**The WAYLAND BAPTIST UNIVERSITY**

**Virtual Campus**

**School of Languages and Literature**

**Wayland Baptist University Mission Statement:** Wayland Baptist University exists to educate students in an academically challenging, learning-focused and distinctively Christian environment for professional success, and service to God and humankind.

**Course Name:** ENGL 4321-The American Epic (and the American Dream)

**Course Term and Year: Spring 1 2021 (First 8 weeks)**

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**Office Hours, Building, and Location: I am available by email or text. If you need to talk by phone, email me to set up an appointment**

**Class Meeting Time and Location**: On BlackBoard

Catalog Description: A study of a specific time, genre, or major figure in American literature. Note: May be repeated one time when topic varies.

Required Textbook and Resources: Should be available as e-books for the course

*Moby Dick*

*The Great Gatsby*

*Their Eyes were Watching God: a Novel*

*The Sea Wolfe*

Other readings may be included from online sources.

Optional Materials: You will need good internet access and the ability to participate in discussion board threads and to turn in written work in a timely manner. You must have software that allows you to save materials as .doc or .docx formats and some form of storage. You will be responsible for making sure that you have saved all works in progress and other materials.

**Course Outcome Competencies**: Course Overview:

This course is structured to examine the development of an American literary identity and legacy. We will look at the development and structure of American Epic Novels and how they connect to ideas of the American Dream and t American history and identity. We will study a variety of novels that could fit well into the epic genre and that also follow some of the expectations for the “Great American Novel.” Students will learn to identify some of the characteristics of American epics and to relate those large stories to the American mythos, and, through Buell and others, to see how the novels interact with, support, and/or undermine cultural expectations and rhetoric of identity in the United States. Students should be able to produce coherent and thoughtful discussion responses and essays developing what they find in the readings and their responses.

The more the student puts into the course, the higher his or her outcome competencies will be.

**Attendance Requirements**: The course will take place entirely online. You must have a functional Blackboard account and be able to access the WBU library website, as well as articles and other material provided through proprietary databases available via the WBU library website. You also must have an active WBU email address. Your WBU email address is the usual way that I will contact you. You are strongly encouraged to visit the Blackboard login page and test your browser for Blackboard compatibility, as well as take the Blackboard Tutorial if you are not familiar with how the service works. If you have problems with Blackboard or your WBU email, please use the WBU Support Contacts available on the Blackboard login page

**Disability Statement**: “In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Wayland Baptist University that no otherwise qualified person with a disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity in the university.  The Coordinator of Counseling Services serves as the coordinator of students with a disability and should be contacted concerning accommodation requests at (806) 291- 3765.  Documentation of a disability must accompany any request for accommodations.”

Plagiarism and Conduct Statement

Writing is a collaborative art. Working out ideas for your paper with an instructor, writing tutor, classmate, family member, or friend is encouraged not only for this class, but also for other classes that involve writing. Discussion and collaborative brainstorming are good. However, passing off another's writing or ideas as your own is plagiarism. It is unethical, it constitutes Academic Dishonesty (cheating), and it is sufficient grounds both for failure of a course and suspension from the university.

Common examples of plagiarism or academic dishonesty include the following:

Copying any amount of text directly from an internet website, book, or other document without appropriate citation and synthesis into one’s own discussion.

Paraphrasing the ideas presented in any source or oral discussion without appropriate citation.

Using the evidence and conclusions of any source as the controlling framework for one’s own paper.

Recycling work from a previous or current course, whether your own work or another student’s work.

Purchasing or otherwise downloading a paper from an internet website.

In some writing assignments, you will be expected to incorporate scholarly sources into your document. ALL OF THE FOLLOWING must be met to constitute appropriate citation of any source:

Including MLA, Chicago, or APA parenthetical or note-style citation format as required by the instructor.

Placing borrowed text directly from another source within “quotation marks.”

Introducing clearly another author’s voice into the document by means of a signal phrase (an introduction of that author).

Offering, in short, a clear distinction between one’s own voice or ideas and those of any outside authors brought into the discussion.

Wayland Baptist University observes a ZERO TOLERANCE policy regarding Academic Dishonesty.

Any suspected instance of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will first be evaluated by the instructor and discussed individually with the student.

If the instructor determines that a student’s actions constitute Academic Dishonesty, the case will be filed with the school dean (as determined by course prefix) and reported to

the university executive vice president/provost, as per university policy. ALL CASES OF

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY WILL RE REPORTED.

Per university policy as described in the Wayland Academic Catalog, second offenses

WILL RESULT IN SUSPENSION FROM THE UNIVERSITY.

In this course, the first instance of Academic Dishonesty may also result in a zero on the assignment.

Grade Appeals

Students shall have protection through orderly procedures against prejudices or capricious academic evaluation. A student who believes that he or she has not been held to realistic academic standards, just evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course by using the student grade appeal process described in the Academic Catalog. Appeals may not be made for advanced placement examinations or course bypass examinations. Appeals are limited to the final course grade, which may be upheld, raised, or lowered at any stage of the appeal process. Any recommendation to lower a course grade must be submitted through the Executive Vice President/Provost to the Faculty Assembly Grade Appeals Committee for review and approval. The Faculty Assembly

**Course Requirements and Grading Criteria:** Students will provide evidence of successful completion of the course outcome competencies by:

**Semiweekly Responses to Study Prompts 1: 30%**

1.) Regarding “Responses to Study Prompts”: these are decidedly not “essays,” merely a page or two of organized thought per prompt. Select one of the possible prompts for each date and submit your considered response by Tuesday and Friday midnight of each course week. There is no order in which to answer the prompts and you might cite freely but meaningfully—by extending or challenging ideas—from your colleagues. Borrowings, of course, require in-text acknowledgments, whether of word or idea.

**Threaded Peer Review of Responses: 10%**

2). Respond to any of the posted responses from your colleagues—one from the Tuesday submissions or one from the Friday submissions. Each review should consist of a single, well-developed paragraph (you will touch on your peer’s argument, question, and critique). This must go beyond, “I agree” or “good job” to really engage your peers. Ask questions, bring up ideas, or explain WHY you agree/disagree. Submit your considered reviews by Saturday midnight of each course week.

**Paper Presentation: 10%**

3.) This will be a powerpoint presentation “teaching” the concepts of your final paper. Should include your thesis and your sources.

**Paper proposal: 20%**

4.) Midterm proposal for final paper: 2 page outline with thesis and tentative works-cited list proposing your final paper.

**Final paper 30%:**

5). Final paper: **4-8 pp** should be an extended argument about epic American concepts and how they can be identified in various works of American literature. You are also welcome to make connections to current literature, film, or historical events and how they continue or trouble those literary/mythological/historical concepts.

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**Tentative Schedule**: **Subject to (slight) revision as necessary! This is basic overview and will evolve with time and discussion.**

**Week 1 (May 30-June 3)**. **Read the introduction to *The Dream of the Great American Novel***

**Discussion prompt 1 (due Tuesday): Introduce yourself and tell us what interested you about the course?**

**Read Chapters 1-46 of *Moby Dick*  (Don’t panic! A lot of chapters are only 1-3 pages).**

**Discussion Prompt 1 (Due Friday): Choose ONE of these:**

1. **The name “Ishmael” taken by the narrator is one of the first Biblical references in *Moby Dick* (one of many). Why Ishmael? How might that name not only relate to the culture of the American northeast, but also to sailing itself?**
2. **What do we find out about Ishmael’s current financial state and his desire to go whaling in Chapter 2? What is the significance of the picture in the Spouter Inn and how might Nathan Swain’s corkscrewed harpoon connect with it?**
3. **How might Bildad and Peleg be seen as representations of American approaches to business? How do their Quaker beliefs seem to be affirmed and/or contradicted by their practices as captains?**

**Peer Response (Due Saturday):**

**Week 2. Read *Moby Dick* Chapters 47-95**

**Discussion Prompt 1 (Due Tuesday): Choose ONE of these**

1. **When Ishmael says that the “English whalers sometimes affect a kind of metropolitan superiority over the American whalers; regarding the long, lean Nantucketer with his nondescript provincialism, as a sort of sea-peasant” (Kindle chapter 55), how does that relate to a problem in the GAN? Do you think that Melville makes other playful references that reinforce his opinion? Give some examples.**
2. **Why do you think that Ishmael was so content when he had made his last will and testament in chapter 50? How does he justify his decision to make up that document and what does such a thing say about life on the sea? In terms of our American mythos, why would he choose that life?**
3. **Why is it significant that the ‘prophet’ Gabriel is Shaker and why would he see Moby-Dick as his deity? Why is it important that his name is Gabriel? Why is Ishmael dismissive of Gabriel?**

**Discussion Prompt 2 (Due Friday): Choose ONE of these to answer**

1. **In Chapter 72, Ishmael is tethered to Queequeq in order to balance him while he peels the whale. He realizes that “my own individuality was now merged in a joint stock company of two; that my free will had received a mortal wound, and that another’s mistake or misfortune might plunge innocent me into unmerited disaster or death” (Kindle). He notes that this is the state in which everyone lives. How does this foreshadow the end of the novel? How does he challenge here the idea of rugged individualism? Does he do so throughout the book?**
2. **Why does Pip go mad? Why does Ishmael say, “The thing is common in that fishery; and in the sequel of the narrative, it will then be seen what like abandonment befell myself” (Kindle Chapter 93)? He is breaking the time line of his narrative. What might he be signaling to the reader?**
3. **In Chapter 95, Ishmael indulges a bit of bawdy humor in having the mincer wear the “grandissimus” or the skin from the whale’s penis as a robe of office. What is he mocking? How is getting the oil from the whale a ritual, and is it a wholesome ritual?**

**Week 3. Read Chapter *Moby Dick* Chapters96-135 (and epilogue)**

**Discussion Prompt 1 Due Tuesday Choose ONE of these**

1. **In Chapter 96, at the end, Ishmael warns against giving oneself up to fire (like that of the try pots), but he also soliloquizes about the “Catskill eagle in some souls” that does not sink down utterly, because “even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains.” What is the quality that keeps some souls from being drawn into the depths? And who do you think he has in mind as an example?**
2. **After ‘singing’ of putting up the whale oil and the cleansing of the decks (and sailors) Ishmael makes a philosophical connection. He notes that the cleaning is often followed very quickly by more hunting and compares this situation to living “for hardly have we mortals by long toilings extracted from this world’s vast bulk its small but valuable sperm; and then, with weary patience, cleansed ourselves from its defilements, and learned to live here in clean tabernacles of the soul; hardly is this done, when—*There she blows!—*the ghost is spouted up, and away we sail to fight some other world, and go through young life’s old routine again” (Kindle Chapter 98). What Transcendentalist idea is he endorsing and how does it contradict his seemingly Christian background? Why does he evoke Pythagoras as a young boy?**
3. **Pip, when confronted with the dying Queequeg declares that “Pip” has died and “shame upon all cowards—shame upon them! Let ‘em go drown like Pip, that jumped from a whale boat. Shame, shame” (Kindle 110). What mythos did Pip feel that he broke and how does that contribute to his psychic break? How does Pip’s speech correspond to Queequeg’s remarkable recovery?**

**Discussion Prompt 2 due Friday Choose ONE of these:**

1. **Why does the blacksmith, Perth, go whaling in Chapter 112? What does Ishmael compare whaling to in this instance? How do you think this chapter relates to Ishmael’s earlier discourse upon why he chose to join a whaler?**
2. **How does Ahab choose to ‘baptize’ his tempered harpoon? Why does he need the three harpooneers to donate to his work? How does his inversion of the baptismal formula in Latin foretell dark things in the future? How does it relate to earlier scenes in the novel?**
3. **What is the significance of the needle, the line and log, and the life buoy? How do they foreshadow the encounter with the Rachel and her terrible sorrow? When Rachel reappears in the epilogue, she picks up Ishmael. What do the reunion of the Rachel and Ishmael represent? Is it a proper ending for the novel?**

**Peer Responses due Saturday**

**Week 4: Read *Great Gatsby***

**Discussion prompt 1: Due Tuesday Choose ONE of these**

1. **Why do you think Nick Carraways is attracted to Gatsby’s “extraordinary gift for hope” (2)? How might it be related to his experience in The Great War (WW I)?**
2. **Buell describes *The Great Gatsby* as a novel where “the dream that was yet to be given the the name we now know it by [the American Dream], at last received canonical embodiment—and critique…” (139). Where do you see critique of the American dream? How are Nick Carraway –and Fitzgerald—both implicated in and critical of the dream?**
3. **How might Tom Buchanan’s “acute limited excellence at twenty-one” (6) contribute to the rivalry between him and Gatsby?**

**Discussion Response 2: Due Friday Choose ONE of these**

1. **Why do you think Gatsby responds to Nick Carraway? What do they have in common?**
2. **How might Carraway’s perceived virtue of reserving judgement have contributed to the end of the novel? Could he have changed the outcome?**
3. **Why is Tom so concerned with maintaining a mistress, yet completely possessive of Daisy with Gatsby? Do you think he would have tolerated an affair with someone else? Why or why not?**

**Peer Responses: due Saturday**

**Week 5: Midterm Paper Proposal due on Friday:**

**Discussion Response: Please post your tentative thesis for feedback (Due Tuesday)**

**Week 6: Read *Their Eyes were Watching God***

**Discussion Response 1. Due Tuesday**

**Discussion Response 2: Due Friday**

**Week 7: Read *The Sea Wolf***

**Discussion Response 1. Due Tuesday**

**Discussion Response 2. Due Friday**

**Week 8:**

**Discussion Prompt 1. Your essay powerpoint**

**Discussion Prompt 2: Answer BOTH of these. This is the only prompt this week.**

1. **What concepts do you take away from this class? Be as specific and clear as possible.**
2. **How does thinking about the American Dream and how that is presented affect your reading of American literary novels and their representation of American identity?**

**Final Essay due.**