



Poetry in America: From the Mayflower Through Emerson

Harvard Summer School: ENGL S-182a

SYLLABUS | Summer 2021

COURSE TEAM

Instructor

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Teaching Instructor

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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 writing and discussion and 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.

The course can be taken for graduate credit, undergraduate credit, or non-credit. No specialized knowledge of American poetry is required.

Each week of the course runs from Wednesday at 12:00pm ET [midday] to Wednesday at 11:59am ET [midday], and covers 1 Unit of material. 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, and all course prose in Canvas modules. All poems are 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.
- **Quizzes:** Quizzes assess students' familiarity with the course content (readings, course prose, and videos) of each unit.
- **Weekly Writing:** Each week, students will engage with peers and course Teaching Staff in formal, written, exploration, of poems and course themes on Yellowdig OR through live video seminars via Zoom on special topics.
- **Participation in Zoom Seminars:** There will be 3 scheduled required Zoom Seminars, and one optional Zoom Seminar. For students unable to attend these sessions, there will be a Make-Up Assignment. We will *not* use Yellowdig during weeks when Zoom Seminars are scheduled.
- **"Pod" Meeting Groups with Peers:** Students will be assigned to a group of 4-5 within the course, which will meet independently once a week for about 45 minutes to work on small projects, develop poetic skills, and discuss readings.

Students pursuing undergraduate or graduate credit will receive a letter grade upon completion of the course. Grading is broken down as follows:

Undergraduate/Graduate Credit

- 30% **Writing & Discussion** (posts due on Yellowdig by every Wednesday at 11:59am ET [midday])
- 15% **Quizzes** for each Unit (due by every Wednesday 11:59pm ET [midday])
- 10% **Completion Based Grades: 3 Zoom Seminars or Make-Up Assignments and Mandatory Course Surveys** (see schedule below for dates & times)
- 10% **Thesis Paragraph Assignment** (due Wednesday, July 21st)
- 35% **Final Essay** (due Friday, December 4th)

Non-credit / Professional Development

Students enrolled in the course for Professional Development (non-credit option) should plan to complete all Weekly Quizzes and Weekly Writing, and are required to attend, or complete the make-up work, for 1 Zoom seminar to receive their certificate. Professional Development students who meet the requirements and earn an overall score of 75% or greater will receive a certificate.

- 60% **Writing on Yellowdig**
- 30% **Quizzes**
- 10% **Zoom Session or Make-Up and Mandatory Course Surveys**

Course Policies

Extensions and Late Work

Weekly Writing (Yellowdig)

No extensions will be granted for Yellowdig. You *must* participate during the content week in order to be awarded participation points, which are tallied from each Wednesday at

noon ET through the following Wednesday at 11:59 AM ET. Although we cannot grant extensions on this weekly work, **the scoring system is set up to forgive one week worth of missed “sessions”** (i.e., you can miss one week of participation in the discussion forum and still receive a 100% participation grade).

Quizzes

Please aim to complete the Quiz for each unit by its deadline; **there are no extensions for Quizzes**, but your lowest Quiz score will be automatically dropped.

Writing Assignments

For extensions on your Thesis Paragraph or Essay, you must notify your section leader *at least 3 days prior to the due date*. **Assignments turned in after the due date that have not received an official extension will be deducted 5 points per day.**

Harvard Summer School Academic Integrity Policies

You are responsible for understanding Harvard Summer School policies on academic integrity and how to use sources responsibly. Review the policy here:

<https://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/student-responsibilities>

Not knowing the rules, misunderstanding the rules, running out of time, submitting “the wrong draft,” and being overwhelmed with multiple demands are not acceptable excuses. There are no excuses for failure to uphold academic integrity. Harvard University, in general, and Harvard Summer School, in particular, offer resources to support your understanding of academic integrity and responsible use of sources. Please see this page to access *The Harvard Guide to Using Sources*, as well as to learn more about the Harvard Summer School Writing Center:

<https://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/resources-support-academic-integrity>

Note on Accessibility

The Summer 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:

<https://www.summer.harvard.edu/resources-policies/accessibility-services>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: List of readings subject to change.

ORIENTATION (HALF-WEEK: June 21-23)

Course Introduction & Orientation

No assigned reading.

Assignments:

Introduce yourself on Yellowdig!

Background Survey

PART 1 | The Poetry of Early New England

WEEK 1 (June 23-June 30)

WEEK 1 Assignments:

Quizzes for Units 1 & 2

Writing on Yellowdig

UNIT 1 | New Accounts of a New World

Readings:

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* (The "Plum-Island Passage")

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

UNIT 2 | Faith & Fate in Puritan Society

Readings:

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)

WEEK 2 (June 30-July 7)

WEEK 2 Assignments:

Quizzes for Units 3 & 4

➔ Zoom Seminar 1: Puritan Poetry

Exact Date and Time TBA

UNIT 3 | Anne Bradstreet

Readings:

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"

UNIT 4 | Edward Taylor

Readings:

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 & Nation: American Poetry, 1700-1850

WEEK 3 (July 7-July 14)

WEEK 3 Assignments:

Quizzes for Units 6 & 7
Weekly Writing on Yellowdig

UNIT 5 | Before the Revolution

Ebenezer Cook, Selection from *The Sot-weed Factor*
James Grainger, "Sugar-Cane"
Royall Tyler, "Prologue" to *The Contrast*

Assignments:

Unit 5 Quiz

UNIT 6 | Patriot Verse: Poetry & the Meaning of Freedom

Readings:

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"

WEEK 4 (July 14-July 21)

WEEK 4 Assignments:

Quizzes for Units 7 & 8

➔ Zoom Seminar 2: Poetry and Revolution

Exact Time and Date TBA

➔ THESIS PARAGRAPH ASSIGNMENT DUE (Wednesday, July 21st at 11:59pm ET)

UNIT 7 | Phillis Wheatley

Readings:

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 & Its Leaders

Readings:

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"

WEEK 5 (July 21-July 28)

WEEK 5 Assignments:

Quizzes for Units 9 & 10
Weekly Writing on Yellowdig

UNIT 9 | The Fireside Poets

Readings:

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

Readings:

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"

WEEK 6 (July 28-August 4)

Week 6 Assignments:

Quizzes for Units 11 & 12
Weekly Writing on Yellowdig

UNIT 11 | Emerson, Part 1

Readings:

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"

UNIT 12 | Emerson, Part 2

Readings:

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Each and All"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Rhodora"

William Wordsworth, "The Immortality Ode"

WEEK 7 (HALF WEEK: August 4-6)

Week 7 Assignments:

➔ Zoom Seminar 3: Poetry in the 19th-century & Indigenous Voices in Early American Poetry

Exact Time & Date TBA

UNIT 13 | Indigenous Voices in Early American Poetry

Readings:

Samson Occom, "The Sufferings of Christ"

Samson Occom, "A Son's Farewell"

Anonymous [Ojibwa], "Music & Poetry of the Indians" (transcribed 1830)

Bamewawagezhikaquay [Jane Johnson Schoolcraft], "On leaving my children John and Jane at School, in the Atlantic States, and preparing to return to the interior"