ENGL 4295: Young Adult Literature
MW 2-3:20; Location TBA

Is This Why Johnny Can’t Read?: Teaching Young Adult Literature as a Political Act

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THE COURSE
How the Course Fits into the English Program:
The course is required for the English Education major and for certification in Secondary Education; English Literature majors may also take the class to satisfy the Genre and Theory 1 or 2 (English Major Area C1 or C2) requirements.

Specific Course Description:
In their editorial from The Washington Post entitled "Why Johnny Won't Read," Mark Bauerlein and Sandra Stotsky lament sharp declines in reading by adolescents, males in particular. While they concede that the current K-12 curriculum is a large part of the problem for a reduction in lifelong learning by way of advancing literacy, they identify the preponderance of Young Adult literature (YALit) taught in reading and English classes in the secondary environment as the chief culprit, not only defining texts of this genre as "easy-to-read, short novels about teenagers and problems such as drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, alcoholism, domestic violence, divorced parents and bullying" but claiming that, in the classroom, "Older literary fare has also been replaced by something called 'culturally relevant' literature—texts that appeal to students' ethnic group identification on the assumption that sharing the leading character's ethnicity will motivate [students] to read." Such arguments point to an acute misunderstanding of the genre’s history as a scholarly field and of adolescent readers’ needs, especially since deployment of texts written expressly for adolescents works to solve problems that the “traditional-canon-only” curricula can create. The authors of the article also misconstrue the amount of YALit actually taught, since classics still dominate syllabi in grades seven through twelve, and teachers often end up explaining the plotlines of texts instead of teaching critical thinking skills that collegiate courses require. Even when considered alongside the vetted scholarship of educators and theorists in the field of YALit and in a climate of increasing illiteracy amongst young people,
Bauerlein’s and Stotsky’s contentions mark the teaching and reading of YALit as political acts.

During fall semester, YALit students will begin their work by investigating the long and varied history of the genre, from primers to problem novels and beyond. We will actively read primary texts, demonstrating our collegiate analytical abilities and discussing ways that each text reaches a targeted demographic. We will explore books explicitly written for teenagers alongside canonical texts in order to discuss the “bridging to the classics” technique used by practitioners in the field, and we will read and reflect upon multi-modal and serial texts now dominating media speculations about books that kids read. Finally, we will discuss curricular planning and Language Arts Common Core Georgia Performance Standards for secondary students and practice content dissemination in two short presentations.

**Course Objectives:**
- Students will develop an understanding of basic reading processes.
- Students will exhibit familiarity with a range of classic and contemporary Young Adult texts, many customarily taught in grades 7-12, and will participate in reading, reviewing, and critiquing such literature in a collaborative manner with peers and instructor.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of students’ abilities to learn from reading and the language arts and understanding of the ways in which novice readers process textual information.
- Students will demonstrate how to provide support to students at every stage of that process both by scaffolding specific reading skill exercises and creating accessible textual, contextual, and illustrative material for novice readers.
- Students will show an understanding of higher-order literacy, including how to build language development, strategies to advance analytical and concept development, and ways to teach both efferent and aesthetic reading.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the development of various types of moral reasoning skills through literature.
- Students will learn to select instructional strategies and develop lesson and unit plans that demonstrate a sincere effort to teach reading-learning strategies in a literature environment.
- Students will learn about the “Classics versus Moderns” debate in YALit studies and then work to devise methods that can bridge distances—perceived and real—between classic literature and Young Adult texts.
- Students will define the rights and responsibilities of teachers, parents, students, and other groups with respect to literature curriculum content and establish proficiency in writing rationales for texts that may be challenged.
- Students will demonstrate an awareness of ways to create a multicultural and gender-balanced curriculum.
• Students will advance personal-professional development through self-examination.
• Students will demonstrate in both oral and written work discipline-specific critical facility through convincing and well-supported analysis of related material.
• Students will demonstrate the command of academic English and the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.

THE WORK

Required Texts:

- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie
- *Feed*, by M.T. Anderson
- *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom*, by John Bushman and Kaye Parks-Haas, 4th edition
- *The Chocolate War*, by Robert Cormier
- *My Own True Name*, by Pat Mora
- *1984*, by George Orwell
- *Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger
- *The Wolves of Mercy Falls Trilogy*, boxed set, by Maggie Stiefvater*  
- Various links on the class resource page

*Students may purchase each of the three novels in Stiefvater’s trilogy separately or in a boxed set. Whichever option students choose, all three novels are required texts for the course. In addition to this information regarding Stiefvater’s books, you should also check the daily, detailed syllabus below to see that you are asked to read each of these three novels on your own, with a culminating due date directly after Thanksgiving, when we will begin our discussion of serial Young Adult literature.

Major Assignments:

- **Daily Driving Questions** (2 questions per class period)—10%
- **Two, short group teaching presentations**—10%
- **Mid-term and final examinations**—20 and 25%
- **Final, 10-12 page project**—30%
- **Active participation**—5%

**MAT students will be assigned to a single group in which they will complete the two Learning Lessons assignments. Each MAT student will also complete a 15-18 page Final Project along with an Annotated Bibliography containing eight secondary sources related to his/her project. See me in the office for suggested resources and examples of the Annotated Bibliography assignment, especially if you have never created one.

Detailed Description of Major Assignments:

*Daily Driving Questions/Learning Lessons*

Beginning **August 27th**, students will participate in daily assignments, of which there are two types. The first type, called Daily Driving Questions (DDQ’s), requires that
students craft two complex questions related to our assigned primary or secondary readings. Each question should not induce discussion of pure plot or rely on summary of our readings but should, instead, drive us towards some sort of analytical discussion. Appropriate questions could lead us to analyze a character or concept in a new way (e.g. “How does the relationship between Archie and Obie or Archie and Emile evidence homoerotic tension in The Chocolate War? Or “How does Salinger’s reference to David Copperfield on the first page of The Catcher in the Rye set up a literary dialog with other bildungsroman texts that came before it?”). Other questions could relate to our secondary materials (e.g. “Why do some believe that teaching classics is of the utmost importance for a “proper” education?” or “Should we save the classics for college, or should we introduce them during high school? Why or why not?”). You might also ask questions that would lead us to discuss ways to teach close reading skills or literary elements like metaphor, motif, theme, symbolism, allegory, etc.

The very best DDQ’s will reflect your close reading and complex thinking about primary and secondary materials and will not simply rehash ideas but ask us to flesh out, expand upon, or even refute them. The very best DDQ’s will not ask for simple yes or no answers but be open-ended to allow for reflection and discussion. The very best DDQ’s will evidence that you have read the material but, more importantly, that you have begun to think about ways in which the material fits in with secondary ideas, our course objectives, or even ongoing scholarly conversations.

On days when you complete DDQ’s, be prepared to provide answers to your own and to others’ questions during our class discussion. I will collect the questions at the end of each class period, and I can accept no late questions. Students can expect to engage in this daily assignment most often and will receive daily grades (√+ [95]; √ [75], or √- [55]) for each pair of questions they turn in at the end of class. There are twenty DDQ’s in all. At the end of the semester, I will drop the two lowest grades you earned on DDQ’s.

The second type of daily assignment, called Learning Lessons, will be completed twice over the course of the semester with at least four days for group preparation allowed before presentation. For each of these assignments, assigned or self-selected groups will collaborate to use specifically-designated English and Language Arts (ELA) Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and professor directions to craft a detailed, procedural Lesson Plan for one full class period.

During each of the two class days devoted to Learning Lessons this semester, half of the groups will teach one activity from their Lesson Plan during a 17-20 minute block of time. Thus, if a group teaches on the first Learning Lessons day, it will not teach again this semester but will spectate (and vice versa). Regardless of whether or not students teach an activity from their procedural Lesson Plan, all groups will turn in a Lesson Plan on both days. So: you will turn in two for a grade and teach once for commentary.

Please note that members in groups will not necessarily receive the same grade, so working together to divide work so that each contributes a fair share during the creation and teaching of the activity is imperative.
Like DDQ’s, Learning Lessons materials will be collected at the end of the periods in which they are due, and, since they are collaborated upon and then completed during class, no late or make up work is possible. Each Learning Lesson will be evaluated ($\sqrt{+} \ [95] \ ; \ \sqrt{[75]} \ ; \ \sqrt{-} \ [55]$) and counts as a daily grade.

**Mid-Term and Final Examinations**

Each in-class, seventy-five-minute exam will have an objective and subjective portion. The objective portion will be made up of quotation identifications that require student analysis and short answer questions. The subjective portion of each test will be comprised of either one long essay or two questions that require two or three paragraphs for each answer, depending on class vote. Students may utilize their annotated texts for the subjective portion of each examination.

**Final Project, Proposal, and Mandatory Peer Review**

There are two types of Final Projects in our class: students will choose either a Pedagogy Project, described below, or they may choose to complete a typical scholarly paper containing an argument, scholarly research, and analysis, and written about a true YALit text not taught in class.

The Pedagogy Project, **the option strongly suggested for all English Education majors and MAT students**, is one that requires students to choose a true YALit text not studied in class and to justify its use in a specific classroom setting via narrative before crafting two days of detailed, procedural Lesson Plans that include reference to and hypothetical fulfillment of ELA Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. The paper is written in two parts: Part One—the Justification, and Part Two—the two days of Lesson Plans.

During the eleventh week of the semester, students will turn in a three-page Project Proposal that introduces their text and a rationale for choosing it, presents a working thesis, and, most importantly, offers up a preliminary Works Cited that evidences serious, scholarly research. While the general plan and source list may well change after completion of the proposal, students cannot change their text. Students must receive professor approval on their proposal before proceeding.

**THE POLICIES**

**Grading Scale:**

All English courses 2000-level and above use a departmental grading scale. Please familiarize yourself with it, as it is the scale I will use to grade all Major Assignments. To view this rubric, please click on the link entitled “Grading Rubric (upper division),” located on the class resource Page.

**Website/Paperless Policy:**

Many of your past professors may have used Course Den for getting information to you. However, I primarily use my website (www.westga.edu/~ainsenga) and often e-mail the class with my thoughts, suggestions, or announcements. Most information for this course—this document, exams, short required texts, announcements, or resources—is hyperlinked on the website. Please check the site regularly for updates. You will be
responsible for printing out all assigned documents from my website or those sent to you via e-mail for class.

“My UWG” and Professionalism Policy:

As of fall 2006, all e-mail correspondence between professors and students must occur via university e-mail. Please send all communication to me via your “My UWG” account. Further, all students should assume a professional disposition when e-mailing or communicating about or in class and/or when speaking to fellow students, guest speakers, and/or professor about the course, scheduling conferences, or the English Education program.

Students should check university e-mail daily to avoid missing important class or programmatic messages. Checking university e-mail regularly also prevents mailboxes from filling up. If university mailboxes fill up, messages do not get queued; rather, they do not get delivered at all. Therefore, students risk not receiving important information if they do not check e-mail in a timely fashion. E-mailing is an essential part of effective and professional communication for this class, for the English Education program, for the university at large, and for the teaching profession you seek to enter.

Attendance and Disruptive Student Policies:

Our class meets twice per week on Mondays and Wednesdays. Students who miss more than four class periods—two weeks of class—cannot pass the course. Please also be aware that no distinction exists between excused and unexcused absences. Finally, please avoid repeated tardiness in a class where we seek to hone professionalism.

Students will be dismissed from any class meeting in which they exhibit behavior that disrespects or disrupts the learning environment of others. Such behavior includes—but is not limited to—repeatedly arriving late for class, allowing cell phones to ring, speaking disrespectfully to the instructor and/or to other students, checking email or surfing the web, and using personal audio or video devices. Each dismissal of this kind will count as an absence and will be applied toward the attendance requirements policy above.

Required Format:

Each major assignment, including the DDQ’s, must be word-processed and delivered in hard copy. When formatting and citing, use MLA documentation. If you need a refresher on MLA format, please see the MLA Documentation link on the class resource page or feel free to talk with me in conference.

Students with Special Needs:

Any student who has a special need should inform me during the first week of class. We will then set up a conference to discuss the specifics of the official paperwork you have received from the appropriate department.

Late Work/Make Up Work**:

As a general rule, late work is not accepted except under the direst of circumstances, and those who miss class cannot make up work missed or turn in any
work that was due on the evening of their absence. However, if you feel you have an extenuating circumstance, you should see me in conference during office hours or during a scheduled conference to discuss your problem. At that time, I will determine whether or not an assignment can be turned in late and what deduction, if any, will apply.

*I fully realize that, occasionally, “life happens” and that some problems beyond your control crop up once in a while. Never hesitate to discuss problems with assignments or attendance with me if you feel that your circumstance is dire. With honest and swift communication, many issues can be resolved to your advantage!

THE DAILY SYLLABUS

- **August 20**
  
  Student, Professor, and Course Introduction
  
  *For next class:*
  
  Reread this document, record questions and/or concerns, and read Bushman and Haas, chapters 1 and 11

- **August 22**
  
  From Primers to Problem Novels and Beyond: The History of Young Adult Literature
  
  *For next class:*
  
  - Read *The Catcher in the Rye*, chapters 1-8
  - Remember that DDQ’s commence next class period; review the requirements of this daily assignment along with examples in the “Detailed Description of Major Assignments” section of this document. Check out, too, the class resource page for exemplars

- **August 27**
  
  DDQ 1
  
  Discuss *The Catcher in the Rye*
  
  *For next class:*
  
  Read Bushman and Haas, chapter 2 and *The Catcher in the Rye*, chapters 9-13

- **August 29**
  
  DDQ 2
  
  Discuss *The Catcher in the Rye*
  
  *For next class:*
  
  Finish *The Catcher in the Rye* and read Bushman and Haas, chapter 3

- **September 3: No Classes or Office Hours—Labor Day Holiday**
September 5
DDQ 3
Discuss The Catcher in the Rye
For next class:
Read The Chocolate War, chapters 1-14

September 10
DDQ 4
Discuss The Chocolate War
For next class:
Read The Chocolate War, chapters 15-19 and Bushman and Haas, chapter 6

September 12
DDQ 5
Discuss The Chocolate War
For next class:
Finish The Chocolate War

September 17
DDQ 6
Discuss The Chocolate War
Learning Lessons One assigned; groups formed or assigned, depending on class vote
For next class:
Read the following poems in My Own True Name: “Mango Juice,” “Ode to Pizza,” “For Georgia O’Keefe,” “1910,” and “Fences” and examine the “SOAPSTONE” method, which is linked on your class resource page

September 19
DDQ 7
Discuss Mora poetry
For next class:
Read the following poems in My Own True Name: “Immigrants” and “Lost Inmigrantes,” “Two Worlds,” “Sugar,” and “Now and Then, America”

September 24
DDQ 8
Discuss Mora poetry
Mid-term Part II Vote
For next class:
Use your group’s assignment sheet to create your Learning Lessons One assignment, which is due for presentation during our next class period—remember, on the days when we have a Learning Lessons daily assignment due, you do not have to complete DDQ’s. Check out the exemplars of Lesson Plans suitable for this assignment on the class resource page, too.

- **September 26**

  Learning Lessons One (four groups teach, all groups turn in a detailed, procedural Lesson Plan)

  *For next class:*
  Read Bushman and Haas, chapter 3 and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, pgs. 1-73

- **October 1**

  DDQ 9
  Discuss *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

  *For next class:*
  Read *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, pgs. 74-129 and chapter 8 in Bushman and Haas

- **October 3**

  DDQ 10
  Discuss *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

  *For next class:*
  Finish *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

- **October 8**

  DDQ 11
  Discuss *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
  Short review for Mid-term examination

  *For next class:*
  Study for Mid-term examination

- **October 10**

  Mid-term examination

  *For next class:*
  Read 1984, book I and chapter 7 in Bushman and Haas

- **October 15**

  DDQ 12
Discuss 1984

For next class:
Read 1984, chapters 1-8 in Book 2

- October 17

DDQ 13
Discuss 1984
Learning Lessons Two assigned

For next class:
Finish 1984

- October 22

DDQ 14
Discuss 1984

For next class:
Read Feed, pgs. 3-40

- October 24

DDQ 15
Discuss Feed

For next class:
- Use your group's assignment sheet and texts to create your Learning Lessons Two assignment, which is due for presentation during our next class period
- Read Feed, pgs. 41-106

- October 29

Learning Lessons Two (three groups teach)

For next class:
Read Feed, pgs. 107-165

- October 31

DDQ 16
Discuss Feed and Final Project proposal

For next class:
Finish Feed and read chapter 10 in Bushman and Haas

- November 5

DDQ 17
Discuss Feed and Final Project proposal

For next class:
Read Speak, pgs. 3-top of 65 and complete Final Project proposal

- **November 7**

DDQ 18
Turn in Final Project Proposal
Discuss Speak
**For next class:**
Read Speak, pgs. 65-159

- **November 12**

DDQ 19
Discuss Speak
**For next class:**
Finish Speak

- **November 14**

DDQ 20
Discuss Speak
Introduction to Stiefvater trilogy
**For next class:**
Make certain that you have read all three books from The Wolves of Mercy Falls series: Shiver, Linger, and Forever. This reading should have been an ongoing activity this semester, but you still have time—almost two weeks—to complete this assignment!

- **November 26**

DDQ 21
The Serial YA Novel: Big Bucks, Big Jest, Big Payoff?
Discuss Stiefvater trilogy
**For next class:**
If, for some reason, you have not completed the Stiefvater trilogy, please do so; aside from this task, you should be working on your Final Project

- **November 28**

Course Evaluations
Discuss Stiefvater trilogy
*Final examination review: students will schedule this time with the professor*
*Final examination: 2 p.m. on December 3*
*Final Project due: 4:30 on December 4 at Dr. Insenga's office*