

EN181 Intro to LGBTQ+ Literature

Fall 2020

“The truth is rarely pure and never simple.” —Oscar Wilde

“Only connect.” —E.M. Forster

Professor: Mary Vermillion

Course description and goals:

In this writing-intensive course, we'll study innovative and award-winning literature in order to explore the following questions:

- What is LGBTQ+ literature? What counts as queer literature? How has it been defined?
- What are some of the key characteristics, topics, themes of LGBTQ+ literature? How have writers represented queer identities, bodies, love, sex, families, communities, time, success, and activism?
- How does queer literature vary according to the historical and cultural context in which it is written? How do other aspects of identity (such as race, gender, and age) influence depictions of queerness in literature?
- Who are some important LGBTQ+ writers? Why are they important?
- Why study LGBTQ+ literature?

Why study literature, period? Why does literature matter? This course (like all courses that satisfy the literature requirement in the Core Curriculum's Expressive Arts Domain) encourages you to consider the purposes of literature. You'll also learn to interpret literary texts from multiple perspectives, and you'll develop your writing skills.

Important note: ALL students are welcome in this course—you do not need to identify as LGBTQ+ to find the literature meaningful or to do well. However, please know that this literature course, like most literature courses, includes some texts that contain sexually explicit verbal or visual content and some texts that portray painful—even traumatic—events. I hope that these texts also inspire and empower you (and that some of the texts make you laugh.) Whatever the case, we'll treat each other and the texts we're discussing with maturity, kindness, and respect. The literature we'll examine, like any literature worthy of study, explores issues that impact real people—issues that may impact you or me or other students in our class.

Texts:

I'll supply some of our short readings via Brightspace, but you'll also need the following books:

Fun Home by Alison Bechdel

The Hours by Michael Cunningham

Less by Andrew Sean Greer

Man Alive by Thomas Page McBee

[INSERT] BOY by Danez Smith
Queer Poets of Color edited by Christopher Soto

Coursework:

The assignments and activities that will help you learn are listed below, along with the weight I'll assign each when I figure your course grade:

Three major essays (60%)

- Essay 1 (15%) analyzes literary representations of coming of age and/or healing trauma.
- Essay 2 (20%) interprets a literary text from at least two different perspectives.
- Essay 3 (25%) traces a theme in several texts and explores some of the questions about LGBTQ+ literature listed on page 1 of this syllabus.

I'll provide written instructions and a rubric for each of these three essays.

Overview of Schedule

The specific tasks that need to be completed for each Tuesday and Friday will be detailed in learning units via Brightspace content. The schedule below lists only reading assignments and major writing assignments.

Diving into Queer Literature

1 T Sept. 8 poems celebrating queer joy by Muriel Rukeyser, Mary Oliver, Sjoanna McCray, and Miller Oberman.

2 F Sept. 11 poems by Richard Blanco and Walt Whitman

Coming of Age and Healing Trauma

3 T Sept. 15 In *Queer Poets of Color*, read poems about childhood or coming of age by Ocean Vuong (10-11), Paul Tran (15), Tommy Pico (38), Beth Brant (48), Eduardo Martinez-Leyva (58), Monica Hand (59), Nikki Giovanni (88), Derrick Austin (143), Saeed Jones (168).

4 F Sept. 18 Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Chs 1-3

5 T Sept. 22 *Fun Home*, Chs 4-5

6 F Sept. 25 *Fun Home*, Chs 6-7

7 T Sept. 29 Thomas Page McBee, *Man Alive*, Parts I and II
 8 F Oct. 2 *Man Alive*, Parts III-V

Poetry

9 T Oct. 6 Danez Smith, *[INSERT] BOY*, 1-41
 10 F Oct. 9 *[INSERT] BOY*, 42-end

11 T Oct. 13 work day
 12 F Oct. 16 **Essay 1 due**

13 T Oct. 20 sonnets by William Shakespeare, Marilyn Hacker, Candace Williams, and Jericho Brown; poems about the Orlando Pulse massacre by Richard Blanco, Andrea Gibson, and Jameson Fitzpatrick

14 F Oct. 23 *Queer Poets of Color*, Introduction through p 99

15 T Oct. 27 *Queer Poets of Color*, p 100-end

Feminists

16 F Oct. 30 excerpts from Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde

17 T Nov. 3 excerpts from Virginia Woolf and Aphra Behn

R Nov. 5 at 7 pm extra credit Zoom event featuring poet Carol Tyx

Literary Responses to AIDS

18 F Nov. 6 Susan Sontag, "The Way We Live Now" and an excerpt from RENT

19 T Nov. 10 poems by Walter Holland and Danez Smith; prose by Alexander Chee and Saeed Jones

Two Novels that Won the Pulitzer Prize

20 F Nov. 13 Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*, 1-87

21 T Nov. 17 *The Hours*, 88-152
 22 F Nov. 20 *The Hours*, 153-end

23 T Nov. 24 **essay 2 due**
 F Nov. 27 **Enjoy Thanksgiving break!**

24 T Dec. 1 *Less*, "Less at First" and "Less Mexican"

25 F Dec. 4 *Less*, “Less Italian,” “Less German,” and “Less French”

26 T Dec. 8 *Less*, “Less Moroccan,” “Less Indian,” and “Less at Last”

27 F Dec. 11 work on your final essay

During exam week, your **final essay is due** no later than Thursday Dec. 17 at 10:00.