

English 2326: Exploring American Identity through Music

Language Building 212, MW 12:45-2:05 pm

Instructor: Hector Dominguez

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Office Hours: 10:30-11:00 a.m.; 2:10-2:45 p.m.

or, by appointment.

Required Materials

• <i>The Piano Lesson</i> by August Wilson	• Notebook and pen/pencil
• <i>There There</i> by Tommy Orange	• Headphones
• <i>Malas</i> by Marcela Fuentes	• Cell phone/tablet with <i>Lyra</i> music app installed
• <i>Stay True</i> by Hua Hsu	

Course Description

The last century of the United States is often divided by historic events and cultural shifts such as wars, economic depression (and booms), urban and suburban flights, civil rights and women's liberation movements, the Internet age, to name a few. Literature, as always, provides us with a snapshot of the time, revealing a range of individual experiences that capture the essence of living during these periods. To students of literature, music also offers the opportunity to study the landscape of American culture through a unique lens, revealing each generation's outlook, their struggles, hopes, and anxieties.

How do music and literature reveal the social problems of the era? What legacies or histories does music tap into? How is the American Dream revealed through character circumstances and ambitions? Can music be an instrument for social change? These are some of the questions we'll be asking throughout our course. We will read fiction, drama, poetry, essays, and criticism that utilize music to comment on American life and listen to different music albums that do the same. We begin with literature from the Harlem Renaissance and make our way into the Great Depression, the post WWII era, the time of Civil Rights and Vietnam War, the Y2K era, and end in the Digital age. We'll develop an understanding of the major literary conventions of each genre and how they relate to certain themes. Doing so will not only help us to better understand and write about literature but, ultimately, develop a more robust conception of the American experience.

Course Objectives

- Identify the formal features of literature and think and talk critically about them with fellow peers.
- Develop an understanding of the various conventions, techniques, and literary forms within American literature.
- Perform a close reading that analyzes literary devices and their effects in a passage.
- Learn to craft a strong thesis statement and marshal appropriate textual evidence through writing assignments and essays.
- Illustrate how the themes and details in literature may critique cultural or political trends.
- Contribute to a supportive community that fosters creativity, critical thinking, respect, and collegiality.

Policies and Expectations

Participation: Students are expected to participate in class discussions, group work, and other in-class activities. I evaluate participation not on mere physical presence in the class but on the preparedness, quality of engagement in discussions and with peers. Bring questions to class and share your insights whenever possible; I am not looking for “correct” answers—your opinions and thoughts will only enrich our discussions. Texting in class and doing work for other courses will result in a failing participation grade.

Attendance: A maximum of five absences is allowed; this allowance accounts for unexcused and excused absences (including university events). Do not email doctor’s notes or personal details expecting to exceed the max number of absences. Instead, “budget” your absences in case of any unforeseen illnesses or emergencies that may arise later in the semester. On the sixth absence, your final grade will be reduced by one letter grade. A seventh absence will result in automatic failure of the course. *By registering for this course, you are committing to its time slot for sixteen weeks; be sure not to take up employment or other engagements that conflict with your attendance or timely arrival.*

Tardiness: Arriving ten minutes late or leaving class early will be counted as an absence. Timely arrival is recommended as this is the time when quizzes are assigned. If you must leave early, please inform me (in person or via email) before class to avoid penalties.

Electronics and Distractions: Cell phones, headphones, and AirPods must be put away during class unless an activity calls for their use. Failure to abide by this policy will result in a marked absence or loss of participation points.

Late Work/Make-up Work/Extensions: Late work is not accepted. Make-up work cannot be assigned. Extensions may be granted under extreme circumstances, but please communicate those ASAP.

Respect and Courtesy: Because many aspects of literature are subjective, as students we must be respectful toward our peers' opinions. It is okay to disagree (in fact, productive!) but only if we are courteous.

Communication: Check Canvas and your student email daily. When emailing me, include "ENGL 2326" in your subject line so I can prioritize it. I will only respond to UNT email accounts. As a professional courtesy, please include proper greetings and signoffs in your emails.

Office Hours: I set time aside each week to meet with you. Feel free to drop in and discuss questions or concerns you may have. If my office hours don't work for you, please reach out so we can set up an alternate time.

Plagiarism: Submitting someone else's work or ideas with the intention of being passed off as your own is considered plagiarism and is grounds for automatic failure and disciplinary action from the university.

ChatGPT and AI tool usage: This course does not specialize in work written in collaboration with artificial intelligence. Any work written entirely by or with the assistance of AI falls outside the learning objectives of this course. *All work produced for this course (writing prompts, discussion board responses, and presentations) must be created and written without assistance from AI tools.* Work authored and/or assisted by AI will not be considered of your own creation and subsequently be given a failing grade and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Course Content: Texts may engage with sensitive topics and traumatic experiences. Class content does not indicate a specific position of the school, department, or instructor. Please reach out if you find any content to be triggering or have difficulties engaging with the work.

Syllabus Changes: I reserve the right to alter the syllabus at any point in the semester. Due dates, readings, and other aspects of this course may be subject to change.

Assignment Policy: Assignment due dates and reading schedules are listed in the Course Schedule on Canvas. It is your responsibility to keep track of these dates in your agendas or planners. Please note that I reserve the right to update and alter our course readings and assignments (both their content and due dates) as I see fit to best serve the class.

Course Assignments

Participation: This includes preparedness, regular contributions to discussion, participation in group work, and in-class activities.

Reading Quizzes: These are quick reading checks given at the beginning of every class.

In-class responses: Periodically, we will listen to music, watch film clips, or bring your attention to short passages. I will ask you to react or respond and collect these at the end of class.

Weekly Reflections: By 11:59 pm on Friday of each week, you will post a 300-400-word weekly reflection that synthesizes, extends, or solidifies your thoughts on the week's assigned readings.

Mid-Term Exam: Divided into two parts, the first part consists of questions that focus on identification of passages, literary terms and themes. In the second part, you will be given a passage (of which I will reveal the work and author) and offer a close reading (600- word minimum) that underscores the passage's significance to the work as a whole. The best way to prepare is to keep up with the reading, mark passages that we discuss, pay attention to the differences in the authors' styles, and take good notes during class. The exam does not require that you memorize passages.

Literary Analysis Essay: A 4-5-page essay analyzing two texts of your choice from course readings. The essay must analyze the text's presentation of an ethical issue relevant to the course. For detailed instructions, please review the assignment sheet.

Music Show/Tell Presentation: Introduce the class to an artist's album that you believe speaks to the American life or any of the themes that we've discussed in class.

Extra Credit Literary Event: Attend a local event that is literary in nature; these may include open mics, poetry readings, writer talks, or events that connect with writing or storytelling. Check with me before attending the event (sorry, no online events). Write and submit a short response (350-500 words) connecting the events with our class texts, themes, or discussions. Assignment is worth 40 pts.

Grading

Participation	10%
In-class responses	10%
Weekly Canvas Reflections	15%
Reading Quizzes	10%

Mid-Term Exam	25%
Literary Analysis Essay	20%
Music Show/Tell Presentation	10%

Grading Scale

100 - 90	89.9-80	79.9-70	69.9-60	59.9 and below
A	B	C	D	F

*Final grades cannot be bumped, unless they lie within .1% of the next letter grade.

UNT POLICIES

ADA Accommodations Statement: UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences: According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

The decision of the instructor will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity, which is responsible for maintaining student conduct records. The incident may result in an official disciplinary record for the student(s).

Academic integrity violations can include copying a passage from a source verbatim, but they can also include improper or misleading citations. Please note that all source material must be acknowledged, even if the material is paraphrased. Be careful to always acknowledge the work of other writers and take the time to work out your thoughts and arguments without copying the work of others. (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-049>)

Emergency Notification and Procedures: UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Sexual Assault Prevention: UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648

Retention of Student Records: Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(subject to change as our needs require)

Week	Day	Class Topics	Reading due before class	Work
1	Mon 8/17	Syllabus / Introductions		
	Wed 8/19	Reading, Lit, and Music What is literature? American literature? Art?	"The End of Reading," The Atlantic	#1 in-class prompt
2	Mon 8/24	Turn of Century to 1920s Rural, Urbanization, Jazz/Popular Music	Cather, "A Wagner Matinee"; Sandburg, "Chicago", "Honky Tonk in Cleveland, Ohio", and "Jazz Fantasia"; Carlos Williams, "To Elsie"	
	Wed 8/26	Harlem Renaissance	Neale Hurston, essay excerpt; Hughes, "Juke Box Love Song", "Harlem Night Song", "Harlem" and "Song for a Banjo"	

3	Mon 8/31	Great Depression	Woody Guthrie, Dustbowl Ballads, Abdurraqib, "On Marathons and Tunnels"	
	Wed 9/2	Great Depression	Wilson, The Piano Lesson	
4	Mon 9/7	Labor Day	NO CLASS	
	Wed 9/9	Great Depression	Wilson, The Piano Lesson	
5	Mon 9/14	WWII and Post-War	Abdurraqib, "The Josephine Baker Monument..."; Baldwin, Sonny's Blues	
	Wed 9/16	Beat Generation	Kaufman, "Believe, Believe" and "Mingus"; O'Hara, various; Komunyak	
6	Mon 9/21	Civil Rights Era	TBA	
	Wed 9/23	Vietnam War	<i>Inside Llewyn Davis</i>	
7	Mon 9/28	90s / Malas	Grunge and Post-Punk music; Abdurraqib, "On the Certain and Uncertain Movement of Limbs"; Fuentes, <i>Malas</i> start to pg.	
	Wed 9/30	Malas	Fuentes, <i>Malas</i> start to pg.	

8	Mon 10/5	Malas	Fuentes, <i>Malas</i> start to pg.	
	Wed 10/7	Malas	Fuentes, <i>Malas</i> start to pg.	
9	Mon 10/12	Mid-Term	In-class	
	Wed 10/14	Stay True	1 Presentation	
10	Mon 10/19	Stay True	1 Presentation	
	Wed 10/21	Stay True	1 Presentation	
11	Mon 10/26	There, There	1 Presentation	
	Wed 10/28	There, There	1 Presentation	
12	Mon 11/2	There, There	1 Presentation	
	Wed 11/4	There, There	1 Presentation	
13	Mon 11/9	Hadestown	1 Presentation	
	Wed 11/11	Hadestown	2 Presentations	
14	Mon 11/16	TBA	TBD; 2 Presentations	
	Wed 11/18	TBA	TBD; 2 Presentations	

X	11/23 11/29	Thanksgiving Break	NO CLASSES	
15	Mon 11/30	Presentation Week	5 Presentations	
	Wed 12/2	Presentation Week	5 Presentations	
16	Mon 12/7	Finals Week	Final exam day tbd	