

Tentative Listing of 2025-26 English Courses

Small= 0-2 sections; **Medium**=3-4 sections; **Large**=5+ sections

WLO=ACCEPTING WAITLIST APPS ONLY: This applies to new courses or other courses that have not been pre-allocated sections.

English students: While WLO courses should ideally be in addition to the 6 courses per semester you apply for, please do sign up if you are interested--sections may well open up!

Fall 2025

English 10. Literature Today **M**

Deidre Lynch and Neel Mukherjee

All literature was contemporary at some point, but the literature that is contemporary now provides special opportunities for enjoying, questioning, and understanding the world. Literature Today focuses on works written since 2000—since most of you were born. It explores how writers from around the world speak to and from their personal and cultural situations, addressing current problems of economic inequality, technological change, structural prejudice, and divisive politics. We will encounter a range of genres, media, and histories to study contemporary literature as a living, evolving system. The course uniquely blends literary study and creative writing—students will analyze literature and make literature. The conviction that these practices are complementary will inform our approach to readings and course assignments.

English 20. Literary Forms **S**

Leah Whittington

This foundational course for English concentrators examines literary form and genre. We explore some of the many kinds of literature as they have changed over time, along with the shapes and forms that writers create, critics describe, and readers learn to recognize. The body of the course looks to the great literary types, or modes, such as epic, tragedy, and lyric, as well as to the workings of literary style in moments of historical change, producing the transformation, recycling, and sometimes the mocking of past forms. While each version of English 20 includes a different array of genres and texts from multiple periods, those texts will always include five major works from across literary history: Beowulf (epic), The Winter's Tale (tragicomedy or romance), Persuasion (comic novel), The Souls of Black Folk (essays; expository prose), and Elizabeth Bishop's poems (lyric). The course integrates creative writing with critical attention: assignments will take creative as well as expository and analytical forms.

English 97. Literary Methods **S**

Alan Niles

This course, taught in small groups and required for concentrators, introduces theories, interpretive frameworks, and central questions about literature and literary media. What do we do when we read? What is an author? What do we mean by "literature" itself? How might we compare and evaluate interpretations? How do the historical, social, cultural, and legal frameworks around a text shape its meanings and its effects? Combining major critical and theoretical writings with primary works, the course investigates how literary production and interpretation are informed by philosophical and aesthetic traditions, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, national and post-colonial identities, and the material forms in which literature circulates, from parchment books to the internet. Students will also practice fundamental literary research methods through close engagement with Harvard libraries.

English 115b. Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales WLO

Anna Wilson

What makes stories so pleasurable and revealing but also so enraging and dangerous? How are we to think about the strong emotions they evoke and learn to resist as well as appreciate their power? This course revisits Geoffrey Chaucer's classic fourteenth-century poem, *The Canterbury Tales*: the deepest and most caustically entertaining analysis of storytelling ever written. *The Canterbury Tales* consists of a series of tales told by members of a pilgrimage on their way from London to Canterbury, representatives of the internally divided social world of Chaucer's England. Some are serious, others funny, obscene, or offensive; some are religious, others not at all; some deal with issues local to England, others range across the Europe and the rest of the known world; many are told against other pilgrims. Written in a long-ago past, the poem jumps off the page, in turns unrecognisably weird and startlingly modern. We read the poem in the language in which it was written, Middle English, easy and fun to learn with early help: no previous experience with the language, or with the medieval era, is necessary. We will also explore the poem's long-ranging impact on English literature, including several contemporary reimaginings. Classes include a short lecture on a tale, and class discussion, which continues in weekly sections. Course projects include an essay, a collaborative report on one tale, and a creative option. Students of all years and from all concentrations and programs are welcome. If you are a graduate student interested in taking this class, please contact Prof. Wilson to indicate interest before term begins; there may be an additional graduate section if there is sufficient demand.

English 148. Modern Monsters in Literature and Film WLO

Deidre Lynch

Why study monsters? Though modern peoples don't fear monsters and indeed don't even believe in them (or so we tell ourselves), monsters have nonetheless done an awfully good job of colonizing twenty-first-century popular culture. At present marauding vampires and the walking dead are everywhere (and then, too, there are the internet trolls). Our world seems to dedicate a lot of energy to exactly the fears we thought we were supposed either to have exorcised by becoming modern and disenchanting or to have exorcised simply by growing up and no longer needing to look under our beds before falling asleep at night. Why does the monstrous compel us?

To help explain the fascination with the monster, this course looks backward, to nineteenth-century Gothic fiction and to the horror cinema that took up its mantle. The course's premise is that by taking seriously monsters' staying power we can learn a lot--about, for instance, the way the horror tradition has helped modernity make sense of itself. Monster stories are stories about the failures built into our systems of categorization and notions of normality. They make vivid the potential for violence in the notions of cultural purity and cultural inheritance that modernity uses to organize its accounts of identity and community.

We'll begin in the year 1818 with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Our next move will be to the fictions that were written in the shadow of that famous ghost-story competition that on a dark and stormy night ushered into being both Shelley's monster and (via the poet Lord Byron and his traveling companion John Polidori) the first modern vampire. Pursuit of this project will have us reading novels, novellas, and short stories by Sheridan Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Robert Louis Stevenson, Gaston Leroux, H.G. Wells, and others. We'll turn briefly near the end of the semester to the early horror films that gave the Gothic tradition's recurring preoccupations with the animation of the dead a new lease on life. Bringing the story of the class up to the present, we'll conclude the semester with some episodes of Ben Stiller's Apple TV show *Severance*.

English 180vw. Two Visionary Women: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Company NO SECTIONS/SEMINAR

Nicholas Watson

Julian of Norwich (born 1343) and Margery Kempe of Lynn (born 1373) are the two earliest women writers in English whose names we know. They lived thirty years and thirty miles apart, met only once over a period of some days, and wrote long, completely different books, both inspired by what they understood as visionary encounters with the divine. Julian was a Christian intellectual, a brilliant writer, intensely visual but also abstract, who spent a lifetime writing and rewriting an intricate and optimistic analysis of how to live as an aspiring and suffering human being in the world that many people around the world still live by. Margery (she did not much

like her husband's name) was a religious experimentalist, devout globe-trotter and performance artist, equally brilliant, whose energies seemed to have gone into living more than writing, but who in old age dictated then revised what many understand as the first English autobiography. After being mostly ignored for several hundred years, they are now being read with care, although by different readerships and in different ways. It is time they were brought together again.

In this discussion-based course, we read Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love* and *The Book of Margery Kempe* alongside one another, as well as in the light other women writers who drew inspiration from visions, revelations, or dreams, from the early Christian martyr Perpetua of Carthage in the third century CE to the reclusive New England poet Emily Dickinson in the nineteenth. We pay particular attention to Julian and Margery's direct precursors, Angela of Foligno, Gertrude the Great, and Marguerite Porete, among others. We consider how it was that revelations were able to make an innovative, demanding and prestigious mode of thought and writing possible for women who were excluded by their gender from the formal education available to male contemporaries. We think about what revelations are, how they function as an embodied, kinetic, and dialogic mode of consciousness, and the stylistic and intellectual experimentation this mode of consciousness enables. We speculate on potential connections between the visionary and other non-natural ways of seeing the world. Finally, we consider the excruciating difficulty of being and writing as a visionary and the cultural and psychic pressures the role of visionary involved and involves. Although the main setting of the course is the world of Julian and Margery, we do not forget that we are reading them in the now.

This course is a limited-enrollment seminar open to both undergraduate and graduate students, including PhD students in English (please contact me for enrolment details). Students in Harvard Masters' programs welcome.

English 184cf. City Fictions M

Tara Menon

Cities are made of contradictions: playgrounds for the rich and sites of concentrated poverty, highly organized and totally chaotic, an endless party and the loneliest places on earth. How do we write about them? In this course, we will visit four major metropolises around the world: London, Bombay, New York, and Seoul. We will focus primarily on one narrative work set in each of these cities—Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City*, Teju Cole's *Open City*, and Hwang Sok Young's *At Dusk*—and supplement our reading with short stories, journalism, sociology, movies, and television by writers and directors including: Zadie Smith, Micaela Coel, Edith Wharton, James Baldwin, Katherine Boo, Spike Lee and Bong Joon-Ho.

English 189vg. Video Game Storytelling L

Vidyan Ravinthiran

Although this course does discuss blockbuster games, it's primarily concerned with indie titles prioritizing discovery over system mastery—asking us to think differently. Drawing on video game scholars—Melissa Kagen, Brendan Keogh, Ian Bogost—we'll examine the gendered deconstruction of horror-codes in *Gone Home* (described by Brigid Kennedy as “an explicitly queer videogame with an explicitly queer narrative”); the interplay between the singular and the shareable in the trans micro-narrative, *Dys4ia*; and consider how *Return of the Obra Dinn* uses retrospective plotting to query a purely economic view of the world. We'll also discuss *Firewatch*, *The Stanley Parable*, *Stray* and *Stardew Valley* among other games, and consider how this art form, better than any other, probes the division identified by Theodor Adorno within capitalist society, separating “work” from leisure, or “play”. At the Bok Center Learning Lab, you'll sample games on multiple platforms and discover tools for creating game stories (engines like Unity, input devices, and storyboards).

GenEd- Fall

GenEd 1034. Texts in Transition **APPLICATION PROCESS HANDLED BY GENED**

Leah Whittington and Ann Blair

We live in a moment of “crisis” around regimes of preservation and loss. As our communication becomes ever more digital— and, therefore, simultaneously more ephemeral and more durable—the attitudes and tools we have for preserving our culture have come to seem less apt than they may have seemed as recently as a generation ago. This course examines how texts have been transmitted from the past to the present, and how we can plan for their survival into the future. We will examine what makes texts durable by considering especially the media by which they are transmitted, the changing cultural attitudes toward their content, and the institutions by which they are preserved. The European Renaissance will provide a central case study. During this period scholars became aware of the loss of ancient texts and strove to recover and restore them insofar as possible. These interests prompted new developments in scholarly conservation techniques which we still value today (philology, libraries, and museums) but also the creation and transmission of new errors, ranging from well-intentioned but overzealous corrections and “improvements” to outright forgeries. What can the Renaissance teach us about how to engage productively with these problems, both as the source of our current attitudes toward preservation and loss, and as a case study of another culture dealing with anxiety over preservation and loss? Ultimately, we hope that students will be able to think productively about how to preserve from the past and the present for the future, while recognizing that all preservation inherently involves some kind of transformation.

GenEd 1186. The Age of Anxiety: Histories, Theories, Remedies

Beth Blum

The poet WH Auden described the 1940s as “the age of anxiety,” but he could have been describing our own stress-ridden times: anxiety is today the most common class of contemporary mental health condition. This course pursues two guiding questions: how has anxiety changed throughout history and how has it stayed the same? And how have authors throughout history productively channeled anxiety into creating beautiful and meaningful works of art? Through a combination of readings and fieldwork, we’ll investigate anxiety’s potential causes, from the universal fear of death to the more historical contexts of urbanization and self-optimization, for instance, as well as its various treatments, such as stoicism, self-help, and psychopharmacology. The course combines practical and theoretical perspectives to examine the relation between anxiety and creativity and to engage with various aesthetic responses—from comedy to literature and film—to the troubles of being that anxiety designates. Smaller weekly assignments will include slow reading, technological unplugging, and proposing one improvement to the mental health culture on campus. Final project may be scholarly, creative, or a hybrid of both. Students will emerge from class readings and discussions with an understanding of anxiety as a social formation, literary preoccupation, and, when harnessed, a spur to aesthetic invention and political intervention.

Other Courses Taught by the English Department- Fall

HUMAN 9. Reading for Fiction Writers **APPLICATION PROCESS HANDLED BY HUMANITIES**

Neel Mukherjee and Laura van den Berg

There is no writing without reading. This is a fact that all writers know. Ask any writer why they became a writer, and they'll tell you that it's because they read. Octavia Butler, who came from a poor family, once said that she became a writer because she had access to public libraries. Books, in other words; they showed her what was possible. What kind of training in reading prepares one to become a writer? This is an open-enrollment creative writing course that will introduce you to some extraordinary writers who will inspire you, make you think, make you quarrel with them, fill you with wonder and awe and, sometimes, bafflement. The reading list is meant to be a stepping-stone to possibilities, to greater imaginative and creative worlds.

HUMAN 10a. A Humanities Colloquium from Homer to Joyce **APPLICATION PROCESS HANDLED BY HUMANITIES**

Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Menand, Glenda Carpio, Tara Menon, David Elmer, Jonathan Bolton

A Humanities Colloquium: from Homer to Joyce: 2,500 years of essential works, taught by six professors.

Humanities 10a will tentatively include works by Homer, Sappho, Sophocles, Plato, Virgil, Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Descartes, Du Bois, Kafka and Woolf. One 75-minute lecture plus a 75-minute discussion seminar led by the professors every week. Students will receive instruction in critical writing one hour a week, in writing labs and individual conferences. Students also have opportunities to participate in a range of cultural experiences, ranging from plays and musical events to museum and library collections.

Spring 2026

English 20 001. Literary Forms S

Glenda Carpio

This foundational course for English concentrators examines literary form and genre. We explore some of the many kinds of literature as they have changed over time, along with the shapes and forms that writers create, critics describe, and readers learn to recognize. The body of the course looks to the great literary types, or modes, such as epic, tragedy, and lyric, as well as to the workings of literary style in moments of historical change, producing the transformation, recycling, and sometimes the mocking of past forms. While each version of English 20 includes a different array of genres and texts from multiple periods, those texts will always include five major works from across literary history: Beowulf (epic), The Winter's Tale (tragicomedy or romance), Persuasion (comic novel), The Souls of Black Folk (essays; expository prose), and Elizabeth Bishop's poems (lyric). The course integrates creative writing with critical attention: assignments will take creative as well as expository and analytical forms.

NOTE: There are two offerings of ENG 20 in the spring, taught by Prof. Carpio and Prof. Pexa, but only one (listed under Carpio) appears in CATS. Please make a special note in the "Details" section of your application if you are applying for only one offering and specify with whom; otherwise, your name will be included in the rank list for both offerings.

English 20 002. Literary Forms S

Christopher Pexa

This foundational course for English concentrators examines literary form and genre. We explore some of the many kinds of literature as they have changed over time, along with the shapes and forms that writers create, critics describe, and readers learn to recognize. The body of the course looks to the great literary types, or modes, such as epic, tragedy, and lyric, as well as to the workings of literary style in moments of historical change, producing the transformation, recycling, and sometimes the mocking of past forms. While each version of English 20 includes a different array of genres and texts from multiple periods, those texts will always include five major works from across literary history: Beowulf (epic), The Winter's Tale (tragicomedy or romance), Persuasion (comic novel), The Souls of Black Folk (essays; expository prose), and Elizabeth Bishop's poems (lyric). The course integrates creative writing with critical attention: assignments will take creative as well as expository and analytical forms.

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English 97 001. Literary Methods S

Anna Wilson

This course, taught in small groups and required for concentrators, introduces theories, interpretive frameworks, and central questions about literature and literary media. What do we do when we read? What is an author? What do we mean by "literature" itself? How might we compare and evaluate interpretations? How do the historical, social, cultural, and legal frameworks around a text shape its meanings and its effects? Combining major critical and theoretical writings with primary works, the course investigates how literary production and interpretation are informed by philosophical and aesthetic traditions, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, national and post-colonial identities, and the material forms in which literature circulates, from parchment

books to the internet. Students will also practice fundamental literary research methods through close engagement with Harvard libraries.

NOTE: There are two offerings of ENG 97 in the spring, taught by Prof. Wilson and Prof. Menon, but only one (listed under Wilson) appears in CATS. Please make a special note in the "Details" section of your application if you are applying for only one offering and specify with whom; otherwise, your name will be included in the rank list for both offerings.

English 97 002. Literary Methods S

Tara Menon

This course, taught in small groups and required for concentrators, introduces theories, interpretive frameworks, and central questions about literature and literary media. What do we do when we read? What is an author? What do we mean by "literature" itself? How might we compare and evaluate interpretations? How do the historical, social, cultural, and legal frameworks around a text shape its meanings and its effects? Combining major critical and theoretical writings with primary works, the course investigates how literary production and interpretation are informed by philosophical and aesthetic traditions, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, national and post-colonial identities, and the material forms in which literature circulates, from parchment books to the internet. Students will also practice fundamental literary research methods through close engagement with Harvard libraries.

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English 111. Epic: From Homer to Star Wars S

Leah Whittington

Epic is one of the most enduring and far-reaching forms of artistic expression. From the heroic poems of the ancient Near East to modern films of quest and adventure, epic speaks to the shared values and collective aspirations of cultures, peoples, and communities. But if its formal conventions and thematic interests endure, epic changes over time. In this course, you will study the historical and literary evolution of epic as it moves from oral verse into new genres and media, reading texts from the ancient Mediterranean alongside works of poetry, fiction, and cinema from early modern Britain, twentieth-century America, and the contemporary Global South. We will look at some texts in their entirety and others in extracts, focusing on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, *The Mahabharata* (in prose and film versions), and George Lucas' *Star Wars*, with detailed analysis of Gwendolyn Brooks's American epics on Black life, *Annie Allen* and *In the Mecca*. If issues of identity, belonging, and community have always been explored in epic, what is the place of epic in a pluralist multi-culture? What are our contemporary epics today?

English 152kd. Keats Isn't Dead: How We Live Romanticism WLO

Vidyan Ravinthiran

Our thoughts and feelings about identity, self-expression, and the power of the imagination draw on the British Romantic poetry of the Long Eighteenth Century—whether we've read any or not. Focusing on John Keats (his key poems, and his key ideas, about "negative capability", the "camelion poet", and so on), this course makes unconventional connections into the twentieth, and twenty-first century. Tracking issues of race, class, gender and sexuality, we'll bounce from Keats into war verse; African-American poetries; world/postcolonial writing; the literature of social class; feminist experimentalism; and constructions of masculinity. Concentrators will learn how to analyze poetry in both closed and open forms.

English 169y. William Butler Yeats and the Modern World WLO

Stephanie Burt

One of the great creators in his, or any, era. W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) left us a matchless body of lyric and dramatic verse, including love poems, political meditations, ballads, prophetic warnings, palinodes, and rewritten

myths. He also wrote and co-wrote transcribed folktales, novels, literary criticism, memoir, political speeches, records of mystical visions, and tens of thousands of letters; promoted Irish culture; ran a theatre company; won a Nobel prize; stood against empire and theocracy (but in favor of aristocracy); and changed his mind when he knew he was wrong. We will read all his major poems and other works, with attention to their composition, along with some rivals, friends and contemporaries in Ireland and beyond; we will also look at critical traditions around him.

English 173bl. The Black Lyric S

Tracy K. Smith

African American poets have long embraced the private freedoms of the lyric poem—freedom to claim the authority of an uncontested first person “I”; freedom to wrangle language into new and startling forms; freedom to depart as needed from the strictures of linear reality. And yet, from its earliest iterations, African American poetry has also concerned itself with correcting and complicating the official narrative of Black life and Black subjectivity in America. This course will explore the means by which Black poets have innovated upon the lyric tradition to accommodate a sense of allegiance to a collective. In this tradition, the lyric poem has become a powerful tool with which to ponder the dynamics of self and other, intimate and political—and justice and injustice. Course readings will include work by seminal 20th Century American figures such as Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden and Lucille Clifton, as well as contemporary voices like Jericho Brown, Tyehimba Jess, Morgan Parker, Eve L. Ewing and others. We will also devote attention to lyric corollaries in film, music, visual art and performance. Students will be encouraged to respond to course themes and texts in both critical and creative form.

English 185e. The Essay: History and Practice M-L

James Wood

Matthew Arnold famously said that poetry is, at bottom, “a criticism of life.” But if any literary form is truly a criticism of life, it is the essay. And yet despite the fact that all students write essays, most students rarely study them; bookshops and libraries categorize such work only negatively, by what it is not: “non-fiction.” At the same time, the essay is at present one of the most productive and fertile of literary forms. It is practiced as memoir, reportage, diary, criticism, and sometimes all four at once. Novels are becoming more essayistic, while essays are borrowing conventions and prestige from fiction. This class will disinter the essay from its comparative academic neglect, and examine the vibrant contemporary borderland between the reported and the invented. We will study the history of the essay, from Montaigne to the present day. Rather than study that history purely chronologically, each class will group several essays from different decades and centuries around common themes: death, detail, sentiment, race, gender, photography, the flaneur, witness, and so on. In addition to writing about essays – writing critical essays about essays – students will also be encouraged to write their own creative essays: we will study the history of the form, and practice the form itself. Essayists likely to be studied: Montaigne, De Quincey, Woolf, Benjamin, Orwell, Primo Levi, Barthes, Baldwin, Sontag, Didion, Leslie Jamison, Hanif Abdurraqib, Helen Garner, Cathy Park Hong.

English 199ad. Adaptation: The Art of Retelling S

Anna Wilson

What makes a good adaptation? Why retell an old story? This class explores texts that are in conversation with others: adaptation, translation, fanfiction, parody, pastiche, and the remix. We will think about the role of form, genre, and media in adaptation, the decisions involved in transposing a story from novel to screen or stage, from oral storytelling to the printed page to digital archive, across times, contexts, languages, and audiences. Texts/movies discussed include fairytales, *The Great Gatsby*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and *Arrival*. We will also consider the legal frameworks, technologies, cultural institutions, and audience expectations that constrain adaptation: what is the nature of authorship? How much can a person own a text, or a character? How far can an adaptation go before audiences no longer recognize, or reject, an adaptation? What economic and cultural roles do adaptations play in our contemporary media landscape? The final assignment will include the option to create your own adaptation using some of the critical models we have explored. This is a lecture and discussion class accessible to non-concentrators.

GenEd- Spring

N/A

Other Courses Taught by English Faculty- Spring

HUMAN 10b. A Humanities Colloquium: From Homer to Joyce APPLICATION PROCESS HANDLED BY HUMANITIES

Beth Blum, Jesse McCarthy, Neel Mukherjee, David Elmer, Spencer Lee-Lenfield

A Humanities Colloquium: from Homer to Joyce: 2,500 years of essential works, taught by six professors. Humanities 10b will tentatively include works by Joyce, John Stuart Mill, Mary Shelley, Austen, Schiller, Augustine, Apuleius, Epictetus, Sophocles, and Homer, as well as the Bible. One 75-minute lecture plus a 75-minute discussion seminar led by the professors every week. Students will receive instruction in critical writing one hour a week, in writing labs and individual conferences. Students also have opportunities to participate in a range of cultural experiences, ranging from plays and musical events to museum and library collections.