“You’ve Still Got Lightning in You”: The Preserving Power of Adolescence

THE CONTACT INFORMATION
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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. Master’s in the Art of Teaching (MAT) degree students from the College of Education (COE) also take the course to fulfill that program’s requirements.

Section-Specific Course Description:
In the penultimate scene of Wes Anderson’s film Moonrise Kingdom (2012), adolescent protagonists Sam and Suzy share a kiss on top of a church steeple as a blinding maelstrom swirls around them. This dissonant moment occurs right after they have been “married” by a Pigeon Scout and after Sam was struck by lightning and scampered away unscathed. In typical Anderson fashion, such oddities are ubiquitous, so it is not surprising that literal sparks fly between them when their lips touch. Deadpan,
Suzy quips “You’ve still got lightning in you.” The blue volts zap and crackle, etching out a larger meaning for us to ponder: the great virtue in their matter-of-fact teenage love, in a charged yet innocent kiss.

Despite their preternatural connection, quirky Suzy and Sam are beset by their parents; by the local sheriff; by their pubescent enemies, a “beige mob” of Pigeon Scouts; by a lovely little dog; and by torrents of flood waters. They successfully flee these pursuants only to come face to face with an unseen but looming nemesis: adulthood. Growing up, others tell them, means surrendering life force—their “lightning”—and acquiescing to transformation, something this pair is unwilling to do.

Each young adult protagonist in this coming spring semester’s texts, like Sam and Suzy, locates and wishes to preserve an elemental flash of childhood magic, a bolt illuminating the sky of childhood, momentarily paving the way towards briefcases and business suits, motherhood and mortgages. Our class will investigate typical Bildungsroman narratives like the one in Moonrise Kingdom and will work to contextualize each new character’s social and historical position in order to develop a greater depth of understanding of the genre, its many forms, its various applications, and, of course, those wonderful creatures—adolescents—who serve as the target audience of YALit.

We will practice consistent close reading and Socratic/Roundtable discussion of YALit from four literary genres: the novel, poetry, motion pictures, and an acclaimed television series. We will discuss ways in which Reader Response criticism buoys up a teacher’s work but can also sink a classroom if she’s not careful with deploying this tool, and we will demonstrate through scholarly research, writing, and verbal presentation our growing understanding of the genre of YALit.

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 (in the order you will read them)*:

- Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom, by John Bushman and Kaye Parks-Haas
- My So-Called Life (entire season), directed by Scott Winant
- Seventeen, by Booth Tarkington
- Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger
- Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret, by Judy Blume
- Night, by Elie Wiesel
- My Own True Name, by Pat Mora
- The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, by Sherman Alexie
- Tears of a Tiger, by Sharon Draper
- Moonrise Kingdom, directed by Wes Anderson
- Cinder, by Marissa Meyer

*You may obtain your texts at the University bookstore, may purchase them from an online outlet, or may even borrow my text to Xerox and/or read before returning it within a reasonable time period. The library has copies of My So-Called Life and Moonrise Kingdom on reserve, and My So-Called Life is also available via instant viewing on Netflix. Whatever retailer or venue you use to acquire class texts, one aspect is constant: each is a required text, and you are expected to bring these texts and annotations to class for our spirited discussions.

Major Assignments:**

- Daily Driving Questions (15%)
- Mid-Term Examination (20%)
- Final Examination (30%)
- Final Project: either a 10-12 page Pedagogy Project or a 10-12 page Scholarly Research Paper (25%)
- Engagement in all classroom activities, especially collaborative assignments and class discussions related to primary and secondary materials (10%)
**MAT students will complete a 15-18 page Final Project and will complete an Annotated Bibliography of eight sources. See me and/or the class resource page for helpful links related to Annotated Bibliographies.**

**Details and Directions for Each Major Assignment:**

**Daily Driving Questions**

Beginning January 15th, students will turn in a daily assignment that I call Daily Driving Questions (DDQ’s). This assignment helps students begin understanding how to formulate complex questions for classroom discussion. The audience for this assignment is your classmates. The assignment requires that for each class period listed on the daily syllabus below you craft two complex questions related to our assigned primary or secondary readings. Each question you create should not induce discussion of pure plot but should, instead, drive us towards reflective, 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 our class to discuss ways to teach close reading skills or literary elements like metaphor, motif, theme, symbolism, allegory, etc.

Superlative DDQ’s will reflect your close reading and complex thinking about assigned primary and secondary readings and will not simply rehash ideas but ask us to flesh out, expand upon, or even to refute them. The best DDQ’s will not ask for simple yes or no answers or cut a wide swathe across a whole text. Instead, high-scoring questions will be open-ended to allow for reflection and discussion but will be anchored in the text. Thus, the 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 critical course ideas, our course objectives, or even ongoing scholarly conversations in the field of Young Adult literature.

On the evenings 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 or questions via e-mail. Students will receive daily grades (√+ [95]; √ [75], or √ - [55]) for each pair of questions they turn in at the end of each class. There are eleven DDQ’s in all. At the end of the semester, I will drop the lowest grade you earned on a DDQ.

I have provided several exemplars of high-scoring DDQ’s on the class resource page for student reference. Check them out.
**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 that require memorization of key concepts, definitions of terms, and important dates. 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—and should—utilize their annotated primary texts for the subjective portion of each examination so that they can reference specific quotations as evidence for their claims.

**Final Project and Proposal**

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 and analysis rooted in scholarly research and written about a true YALit text not taught in this class.

The Pedagogy Project, the option strongly suggested for all English Education majors and required for all MAT students, is one that requires students to choose a true YALit text not studied in class and 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 thirteenth 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—an academic argument—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 AND PROCEDURES**

**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 discussed above. 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 (now D2L) for getting information to you. However, for face-to-face courses 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, information about exams, short required texts, announcements, and 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 and bringing them with you on the days designated on the detailed daily syllabus below.

“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 an honest, 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 once per week on Tuesday evenings. Students who miss more than two class periods—equivalent to four weeks of class—cannot pass the course. No distinction exists between excused and unexcused absences, so use absences wisely and sparingly. Finally, avoid repeated tardiness in a class where we seek to hone professionalism; entering class after we begin interrupts ongoing discussion and learning.

   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 absence policy above.

Required Format:
   Each major assignment, including DDQ’s, must be word-processed and delivered in hard copy. When formatting and citing, please use MLA formatting and 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 where I can go over questions you may have.

The Disability Pledge:
   I pledge to do my best to work with the University to provide all students with equal access to my classes and materials, regardless of special needs, temporary or permanent disability, special needs related to pregnancy, etc. If students have any special learning needs, particularly those needs defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and require specific accommodations, they should not hesitate to make
these known to me, either themselves or through Disability Services in 272 Parker Hall at (770) 839-6428.

Students with documented special needs may expect accommodation in relation to classroom accessibility, modification of testing, special test administration, etc. This is not only my personal commitment: it is a right, and it is the law. For more information, please contact Disability Services at the State University of West Georgia.

Any student who has a special need should inform me at the end of the first class. We will then set up a conference to discuss the specifics of the official paperwork from Disability Services.

Plagiarism, Collusion, and Academic Dishonesty Policy:
From the English Department’s website: “The department of English and Philosophy defines plagiarism as taking personal credit for the words and ideas of others as they are presented in electronic, print, and verbal sources.” The department expects that students will accurately credit sources in all assignments. An equally dishonest practice is fabricating sources or facts; it is another form of misrepresenting the truth. Plagiarism is grounds for failing the assignment and/or course. You can also be subject to a university disciplinary review, and the university requires professors to report plagiarism in writing to the appropriate university office. Other university policies for handling cheaters are found here: The Faculty Handbook and UWG Connection and Student Handbook.

*Did you know? “Excessive collaboration” includes having family members, friends, or significant others edit your work. This means that no one should “fix” your grammar for you or “write in” sentences/ sources/ documentation for you. This sort of behavior is also cheating and will be treated as such. We will collaborate in class, and you have the University Writing Center as well as my input should you need extra advice about your writing. All assignments are included here in the syllabus on this first day, so you have ample time to complete work and/or get feedback, should you choose. Should I have evidence of any cheating, you will earn an “F” for the course. My policy, then, is a zero tolerance one.

Late Work/Make-Up Work***:
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 believe your circumstance to be extenuating, make every attempt to see me in conference during office hours or during a scheduled conference to discuss the 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 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!
**A Word on Format of and Workload in this Course:**

Our class meets once per week. While this schedule proves convenient for those who teach and/or commute long distances to UWG, it requires a rather serious work commitment from you. We will move at quick pace; each week, you will read one full primary text and at least one chapter from our secondary reader. Because we do not meet twice per week, our two and a half hours together must be structured to maximize discussion and collaborative possibilities as we learn about the genre of YALit. Arriving prepared with adequate DDQ’s and knowledge of assigned work, then, is imperative. If you struggle with being autodidactic—self-motivated to learn on your own—then you may struggle with this class’s structure. Consider these parameters carefully and visit my office to discuss any questions or concerns regarding the workload and class meeting structure.

**THE DETAILED, DAILY SYLLABUS**

- **January 8**
  - Course Introduction
  - Texts for Teens?
  - Teen Talk Days Discussion
  
  **For next class:**
  - Reread this document; write down any questions you may have for discussion at the beginning of next week’s class
  - Read Bushman and Haas, chapters 1 and 2
  - View and annotate episodes 1-6 of My So-Called Life; for helpful tips related to reading motion pictures and annotating, read the following links on the class resource page: “A Checklist for Analyzing Films”; “Analyzing and Evaluating Films as Works of Art”; “Worksheet for Analyzing Film Trailers as Persuasive Texts”; “The Basics of How to Read a Film”; “The ‘Grammar’ of Television and Film”; and “On the Scene: Analyzing Scenes in Film and Literature”
  - Remember: DDQ’s commence next class; therefore, make certain to reread the assignment details in this document and then view the exemplars on the class resource page for ideas and inspiration

- **January 15**
  - DDQ 1
  - Discuss Bushman and Haas and My So-Called Life
  - Building Context for Tarkington
  
  **For next class:**
  - Read Seventeen
  - Read Bushman and Haas, chapter 11

- **January 22**
  - DDQ 2
  - Discuss Seventeen and Bushman and Haas
  - Building Context for Salinger
  
  **For next class:**
  - Read The Catcher in the Rye


✓ January 29
DDQ 3
Discuss The Catcher in the Rye
Building Context for Blume
For next class:
-Read Bushman and Haas, chapter 10
-Read Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret

✓ February 5
DDQ 4
Discuss Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret and Bushman and Haas
For next class:
-Read Bushman and Haas, chapter 7
-View My So-Called Life, episodes 7-12

✓ February 12
DDQ 5
Teen Talk: My So-Called Life
Discuss Bushman and Haas and Bridging to the Classics
For next class:
-Read the following poems in Pat Mora’s text: “Mango Juice,” “Ode to Pizza,” “For Georgia O’Keefe,” “1910,” “Fences,” “Immigrants,” “Los Inmigrantes,” “Two Worlds,” “Sugar,” and “Now and Then, America”
-Examine—and even use—the “SOAPSTone” method, which is linked on your class resource page under the heading “Links to Resources for Teaching Writers in Secondary Schools”
-Read Bushman and Haas, chapter 8

✓ February 19
DDQ 6
Discuss Pat Mora poetry and Bushman and Haas
Short review for Mid-Term Examination
For next class:
-Study for Mid-Term Examination
-Read pages 1-73 in The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

✓ February 26
Mid-Term Examination (first or second 75 minutes, depending on class vote)
Discuss The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian
For next class:
-Finish The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian
-BEGIN work on your Final Project Proposal

✓ March 4: no regular class, but this is the last day to drop with a “W”

✓ March 5
DDQ 7
Discuss The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian and Multimodal YALit
Discuss Proposal/Research Process

*For next class:*

- Read *Tears of a Tiger*

**✓ March 12**

DDQ 8
Discuss *Tears of a Tiger*

**✓ For March 26:**
- View *My So-Called Life*, episodes 13-19
- Work on Project Proposal

**✓ March 19: no regular class or office hours—Spring Break**

**✓ March 26**

DDQ 9
Teen Talk: *My So-Called Life*
Discuss Proposal/Research Processes

*For next class:*
- Read *Night*
- Finish Project Proposal

**✓ April 2**

DDQ 10
Turn in Project Proposal
Discuss *Night*

*For next class:*
- Review the information found at the following links on the class resource page before you view *Moonrise Kingdom*: “A Checklist for Analyzing Films,” “Analyzing and Evaluating Films as Works of Art,” “Worksheet for Analyzing Film Trailers as Persuasive Texts,” “The Basics of How to Read a Film,” “The 'Grammar' of Television and Film,” and “On the Scene: Analyzing Scenes in Film and Literature”
- View and annotate *Moonrise Kingdom*

**✓ April 9**

DDQ 11
Discuss *Moonrise Kingdom* and Film as YALit

*For next class:*
- Read *Cinder*
- Work on your Final Project

**✓ April 16**

DDQ 12
Course Evaluations
Discuss *Cinder, Serial YALit, and Self-Select Reading Programs*

*For next class:*
- Study for the Final Examination
- Work on your Final Project
April 23
Final Examination from 5:00-7:30 in our regular classroom
Final Project Due on April 24 by 4 p.m. at my office—TLC 2245