

## **LIT 110: Intro to Literature: How does literature engage your brain?**

Drs. Ashby Kinch (Prof. of English) and Chris Comer (Dean of CHS, Prof. of Biology)  
TTh 9:40-11:00; LA 138

### **Office Hours / Location**

**Office:** LA 126; **Phone:** x4462; [ashby.kinch@umontana.edu](mailto:ashby.kinch@umontana.edu)

**Office Hours:** TTh 11-12; W 1-2

### **Course Description**

A compelling literary text creates a vast and complex network of brains spread through time, linked together by a common stimulus: a work of literature that has more to say than what it seems to say. This staggering human phenomenon—the brain engaged with a work of literature—is the subject of this course. How does literature engage your brain? What distinctive characteristics of human intelligence are manifest in literature? Can approaching literature through the insights of neuroscience reveal important facets of how we think? We will explore these questions through readings in neuroscience that introduce students to some of the exciting recent research on the capacity and function of the brain, connecting that work with literary texts. We will conduct case studies in poems, novels, and films that demonstrate astute intuitive awareness of basic brain characteristics, including theory of mind, elastic temporality, narrative modes of consciousness, and the perceptual processes that link us emotionally with the world around us. Readings will include: Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*; Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*; Ian McEwan, *Saturday*; and selected poems by William Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens, among others. We will also screen two films, *Memento* and *Blade Runner*.

### **General Education Goals Met by This Course: Literary and Artistic Studies:**

Upon completion of the “L,” a student will be able to:

1. analyze works of art with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions, including emergent movements and forms; and
2. develop coherent arguments that critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical.

### **Course Requirements explained (IN DETAIL on Moodle)**

Weekly Grade / Moodle: 20%

The Art and Science of Reading (3-5 pp.): 10% (Sept 29<sup>th</sup> / Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>)

Two Analytical Essays on Literature (4-6 pp): 2 x 20% (Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>/ Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>)

Annotated Bibliography: 10% (Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>)

Revised Reading Paper: 20% (Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>)

### Texts: Available at the UM Bookstore

Course Handouts / PDFs: available on Moodle

Mark Haddon, the Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time. New York: Vintage, 2004. **ISBN-10: 1400032717**

Ian McEwan, Saturday. New York: Anchor Books, 2005. **ISBN-10: 1400076196**

Philip K. Dick, Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? New York: Del Ray / Ballantine Books, 1968; rpr. 1996. **ISBN-10: 0345404475**

V.S. Ramachandran, A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness. New York: PI Press, 2003.

## Class Policies

### Attendance

You may miss class three times with no immediate impact on your final semester grade, but I expect you to justify each absence in a short e-mail. In the absence of such an e-mail, you will lose all of your weekly points for class for that week. An excused absence does not, however, excuse you from the work: in order to make up the missed points in your participation grade, you need to write an additional Moodle post of a minimum of 250 words that summarizes the reading for that day. After you have missed four classes (two weeks), your weekly grade will automatically be docked by 20 points, and each subsequent absence will cost 20 additional points (4 absences = 20 points; 5 absences = 60 points; 6 absences = 80 points). By the time you reach 8 absences (4 weeks), it will be difficult to pass the class. These points can only be made up by extra credit work (see Work Requirements), and will only be possible in extreme cases of sickness or extreme family or personal crisis. If you are participating in a sponsored University activity, you must provide an explanation **BEFORE** the event, not after, and the burden is on you to make up the missed work.

### Class Discussion

A good class discussion should have the buzz of new discovery, as we share the insights we have gained from reading and thinking about compelling literary texts. You will no doubt come to the class with the idea that there are no right or wrong answers in discussing a literary text, but that is a very low bar for a good discussion. There are, in fact, better and worse approaches to a literary text, and those approaches are defined by whether they lead to productive, engaging, and stimulating dialogue (better) or attempt to shut such dialogue down (worse). The latter are usually characterized by evaluative claims—“This book sucks” / “I hated this book” or “This book was awesome” / “I loved this book”—with no substantive intellectual rationale.

For poetry, in particular, an unproductive approach is often characterized by statements such as “I have no idea what this poem is about” or “I really don’t like poetry.” A failure to engage with a poem is a failure on the reader’s part, not the poem’s. While there are better and worse poems, you can assume that the poems we are reading have withstood the test of time and are worth discussing. They may be

quite difficult, experimental, and sometimes strange. But giving up in the face of difficulty will differentiate the lazy or indifferent reader from the engaged reader: cultivating the habits of the engaged reader is the principal goal of this class.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism—representing another person’s intellectual work as your own—is an affront to the fundamental values of an academic institution, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for each student’s part in sustaining academic community. Acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and page number, all work that has influenced your thinking, including all work that you cite in whole or in part. The University’s official warning on plagiarism is spelled out in the University Student Conduct Code (Academic Conduct), available on the web through this link: [http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php)

### Add-Drop Deadlines, Incompletes

For information on these topics, please see the Academic Policies section of the current catalog (2015-16) at the following link: <http://www.umt.edu/catalog/academics/academic-policy-procedure2.php>

### Disability Accommodation

Students with **disabilities** may obtain assistance with the registration process and the relocation of classes (if needed) through Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 (406) 243 2243 VOICE/TDD. I will make, and have made, every reasonable attempt to accommodate students who are registered with Disability Services. I have endeavored to make all documents I post on Moodle accessible; if you find documents that are not accessible, please inform me and I will convert them or have them scanned again.

## Reading Schedule (Subject to Revision: changes will be posted on Moodle)

### Week 1: Reading and the Brain: Practical and Expert Strategies

**Sept. 1:** Introductions; syllabus; course requirements

**Handout:** Quotes on reading (finish for Thursday)

**Topics:** close reading; reading in the Academy; reading and contemporary American culture

**In-class reading:** William Shakespeare, “When I consider everything that grows” (Sonnet 15); Emily Dickinson, “The brain is wider than the sky” (HANDOUT)

- Sept. 3: Read:** Nicholas Carr, “Tools of the Mind” and “The Deepening Page,” from *The Shallows*, pp. 50-77 (MOODLE);  
Wallace Stevens, “The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm,” “Adagia” (HANDOUT)  
**Topics:** the phenomenology of reading; reading fast and slow; reading technologies and cognitive habits

## Week 2: Poetry: Reading Closely, “Paying” Attention

### *Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

- Sept. 8:** Selection of Shakespeare Sonnets: 1, 15, 18, 29, 30 (POETRY PACKET)  
Read: Maryanne Wolf, “The Unending Story of Reading’s Development,” excerpt from *Proust and the Squid*, 134-62 (MOODLE)  
Interview with Stanislaus Dehaene, “The Brain and the Written Word,” *Scientific American Mind* March/April (2010), 62-5. (MOODLE)
- Sept. 10:** Selection of Shakespeare Sonnets 73, 129, 130, 138, 152 (POETRY PACKET)  
Michael O’Shea, “Thinking about the brain,” from *The Brain: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-11 (MOODLE)  
Philip Davis. 2007. The Shakespeared Brain, Published on “More Intelligent Life”  
<http://moreintelligentlife.com/story/the-shakespeared-brain>

## Week 3: Your Mind at Work in / on the Poem

### *Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

- Sept. 15:** Jorie Graham, “Mind”; Wallace Stevens, “Of mere being” and “Study of Images I”; Ron Padgett, “Nothing in that Drawer”; Marianne Moore, “Poetry”; Wallace Stevens, “Of Modern Poetry”; W.C. Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (POETRY PACKET)  
David Eagleman, “The Testimony of the Senses” (MOODLE)  
V.S. Ramachandran, *Brief Tour*, “A Pain in the Brain” (1-23)
- Sept. 17:** Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art”; Theodore Roethke, “The Waking”; Robert Haas, “Meditation at Lagunitas”; William Butler Yeats, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”; e.e. cummings, “since feeling is first” (POETRY PACKET)  
Lacey, S., Stilla, R. and Sathian, K. (2012). Metaphorically feeling: Comprehending textural metaphors activates somatosensory cortex. *Brain and Language* 120:416-421 (MOODLE)  
Ramachandran, *Brief Tour*, “Believing is Seeing” (24-39)

## Week 4: Multi-sensory Thinking and Reading; Reading from the Body

### *Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

**Sept. 22:** G. Gabrielle Starr, "Multisensory Imagery" (MOODLE) and these poems:

Elizabeth Bishop: "The Fish," "At the Fishhouses"; William Stafford, "Traveling Through the Dark"; Gerard Manly Hopkins, "The Woodlark," "Pied Beauty; Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Come Down, O Maid" (POETRY PACKET)

Diane Ackerman, "Sensory Underload" (NYT, June 10, 2012; MOODLE)

**Sept. 24:** Read excerpt from Mark Doty, "Description," which includes e.e.

cummings "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" and Cole Swensen "How Everything Happens," (POETRY PACKET)

Ramachandran, Brief Tour, "The Artful Brain" (40-59) and "Purple Numbers and Sharp Cheese" (60-82)

Peter Mendelsund, "What We See When We Read" (Paris Review; MOODLE)

## Week 5: Concrete, Mimetic and Kinesthetic Poems

### *Bring draft of first paper to class on September 29<sup>th</sup>*

**Sept. 29:** Writing Workshop

**Oct. 1:** William Carlos Williams, "The Dance," "The Great Figure" (POETRY PACKET)

## Week 6: Theory of Mind, Autism, and Emotion

### *Paper 1 (close reading) due on Moodle by Tuesday, October 6<sup>th</sup> before class*

**Oct. 6:** Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

**Oct. 8:** *Curious Incident*; Phillip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1-34

Chris Frith and Uta Frith, "Theory of Mind," *Current Biology* 15.17 (2005), 644-45. (MOODLE)

## Week 7: Literature and Empathy

### *Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

**Oct. 13:** *Androids*, 35-83

Mar, R.A. et al. (2011). Emotion and narrative fiction: interactive influences before, during and after reading. *Cogn. Emotion* 25:881-83.

**Oct. 15:** *Androids*, 84-144

## Week 8: Literature, Empathy, and Embodied Simulation

### *Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

**Oct. 20:** *Androids*, 145-95

David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, "Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 11.5 (2008).197-203.

**Oct. 22:** *Androids*, 196-244

## **Week 9: Intelligent Emotion and Emotional Intelligence**

*Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

**Screening of *Blade Runner*, a film by Ridley Scott (1982): Miller Hall GLI Living-Learning Community (basement): Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>, 6:30-9:30.**

**Oct. 27:** *Blade Runner*, a film by Ridley Scott

Iacoboni, Marco. 2009. "Imitation, Empathy, and Mirror Neurons." *Annual Review of Psychology*. 60: 653-670.

**Oct. 29:** *Androids / Blade Runner*

*Bring a draft of your Androids paper to class: WORKSHOP*

## **Week 10: Memory and Identity**

*Paper on Androids) due on Moodle by Tuesday, NOV. 3<sup>rd</sup> before class*

**Screening of *Memento*, a film by Christopher Nolan (2000): Miller Hall GLI Living-Learning Community (basement): Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6:30-9:30.**

**Nov. 3:** Discuss *Memento*; memory and identity

Schacter, D. and Addis, D. R. (2007) Constructive Memory: The Ghosts of Past and Future. *Nature* 445: 27.

**Nov. 5:** Ramachandran, *Brief Tour*, 83-112;

Gelbard-Sagiv et al. (2008) Internally generated reactivation of single neurons in hippocampus during free recall. *Science* 322:96-101.

## **Week 11: Literature and Consciousness**

*Moodle Post due by midnight Monday*

**Nov. 10:** Guest Lecture: Diana Lurie, Professor of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences: Sensation and Memory

**Nov. 12:** *Saturday*, Part 2, pp. 1-119

Damasio: biological self-regulation and the somatic marker hypothesis

## **Week 12: Literature and Consciousness**

*Annotated Bibliography Check-Up: due on Moodle before class on Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>*

**Nov. 17:** *Saturday*, Part 3, pp. 121-177

Stanislaus Dehaene: the “neural global workspace” theory of consciousness  
**Nov. 19:** *Saturday*, Part 4, pp. 178-242

### **Week 13: Science, Poetry, and the Dynamic Brain**

***Moodle Post due by midnight Monday***

**Nov. 24:** *Saturday*, pp. 243-289

**Nov. 26:** ***Thanksgiving: No Classes***

### **Week 14: Student Research Discussions**

***Paper on Saturday due on Moodle before class on Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>***

**Dec. 1:** Student-led discussion of independent reading

**Dec. 3:** Student-led discussion of independent reading

### **Week 15: Wrap-up**

**Dec. 8:** Student-led discussion of independent reading

**Dec. 10:** Conclusions / Evaluations

**Final annotated bibliography due on Moodle before or in class Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Final Exam Scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>: 10-12**

***REVISED PAPER due AT FINAL***