

Seminar on the Teaching of Literature: How We Teach & Why

Education 405x
English 397x
Fall 2009
Thursdays 10-11:50
Building 160 Room 326

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Course Overview:

This course, designed for graduate students in English and Education, examines the teaching of literature across the secondary and collegiate levels. Its perspective is both practical and theoretical, examining topics that include the kinds of readings and readers English teachers are trying to create and effective pedagogical practices for the teaching of literature. The course is designed around 3 core themes: the purposes for teaching literature; the content for teaching literature; and pedagogical approaches for teaching literature. We will explore these topics through a variety of texts and perspectives. As part of the culminating assignment for the course, students will be asked to prepare and present a conference paper on some aspect of the teaching of literature at any grade level.

Required Texts:

Rabinowitz, P. J. & Smith, M. W. (1998). *Authorizing readers: Resistance and respect in the teaching of literature*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Scholes, R. (2001). *The crafty reader*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Showalter, E. (2003). *Teaching literature*. Wiley Blackwell.

Wolf, D. P. (1998). *Reading reconsidered: Literature and literacy in high school*. New York, NY: The College Board.

The Yellow Wallpaper

Othello

Course Reader: Available at Copy America, 344 S. California Ave, Palo Alto

Recommended Texts:

Appleman, D. (2009) *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents, 2nd edition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Folger Shakespeare Library. (2006). *Shakespeare set free: Teaching Twelfth Night Othello*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

McKeachie, W., & Gibbs, G. (1998). *Teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. New York: D.C. Heath & Co.

Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Assignments

Position Paper: Due 10/15

Students will write their own position statement on the purposes for teaching literature. These papers should be no more than 5 pages in length and should provide a compelling argument about the purposes for teaching of literature in either high school or college.

Final Paper: Due 12/10

Students can choose from one of the following options. Students may also propose their own option for the final paper. Papers should be roughly 12-15 pages long.

1. A syllabus for teaching a particular aspect of literature and an accompanying rationale. The syllabus should specify the purpose of the class, works to be read, assignments and other assessments. Further details will be handed out in class.
2. A concise review of the literature on a particular topic related to the teaching of literature.
3. A conference paper on some aspect of teaching literature.

Oral presentation at Class Conference: December 3

Class Expectations/Assessment

1. In order for the seminar format to work, people must have done the readings for the class ahead of time and come prepared to discuss them; the quality of our class depends upon your preparation beforehand and your engagement during class discussions.

We expect students to attend class regularly and to participate actively in class discussions and other small and large group activities. If for any reason you must miss class, please notify us beforehand and ask a classmate to take notes and pick up assignments for you.

2. Assignments must be completed on time. If for any reason an assignment will be late, please talk with us ahead of time.

3. All written work will be held to high standards and should conform to rules of proper grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. Please double-space all written work.

4. Grading: Assignments will be weighed according to the following scheme:

Position Paper:	30%
Short Assignments:	10%
Final Paper & Presentation:	60%

Class Calendar

9/24 Introductions

After introducing the class and reviewing the syllabus, we will consider how the purposes for teaching and learning literature, as well as teaching strategies, differ and cohere across the continuum from high school through graduate school. To deepen our discussion, we'll be viewing and discussing video clips of teachers in action across this continuum.

10/1: Why Teach Literature?

We will begin to surface the different goals teachers have for teaching literature and the relationship between these goals and teachers' pedagogical decisions and actions. We will also begin to examine how these goals contain implicit theories about the nature of reading and of literary text.

Assigned reading:

1. Reading Reconsidered, 1-61
2. Scholes, The Crafty Reader, introduction
3. Showalter, "Theories of Teaching Literature" from Teaching Literature
4. Booth, W. C. The Vocation of a Teacher, pp. 209-215
5. Tompkins, A Life in School, Preface and pp. 207-223

10/8: What do we want students to learn?

We will consider the end point of teaching literature---what we want students to take away from our classes. Beyond inculcating a vague "love of literature," what specific skills, stances, and habits of mind do we want students to develop? How do these learning goals begin to specify not only what we teach but how we teach?

Assigned Reading:

1. Miriam Marty Clark, "Beyond Critical Thinking" Pedagogy 9.2 (2009): 325-330 (through Project Muse)
2. Gerald Graff, "Outing Criticism" from Clueless in Academe
3. Michael W. Smith, "Playing by the Rules" from Authorizing Readers
4. John Guillory, "On the Presumption of Knowing How to Read" ADE Bulletin 145 (2008) 8-11 (handout)

Recommended for Higher Ed:

5. Ken Bain, "What do they expect of their students?" from What the Best College Teachers Do
6. Peter Filene, "Defining Aims and Outcomes" and "Cognitive Sequence" from The Joy of Teaching

Recommended for Secondary:

7. Scholes, Textual Power, chapter 1 and 2
8. Reading Reconsidered, chapters

10/15: What do we know about how people learn to read literature?

We will consider what it means to read literary texts, and what role literature teachers play in teaching reading. What characterizes the specific ways of reading literary text? What do we know about how people develop these capacities and skills?

Assigned Reading:

1. Grossman, (2001)
2. research articles Douglas Hartmann, intertextuality; Earthman, revising interpretations
3. Reading Reconsidered, chapters 4 & 5
4. Rabinowitz & Smith, chapter 3

10/22 (reschedule): How to lead a discussion

Discussions represent a ubiquitous pedagogy for the teaching of literature. The image of a college seminar, in which engaged students delve deeply into ideas, gently guided by a skilled teacher, represents an ideal of discussion-based teaching. Yet all too often, discussions are not the grand explorations of literature we envision, to paraphrase, but rather turn into gentle, or not so gentle, inquisitions. In this class, we explore the components of teaching with discussion and what both teachers and students must do to prepare for productive discussion.

Assigned Reading:

1. C. Roland Christensen, “The Discussion Teacher in Action” from Education for Judgment, ed. Christensen
2. Showalter, “Methods of Teaching Literature”
3. Parker Palmer, “The Hidden Wholeness” from The Courage to Teach
4. Website of Yvonne Divans Hutchinson

Recommended for Higher Ed:

1. “Facilitating Discussion: Posing Problems, Listening, Questioning” in McKeachie’s Teaching Tips

Required for Secondary:

1. Applebee, A., Langer, J. A. & Nystrand, M. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40, (3), 685-730.

10/29: Teaching Fiction

(Class visit from Professor Gavin Jones)

Each literary genre presents its own set of pedagogical challenges. In this class, we explore the challenges specific to teaching works of narrative fiction; what do we want students to learn from their engagements with novels and short stories, and how can our classroom approaches facilitate those goals?

Assigned reading:

1. The Yellow Wallpaper
2. Showalter, "Teaching Fiction"
3. Rabinowitz & Smith, pp. 88-118

11/5: Teaching Poetry

Poetry presents a different set of challenges to the teacher, both cognitive and affective. Because poetic text is more condensed and elliptical, readers must engage in much more "gap-filling" in order to puzzle through the text. In addition, many students arrive in high school and college with negative attitudes towards poetry. In this class, we explore different approaches to teaching poetry that address these challenges.

Assigned reading:

1. Dickinson, "The Chariot," Yeats, "Among School Children," Hughes, "Theme for English B"
2. Showalter, "Teaching Poetry"
3. DVD, Helen Vendler teaching "Among School Children"
4. Scholes, "Reading Poetry" from The Crafty Reader (edited)

11/12: Teaching (with) Drama

Drama can be both a subject and a teaching method. This class explores approaches to teaching drama—with a specific focus on Shakespeare, who is widely read in high school and colleges but whose work poses specific historical, linguistic, and ideological challenges—as well as possibilities for using drama in the classroom as a pedagogical tool.

Assigned readings:

1. Othello
2. Showalter, "Teaching Drama"
3. Folger Library, *Shakespeare Set Free* pp. ?

Video:

11/19 (reschedule): Teaching Theory

Students (and sometimes teachers) find literary theory intimidating; yet, handled carefully, it offers a productive inroad to the big questions of literary study at both the post-secondary and the secondary level. This class explores the challenges and rewards of introducing literary theory into the literature classroom.

Assigned reading:

1. Eagleton, T. "What is literature?" from Literary Theory: An Introduction, 1-14
2. Susan B. Lanser, "The T-Word: Theory as Trial and Transformation of the Undergraduate Classroom" in Teaching Contemporary Theory to Undergraduates, eds. Sadoff and Cain (MLA, 1994)
3. Chapter 1 and 2 from Critical Encounters in High School English

12/3: Class conference

On the final day of class, students will present some aspect of their final paper. These presentations should take the form of professional presentations, in which the goal is to pique the interest of the audience, provide a concise introduction to the work, and share what you have learned with others.

References

- Applebee, A., Langer, J. A. & Nystrand, M. (2003). Discussion-based approaches to developing understanding: Classroom instruction and student performance in middle and high school English. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40, (3), 685-730.
- Appleman, D. (2009) *Critical encounters in high school English: Teaching literary theory to adolescents, 2nd edition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clark, M. M. (2009). Beyond critical thinking, *Pedagogy*, 9 (2), 325-330.
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary theory: An introduction, 3rd edition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Filene, P. G. (2005). *The joy of teaching*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Folger Shakespeare Library. (2006). *Shakespeare set free: Teaching Twelfth Night Othello*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Graff, G. (2003). *Clueless in academe: How schooling obscures the life of the mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Grossman, P. L. (2001). Research on the teaching of literature: Finding a place. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching, 4th edition* (pp. 416-432). New York: Macmillan
- Lanser, S. B. (1994). "The T-Word: Theory as Trial and Transformation of the Undergraduate Classroom." In *Teaching Contemporary Theory to Undergraduates*, eds. Sadoff and Cain. Modern Language Association.
- McKeachie, W., & Gibbs, G. (1998). *Teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. New York: D.C. Heath & Co.
- Palmer, P. (1997). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Rabinowitz, P. J. & Smith, M. W. (1998). *Authorizing readers: Resistance and respect in the teaching of literature*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Scholes, R. (2001). *The crafty reader*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (delete if we order textual power) (check on page numbers for poetry chapter)

Showalter, E. (2003). *Teaching literature*. Wiley Blackwell.

Wolf, D. P. (1998). *Reading reconsidered: Literature and literacy in high school*. New York, NY: The College Board.