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**Introduction to Literature (LIT 110)****Fall 2016****Rob Browning****e-mail:** rob.browning@mso.umt.edu**Office Hours:** (LA 217) MWF 12:15-12:45, 2:00-2:55, and by appointment

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**“To look closely with the attention of questioning changes everything.”**--Jane Hirshfield, *Nine Gates*

This course introduces students to the joys and challenges of studying literature at the college level, with the primary goal of enabling you to read with greater understanding and appreciation. Our focus throughout the semester will be the question of how interpretation works: in short, what makes a given literary text meaningful? What makes a text “literary” in the first place? How should genre—a text’s adherence to the conventions of lyric poetry, drama, or fiction—affect the way we go about making sense of a work? What do the most basic elements of literature (diction, figurative language, voice, sound, and structure) contribute to a text’s potential meanings? How do personal experiences and perspectives affect what each of us sees in a work of literature and the ways we each interpret what we see? Discussion and writing are two of the most effective ways we have for thinking through our engagements with texts, ideas, and the world beyond ourselves. For this reason, LIT 110 is both discussion-oriented and writing-intensive. The course will provide guidance through the process of writing clear and interesting essays about literature.

**Required texts:**

- Mary Oliver. *A Poetry Handbook*. Mariner Books, 1994. ISBN: 978-0156724005
- E. E. Cummings. *Selected Poems*. Ed. Richard S. Kennedy. W. W. Norton, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-87140-154-0
- William Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Ed. Russ McDonald. Penguin, 2000. ISBN: 0-14-071455-3
- Thomas Hardy. *The Woodlanders*. Penguin, 1998. ISBN: 978-0140435474
- Samuel Delaney. *Babel-17*. Vintage, 2002. ISBN: 978-0375706691
- Readings on Moodle. See top of class schedule (below) for how to access this website.

**An important requirement of this class is that you have with you in class a physical paper copy of the literature we’re reading for each day.** This includes the required texts listed just above and all the poems listed on our schedule. You can access the poems on our class’s Moodle page *and then you’ll need to print them out*. Our culture is on the cusp of print and electronic technologies, but until electronic texts can allow us to mark them up with the same facility that we can annotate a paper text with a pencil they’re not sufficient for our purposes. A physical text is a basic tool that can enable you to read literature more engagingly.

**Graded work:**

(percent of final grade)

- Poetry essay ----- 20%
- Drama essay ----- 20%
- Essay on Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* ----- 25%
- Essay on Delaney’s *Babel-17* ----- 25%
- Contributions to class discussions ----- 10%

**Contributions to class discussions:** Exploring literature in the company of other readers is an opportunity to learn about the texts in ways that we never could as solitary individuals. Our classes will be successful to the extent that each of you keeps up with the readings and contributes to our discussions. Consistent preparation and thoughtful participation typically will raise a final grade by one-third of a letter grade; poor preparation, repeatedly not having a hard copy of our readings in class, and a lack of participation will lower a final grade by one-third of a letter grade.

**Attendance** is essential to your success in this class. I notice and wonder what's up when you're not in class. If you have met with an unusual circumstance, please do not hesitate to let me know. You do not need to give me specifics (although I'll always listen). Unexpected problems are a normal part of life. Barring unusual circumstances, however, each class you miss beyond four will lower your final grade by one third of a letter grade. If you miss four classes (without excuse), your letter grade will drop from an "A" to an "A-minus," for example, or a "B-minus" to a "C-plus." All this is just to say that your attendance in this class is very important!

**Academic Honesty:** Plagiarism is a violation of trust. According to the Provost, "Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321>." Violators of the Student Conduct Code will receive an "F" for the offending paper. Each essay you submit must be signed at the bottom of the last page, assuring that the work is your own, except where indicated by proper documentation. Your signature is your word that the essay is free of plagiarism.

**Accommodation:** The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

### **Specific objectives of the course:**

1. To gain understanding of the distinguishing characteristics of the major literary genres (poetry, drama, fiction) and to analyze specific examples in light of these characteristics.
2. To learn how to perform a meaningful, interesting close reading of a literary text.
3. To engage thoughtfully with a range of different perspectives concerning the central ideas and aesthetic characteristics of a literary text.
4. To learn the stylistic conventions of formatting an essay and documenting secondary sources.
5. To become proficient in writing rhetorically effective essays (well-reasoned and grammatically sound), driven by a thesis and sustained by an organized, coherent argument.

### **SCHEDULE OF CLASSES**

*"The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter--it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." --Mark Twain*

*"Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary." --Khalil Gibran*

**Words:** You should take it upon yourself to learn each word that's new to you in the literature we

read. Keep a dictionary by your side as you read (most dictionaries, including dictionary.com, are perfectly fine).

**“Moodle”:** This is where I’ll post copies of poems, short stories, and essays we’ll be reading (or links to these); assignment sheets; slides I have used in class; and links to useful or interesting internet sites. Here is one route to Moodle: go to UM’s main web page and click on “MY” on the top bar. Click on UOnline/Moodle on the top bar. Log-in with your NetID. Look for our course in your list of courses on the left side of the page.

**According to the pace of our discussions, we will deviate from the following schedule from time to time.** Each class I will confirm the assignment for the next class. It's important that you exchange contact information with one of your classmates. Anytime you miss a class you should get in touch with that person to learn if there have been any changes to the schedule.