

Poetry in America: From the Mayflower Through Emerson

Harvard Extension School: ENGL E-182a

**SYLLABUS | Fall 2019**

**COURSE TEAM**

**Instructor**

Elisa New PhD, Powell M. Cabot Professor of American Literature, Harvard University

**Teaching Instructor**

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**Course Manager**

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**Teaching Fellows**

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Tom Nunan, PhD candidate, American & New England Studies, Boston University

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**ABOUT THIS COURSE**

This course, an installment of the multi-part Poetry in America series, covers American poetry in cultural context through the year 1850. The course begins with Puritan poets—some orthodox, some rebel spirits—who wrote and lived in early New England. Focusing on Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and Michael Wigglesworth, among others, we explore the interplay between mortal and immortal, Europe and wilderness, solitude and sociality in English North America. The second part of the course spans the poetry of America's early years, directly before and after the creation of the Republic. We examine the creation of a national identity through the lens of an emerging national literature, focusing on such poets as Phillis Wheatley, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allen Poe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others. Distinguished guest discussants in this part of the course include writer Michael Pollan, economist Larry Summers, Vice President Al Gore, Mayor Tom Menino, and others. Many of the course segments have been filmed in historic places—at Cape Cod; on the Freedom Trail in Boston; in marshes, meadows, churches, and parlors, and at sites of Revolutionary War battle.

Led by Harvard Professor Elisa New, Poetry in America surveys nearly 400 years of American poetry. Through video lectures, archival images and texts, expeditions to historic sites, interpretive seminars with large and small groups, interviews with poets and scholars, and conversations about poems with distinguished Americans, Poetry in America embarks on a journey through the literature of a nation. Distinguished guests, including President Bill Clinton, Elena Kagan, Henry Louis Gates, Eve Ensler, John McCain, Andrea Mitchell, Michael Pollan, Drew Faust, Tony Kushner, and Nas, among others, bring fresh perspectives to the study of American Poetry.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

In addition to offering students an in-depth look at the poetry of this period, Poetry in America is anchored in these approaches to close reading literary texts:

1. **Making Observations**, with a focus on such skills as gathering and drawing conclusions from textual evidence; noticing patterns; tracing the development of central ideas and themes; detecting shifts in voice, tone, and point of view; and drawing comparisons across texts.
2. **Understanding Structure and Form**, with a focus on analyzing structural features and patterns, such as the relation of structural sub-units (the sentence, the stanza) to one another and to the whole; and the impact of formal choice (rhymed couplet or free verse, sonnet or limerick, lyric or narrative) on a given text.
3. **Situating Texts in History**, with a focus on analyzing the relation of authors and texts to particular cultural, historical, and geographical contexts.
4. **Enjoying Language**, with a focus on cultivating the pleasure and fun of poetry in the classroom, and on analyzing the function of such elements as figurative language, word choice, sound, and imagery within a literary text.
5. **Making Claims**, with a focus on crafting focused argumentative claims developed through evidence gathered using the above reading strategies.

**COURSE EXPERIENCE**

Poetry in America for Teachers features a combination of video tutorials and conversations, archival images and texts, expeditions to historic literary sites, and practical exercises designed to support skills development. In this course, you will:

* Learn and practice the course’s four approaches to reading a poem, which can also be applied to reading literary texts more broadly (see Course Objectives).
* Enhance literary analysis skills by engaging in conversation with your peers and members of the course Teaching Staff through online discussion forums

where you will have the opportunity to apply the skills demonstrated in the course.

* Experience the power of place through video excursions to the actual sites where our poets lived and wrote.

**COURSE EXPECTATIONS & ASSESSMENTS**

*Note: Assignments and due dates listed in the syllabus are subject to change.*

**Requirements for All Students**

This course can be taken for graduate credit, for undergraduate credit, or for Professional Development (non-credit option). No specialized knowledge of American poetry is required.

Each week of the course runs **from Friday at 8:00 PM ET** **to the following Friday at 7:59pm ET**. All students should plan to complete the following assignments on a weekly basis:

* **Readings**: Students are responsible for reading the poems assigned in each week. Poems will be made available as PDFs.
* **Videos**: Each week will also feature a series of videos, including tutorials by Professor New and conversations with guest discussants. Students are responsible for keeping up with the video content as well as the readings.
* **Weekly Discussion Posts**: Students will engage in conversation about individual poems and course themes with peers and course Teaching Staff through the section discussion boards.
* **Weekly Quizzes**: Students will complete weekly quizzes gauging their mastery of the content presented and demonstrating that they are staying on pace. Students should aim to complete each quiz during the content week in which it is assigned.

**Additional Requirements for Undergraduate or Graduate Credit**

Students pursuing undergraduate or graduate credit will receive a letter grade upon completion of the course.

Grading is broken down as follows:

 40% Yellowdig Writing Exercises (posts due every Friday at 7:59pmET; 20%

 Participation Score; 20% Content Score)\*

 20% Weekly Quizzes\*\*

 10% Completion Based Participation Grades: Diagnostic Assignment, Zoom

 Workshops or Make-Up Assignment, End-of-course Survey

 30% Essay (1200-1700 words [3-5 pages] for undergraduate students; 1500-

 2000 words [4-6 pages] for graduate students)

\*Yellowdig Writing Exercises receive points on the basis of completion and on overall quality of content. Prompts will be posted on Yellowdig each Friday, and should be completed within one calendar week (by 7:59PM ET Friday the following week). We will not offer extensions on discussion posts; please note that the weekly writing requirement has some flexibility (so that you can participate less fully some weeks while still receiving full credit at the end of the term).

\*\*Weekly Quizzes should be completed during the content week in which they are assigned.

**Non-credit / Professional Development**

Students enrolled in the course for Professional Development (non-credit option) must complete Weekly Discussion Posts, required surveys, and the Weekly Quizzes; they must also attend at least one of the live sessions (Zoom Seminar), or complete the make-up work, to receive their certificate. Professional Development students who meet the requirements and earn an overall score of 75% or greater will receive a certificate.

Although you will not receive a letter grade upon completion of the course, your score will be calculated as follows:

75% Yellowdig Writing Exercises (37.5% Participation Score; 37.5% Content Score)

 5% Completion-based Grades (required surveys + Zoom Sessions)

20% Weekly Quizzes

**COURSE POLICIES**

**HES Academic Integrity Policies**

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Extension School policies on academic integrity

([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-) conduct/academic-integrity)

and how to use sources responsibly. Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting "the wrong draft", or being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. To support your learning about academic citation rules, please visit the Harvard Extension School Tips to Avoid Plagiarism

([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/tips-avoid-) plagiarism),

where you'll find links to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources and two, free, online 15-minute tutorials to test your knowledge of academic citation policy. The tutorials are anonymous open-learning tools.

**Note on Accessibility**

The Extension School is committed to providing an accessible academic community. The Disability Services Office offers a variety of accommodations and services to students with documented disabilities. For more information please visit

([www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources/disability-services-) accessibility)

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Note: List of readings subject to change.

**Unit 0 | Orientation: Introduction to Poetry in America: From the**

**Mayflower** **Through Emerson (9/4-6)**

No assigned reading.

**Part 1: The Poetry of Early New England**

**Unit 1 | New Accounts of a New World (9/6-9/13)**

William Bradford, Selection from *Mourt’s Relation*

Anne Bradstreet, “Contemplations”

Anne Bradstreet, “Meditation 38”

Thomas Morton, Selection from *New English Canaan*

Thomas Morton, “The Song”

Samuel Sewall, Selection from *Phaenomena quaedam Apocalyptica* (“Plum-Island

 Passage”)

Roger Williams, “Verses” from *A Key into the Language of America*

**Unit 2 | Faith and Fate in Puritan Society (9/13-9/20)**

Cotton Mather, “A Poem Dedicated to the Memory of the Reverend and Excellent Mr.

Urian Oakes, the Late Pastor to Christ’s Flock, and President of Harvard College in Cambridge”

Urian Oakes, “An Elegie upon the Death of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Shepard, Late

Teacher of the Church at Charlstown in New-England: By a Great Admirer of His

Worth, and True Mourner for His Death”

Michael Wigglesworth, Selections from “God's Controversy with New England”

Michael Wigglesworth, Selections from *Day of Doom* (Stanzas 5, 18, 209, 189-205)

**Unit 3 | Anne Bradstreet (9/20-9/27)**

Anne Bradstreet, “Prologue”

Anne Bradstreet, “A Letter To Her Husband, Absent Upon Publick Employment”

Anne Bradstreet, “The Author to Her Book”

Anne Bradstreet, “Before the Birth of One of Her Children”

Anne Bradstreet, “In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who

Deceased August, 1665, Being a Year and Half Old”

Anne Bradstreet, “In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Anne Bradstreet Who Deceased

June 20, 1669, Being Three Years and Seven Months Old”

Anne Bradstreet, “On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet, Who Died on 16

November, 1669, Being But a Month and One Day Old”

**=> Diagnostic Essay Due: Friday, 9/27 8pm ET**

**Unit 4 | Edward Taylor (9/27-10/4)**

Edward Taylor, “Huswifery”

Edward Taylor, “Prologue to Preparatory Meditations”

Edward Taylor, “Meditation 1”

Edward Taylor, “Meditation 8”

Edward Taylor, “Meditation 22”

Edward Taylor, “Meditation 34”

Edward Taylor, “Meditation 45”

**Part 2: Nature and Nation: American Poetry 1700–1850**

**Unit 5 | Before the Revolution (10/4-10/11)**

Ebenezer Cook, Selection from *The Sot-weed Factor*

James Grainger, “Sugar-Cane”

Royall Tyler, “Prologue” to *The Contrast*

**Unit 6 | Patriot Verse: Poetry and the Meaning of Freedom (10/11-10/18)**

Philip Freneau, “To Sir Toby”

Philip Freneau, “On Mr. Paine’s Rights of Man”

Philip Freneau, Selection from “On the Rising Glory of America”

Anonymous, “Volunteer Boys”

Anonymous, “Yankee Doodle”

Anonymous, “To the Ladies”

Mercy Otis Warren, "Articles Which Female Vanity Has Comprised as Necessaries" Mercy Otis Warren, Selection from “The Group”

Mercy Otis Warren, Selection from “The Motley Assembly”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Paul Revere’s Ride”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Concord Hymn”

**Unit 7 | Phillis Wheatley (10/18-10/25)**

Phillis Wheatley, “To the University of Cambridge, in New England”

Phillis Wheatley, “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitfield, 1770”

Phillis Wheatley, “To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth”

Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America”

Phillis Wheatley, “To S.M., a Young African Painter, On Seeing His Works”

**Unit 8 | Symbols of the Nation and Its Leaders (10/25-11/1)**

Phillis Wheatley, “His Excellency General Washington”

Joel Barlow, “Hasty Pudding”

Timothy Dwight, “Greenfield Hill”

Philip Freneau, “The Wild Honeysuckle”

Philip Freneau, “On the Emigration to America and People of the Western Country” Thomas Jefferson, Selection from *Notes on the State of Virginia*

Mercy Otis Warren, “Simplicity”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Village Blacksmith” William Cullen Bryant, “Thanatopsis”

William Cullen Bryant, “To a Waterfowl”

William Cullen Bryant, “Sonnet to an American Painter Departing for Europe”

**Unit 9 | The Fireside Poets** **(11/1-11/8)**

James Russell Lowell, “A Fable for Critics”

Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The One Hoss Shay”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Bridge,”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Fire of Driftwood”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Cross of Snow”

**Unit 10 | Edgar Allan Poe (11/8-11/15)**

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Conqueror Worm”

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven”

Edgar Allan Poe, “Annabelle Lee”

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Sleeper”

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition”

Edgar Allan Poe, “To Helen”

**Unit 11 | Emerson, Week 1** **(11/15-11/22)**

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Selection from “Nature” (Ch. 1)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Snow Storm”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Blight”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Days”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Hamatreya”

**Thanksgiving Break (11/25-29)**

No coursework in Canvas; no assigned readings.

**Unit 12** **| Emerson, Week 2** **(11/29-11/6)**

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Each and All”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Rhodora”

William Wordsworth, “The Immortality Ode”

* **Essay Due: Friday, 12/6 8pm ET**