

## English 124.006: The Literature of Adventure

Tuesdays and Thursdays 5:30-7, 2468 Mason Hall

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Office Hours: Thursdays 3-5, and by appointment

### Generic Course Description: Academic Writing and Literature

This class is about writing and academic inquiry. Good arguments stem from good questions, and academic essays allow writers to write their way towards answers, towards figuring out what they think. In this course, you will focus on the creation of complex, analytic, well supported arguments addressing questions that matter in academic contexts. The course will also hone your critical thinking and reading skills. Working closely with your peers and your instructor, you will develop essays and other written assignments through workshops and extensive revision and editing. Readings will cover a variety of genres and often serve as models or prompts for assigned essays; the specific questions you pursue in your essays, however, will be guided by your own interests.

### Specific Course Description: The Literature of Adventure

What defines adventure, and who gets to have one? Who gets to tell of one? How do we read narratives of adventure—and evaluate them? What does this vicarious engagement and pleasure mean for the genre of adventure writing, whether as fiction or as non-fiction? And where, finally, do the lines of commitment or safety lie for either adventurer or writer, or both? In this course, we shall frame our discussions around such questions as we read a selection of the finest adventure writing available to us. From Tenzing Norgay's profound balance of professional risk and safety, to the daring and philosophy of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's aerial voyages, to Robyn Davidson's learning and loss in her solo desert journey in Australia, to Lauret Savoy's poignant articulation of her stakes in the North American landscape, and ultimately to the ancient wind in the sails of Homer's wayfaring Ulysses, we shall range far and wide as we discuss and understand craft, allure, and responsibility.

### Course Goals

In this course, we shall work towards:

1. Developing your methods and strategies for sustained good reading, writing, revising, and editing;
2. Improving your ability to interpret literary works and to explain those interpretations in writing;
3. Inculcating critical thinking and writing;
4. Inspiring a sense of pleasure with textual interactions.

### Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

Attendance and participation	10% of course grade
One short paper (4 pages; close reading)	20% of course grade
Book or article report (4 pages; analytical)	20% of course grade
Presentation of final project	20% of course grade
One long paper (12 pages; research-based)	30% of course grade

The first essay due—a short paper of 4 pages—will be an exercise in **close reading**, asking you to read a particular work with specific attention to and pressure on its language. You will be

encouraged to spot and tease out layers of meaning—those that are apparent, and those not so apparent. You will read with an alertness for nuance and undertone to the text in front of you, and lay out in your own writing the emphases and/or contradictions you note.

In the second week of the term, I shall ask each of you to commit to a date in November on which you will present on an article or book that you would like to bring to the class's attention. You don't have to know just yet what this text will be; the readings and discussions of the first half of the semester will prove to be spurs towards your deciding on a particular essay or book you want to analyse or respond to. The report, an **analytical** essay of 4 pages, will ask you not only to employ your close reading skills, but also to analyse your selected text to state *what* it means, and *how* it makes the point(s) it does. This is not an invitation to summarise its stance or argument. Rather, it is an encouragement for you to tease out the manner in which it *achieves* its stance or argument. Thus, you will learn to both locate and use *evidence* to ground the claims you make. Note: you will present this orally in class, *and* turn in a written version. While it is your analytical essay that will primarily be graded, there will be added points for a clear, succinct, energetic, and thought-provoking presentation.

In a continuation of the exercises designed to make you a better thinker, a better writer, *and* a more confident speaker, the **presentation** of your final project will be a conference-style laying forth of *your research question*, your views on *what makes it an important question* for *all* of us to consider, and some indication of *your findings* as you begin to write your final paper. By this time, you will have completed your annotated bibliography for your final project, and will have a good sense of the thrust of the argument you wish to make in your final paper. You will use the time you have for this presentation to tap into the collective mind of the class, bounce ideas off your peers, and note their reactions and responses. During the three days of in-class presentations towards the end of term, you will be evaluated not only on how you *present*, but also on how you *respond* to others' presentations. Each of you will be expected to ask at least three (and ideally five) substantive and probing questions over the course of the presentations.

Your final paper will be a sustained piece of **research-based critical or argumentative writing**. For this, you may pick up and pursue a question that particularly compels you, respond to a piece of writing you feel strongly about, analyse a film that leaves you wanting or excited, cull evidence from various texts around you to make an argument about a social issue, or pretty much anything at all—just as long as it has a bearing on the course topic. In my experience, the best papers come out of real questions, or issues that a writer feels passionately about. I encourage you to start thinking about your final paper early. I shall be consistently available for individual consultations to talk through ideas you may have, and to direct you to sources and avenues that will be rich for the kind of exploration you wish to do. Over the years, I have had the great fortune of reading some *excellent* final papers on a stunningly diverse set of subjects, and I have learnt a great deal from them. I look forward to no less from this class. Think boldly, exercise both rigour and imagination in equal measure, and write well.

Other evaluations: on days of workshops and presentations, your classroom participation will be especially crucial. On these days, you will be evaluated on your powers of listening, assimilation, and on-point discussion. During workshops and presentations, you will have to be present at your most alert, most critical, but possibly also most generous. Please remember that the aim of good feedback is to refine an idea or an argument or a piece of written work, and we must collectively take responsibility to make that happen.

## Course Policies

1. The class is a learning community; understand that each member is a valuable and equal part of it.
2. This is a reading-and-writing-intensive course. Allow sufficient time for reading, writing, re-writing, and editing. Expect to spend class-time in intense discussion or writing exercises, and expect to spend time outside class on reading and assignments.
3. If you require extra time or other adjustments to fulfil course expectations, please let me know in the first few meetings of term so that I can plan any necessary adjustments to assignments and due dates.
4. If you *must* miss a class meeting, please let me know well in advance. It would be smart too to arrange to trade notes with a classmate in case you do have to be absent.
5. This course adheres to the Department of English plagiarism policy, with details available at <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/plagNote.asp>. I shall expect the work you turn in to be entirely your own, written specifically for this course. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment, and possibly for the course. I shall also refer any plagiarism case to the Dean of Academic Affairs, who may impose other penalties.
6. Please bring each day's reading—and pen/pencil and notebook—to class for discussion.

## Grading Standards

Grades are measures, not rewards. And many factors go into evaluating each individual paper.

However, as some very general guidelines, I have listed these outlines below:

**Grade A:** Advances a clear and persuasive thesis through a thoughtful selection of evidence.

Demonstrates engagement with and a clear understanding of the prompt. Goes considerably beyond class discussion in developing an independent reading/argument. Does not generalise but develops specific and well supported interpretations.

**Grade B:** Develops a clear thesis, well supported by evidence. Tends to be a little more superficial and obvious than an A essay, either in the thesis, or in the specific details considered, or in repeating some of a class discussion. Shows a serious attempt to understand and respond to the prompt. Does not generalise.

**Grade C:** Provides some analysis, while remaining relatively general. Uses the prompt minimally. Tends to be over dependent on class discussion and does not develop an appropriately independent analysis. Tends to generalise and to be impressionistic in advancing interpretations.

**Grade D:** Fails to analyse or argue. Forgets what the prompt was. Deals not in evidence, but in generalisations.

**Grade E:** Work plagiarised, or not turned in.

## Schedule (date, text under discussion, other agenda)

[An asterisk next to a text indicates that it is of some length, and you are advised to allow extra time for it.]

### 5 September

**Introduction to the course**

**Discussion of two short poems by Helen Mort (texts handed out in class)**

### 7 September

**Discussion of two short poems by Helen Mort**

## Self-assessment as a writer due in class

### 12 September

Tenzing Norgay, *Man of Everest*\*  
Brief quiz on Norgay's book

### 14 September

Study Case Examination at University of Michigan Museum of Art: "Adventure Photography"  
**Out of class, in the course of the next few days: meeting Dave Choberka at the University of Michigan Museum of Art in brief half-hour sessions to talk about the displayed artworks**

### 19 September

Tenzing Norgay, *Man of Everest*\*  
Brief quiz on Norgay's book  
Initial discussion of close reading strategies

### 21 September

**1-2 minute presentations based on Study Case Examination**

### 26 September

Examples of adventure/travel poetry: Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel," Nan Shepherd, "Summit of Corrie Etchachan," Seamus Heaney, "The Peninsula" (texts handed out in the previous class)  
In-class written practice of close reading

### 28 September

David Stevenson, "A Short Climb with Z-man" (text handed out in the previous class)  
In-class written practice of close reading  
**Close reading paper prompt distributed**

### 3 October

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*\*  
In-class written practice of close reading (thorough understanding of the text required)

### 5 October

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Wind, Sand and Stars*\*  
In-class written practice of close reading (thorough understanding of the text required)

### 10 October

**Draft of close reading paper due in class (please bring 3 copies of the draft of your paper)**  
**Peer-review workshops in class**  
**Peer-review responses due in class**

### 12 October

Gary Snyder, "Atomic Dawn" (text handed out in the previous class)  
**Close-reading paper due in class**  
**Mid-term self-assessment due in class**

**17 October**

Fall Study Break; no class

**19 October**

Lauret Savoy, *Trace*\*

Discussion of critical analysis strategies

In-class written exercise of quick mapping of an argument (thorough knowledge of the text required)

**24 October**

Lauret Savoy, *Trace*\*

Discussion of critical analysis strategies

In-class written exercise of quick mapping of an argument (thorough knowledge of the text required)

**26 October**

**Research Methodology Orientation (please bring your laptops—should you need, you may also borrow one from Instructional Support Services for free—to class)**

**31 October**

Robyn Davidson, *Tracks*\*

Discussion of critical argumentation, with examples (thorough knowledge of the text required)

**2 November**

Robyn Davidson, *Tracks*\*

Discussion of critical argumentation, with examples (thorough knowledge of the text required)

**7 November**

**In-class book/article reports, according to order of signing up (5+5 minutes each)**

**9 November**

**In-class book/article reports, according to order of signing up (5+5 minutes each)**

**14 November**

**In-class book/article reports, according to order of signing up (5+5 minutes each)**

**16 November**

**In-class book/article reports, according to order of signing up (5+5 minutes each)**

**21 November**

Homer, *Ulysses*\*

Brief quiz on the book

Discussion on research practices (references, citations)

**Written book/article reports due in class**

**23 November**

Thanksgiving; no class

**28 November**

Homer, *Ulysses*\*

Brief quiz on the book

Discussion on research practices (references, citations)

**Annotated bibliography for final project due in class**

**30 November**

**In-class presentation of final projects (7 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of questions and comments)**

**5 December**

**In-class presentation of final projects (7 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of questions and comments)**

**7 December**

**In-class presentation of final projects (7 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of questions and comments)**

**12 December**

**Final paper workshops (please bring 3 copies of the draft of your paper to class)**

**15 December**

**Final research papers—with self assessment—due in my Canvas mailbox by noon**

\*Submission/attendance/active participation for everything marked in **bold** is **mandatory**.