 pm                                                |
| Moffett Library      | Mon-Thurs 8:00 am–10:00 pm; Fri. 8-5; Sat: 10pm-6 pm; Sun: 2:00 pm-10 pm |
| Legacy Hall          | 24 hours (Mon-Sun)                                                       |

### Week 1

8/25 Totally rad intro; bust a move with VJ Ryan Samuelson

8/27 The Return of VJ RS; AARP Magazine, “Surviving the 80s” (**handout**)

### Week 2

9/1 Movie: *The Breakfast Club*

9/3 Movie: *The Breakfast Club*

### Week 3

9/8 Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (9-77); Vanity Fair, “The Young and the Wasted” (**handout**)

9/10 Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (77-143)

### Week 4

9/15 Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* (144-208)

9/17 Ellis cont.; Giles, ““Surface, surface, surface was all that anyone found meaning in’: *American Psycho* and the Pictures Generation” (**handout**); 80s Art Slideshow

### **Week 5**

9/22 Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (1-127); Newsweek, "The Year of the Yuppie" (handout)

9/24 Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (128-182)

### **Week 6**

9/29 Poetry (handout)

10/1 Poetry cont.

### **Week 7**

10/6 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (3-105)

10/8 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (109-163)

### **Week 8**

10/13 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (167-281)

10/15 Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (282-326)

### **Week 9**

10/20 Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* (3-40)

10/22 Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* (43-83)

### **Week 10**

10/27 Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* (84-129)

10/29 Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* (130-165)

### **Week 11**

11/3 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (3-95)

11/5 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (99-131)

### **Week 12**

11/10 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (132-222)

11/12 William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (223-261)

### **Week 13**

11/17 Movie: *Blade Runner*

11/19 Movie: *Blade Runner*

### **Week 14**

11/24 Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (Issues 1-4)

11/26 **Gobble Gobble**

**Week 15**

- 12/1 Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (Issues 5-8)  
12/3 Alan Moore, *Watchmen* (Issues 9-12)