

Fall 8-15-2007

ENG 2011G-004: Literature, the Self, and the World: Fiction "Constructions of American Youth"

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Recommended Citation

Engles, Tim, "ENG 2011G-004: Literature, the Self, and the World: Fiction "Constructions of American Youth"" (2007). *Fall 2007*. 74.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2007/74

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Literature, the Self, and the World: Fiction
 "Constructions of American Youth"
 English 2011—Fall, 2007

Instructor: Tim Engles

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Office hours: 2:00 – 3:00, Tues Thurs and
by appointment

Written Texts:

The Catcher in the Rye, J. D. Salinger (1951)

The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath (1963)

The Liars Club, Mary Karr (1995)

American Son, Brian Ascalon Roley (2001)

Leaving Atlanta, Tayari Jones (2002)

Important Things That Don't Matter, David Amsden (2003)

Blankets, Craig Thompson (2003)

American Born Chinese, Gene Yang (2006)

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The job of young people is not, as we sometimes assume, to go to high school. It is to imagine and begin to construct their lives. They need to understand both their own interests and abilities and the society of which they are a part. And they need to make a self that makes sense for the times in which they live. This isn't easy.

—Thomas Hine

Bildungsroman: A novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place in the world.

—Ross Murfin

**(read the following carefully! these words constitute our contract,
and I will request your written agreement to them)**

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS: A primary goal of this course is to enhance your skills in the art of textual analysis, a skill that any university student should fully develop. We will read, discuss, and write about works that foreground issues of growing up and coming to understand (or misunderstand) the world around us. We will ask how literature and film seem to reflect artistic intentions and social values, and whether they help to shape social values and beliefs. We will take a sociological/anthropological approach to our material, considering along the way such relevant factors as race, class, gender, and sexuality, and how these factors play out differently in different societal contexts. Issues and ideas that many consider touchy and off limits will arise in our readings and discussions, so you will need to approach this course and its material with an open mind and a willingness to seriously consider viewpoints expressed from

different perspectives. This course will require dedicated daily work (reading and talking), periodic pop quizzes, two formal essays, and two exams.

Finally, note that some of the works we'll study contain a good deal of "bad" language, controversial themes, and strong sexual content. If for any reason you strongly object to such material or otherwise find it upsetting, you should consider taking another course. If you decide to stay, do your best to maintain an open mind, to reconsider where your own values and judgments are coming from, and to understand as fully as you can the circumstances of others before judging them.

GRADES: Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

Exam 1	20%
Final exam	25%
Shorter essay	15%
Longer essay (6-8 pages)	20%
Participation/quizzes/attendance	20%

REGARDING WRITING: All writing assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the day they are due, whether the student is in class or not. Papers will be graded on a one hundred-point scale, and late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in papers before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day. Good, clear, careful writing and solid, insightful content will improve paper grades dramatically.

REGARDING READING (AND QUIZZES): Since one skill you will be developing in this class is the art of textual analysis, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over (and of course, you must read the novels, rather than notes of some sort about the novels). Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read all of the assigned pages, and to read them carefully. I suggest that you take notes as you read, then decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light.

Also, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will occasionally give "pop" quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will not be announced beforehand and because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, they cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. I recognize that some students must be absent at times; accordingly, when I compile your quiz grades at the end of the semester into an average score, I will drop the lowest one—if you miss a quiz, that will be your one dropped quiz. If you don't miss any quizzes, I will still drop your lowest score from your quiz average.

E-MAIL ACTIVITY: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every weekday, for messages pertaining to the course. E-mail is the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Our class discussions will sometimes carry over onto the e-mail listserv, and I will occasionally send messages to the entire class. I will subscribe you to the listserv after you send me a message about yourself (from an email account that you use frequently). If you do not send an email message to me at tdengles@eiu.edu by Friday, August 24 at 3:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In

your message, describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, and also write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and procedures. The latter will constitute your signature of our class contract—that is, the “policies and procedures” you are currently reading. I will send back a reply to your message, and I will use the address you use to send me this message to subscribe you to the class listserv.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: In class, my teaching style is to lead discussions as much as possible, rather than perform lectures. Lectures are fun for me, but as studies have repeatedly demonstrated, less effective for you. As in all of your college courses, you should strive to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. Again, I plan to keep lectures to a minimum, and I instead want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. Finally, please note that drinking beverages in class is okay, but chewing gum or eating food can be very distracting to others. Finally, no caps, please, but if you must wear one, turn it backwards so we can see your eyes.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “Daily Schedule” (you will be receiving a completed Schedule for the entire semester soon). Note that more than three missed classes will lower your class participation grade to an F. Missing class frequently will also harm your grade on the reading quizzes. Regarding tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this class on time because of other commitments, drop it and take another course.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

(See next page for the beginning of our “Daily Schedule”; you will receive the remainder of this detailed schedule soon . . .)

ENGLISH 2011: DAILY SCHEDULE
(this schedule may be subject to change)

T AUG 21 Introduction to the course

- Begin in-class film-screening: *Rebel without a Cause* (1955)
- After class, and before Friday, August 24 at 3:00 p.m., send an e-mail message to Dr. Engles at **tdengles@eiu.edu** describing yourself in whatever ways you like and confirming that you have read and agree to our “course policies and procedures”—if you have any questions or concerns about the latter, write about those as well

R AUG 23 Continue screening of *Rebel without a Cause*; read first 25 pages of J. D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

F AUG 24 3:00 p.m.: **Deadline** for sending Dr. Engles an e-mail (cftde@eiu.edu): In your message,

- since I teach several courses, explain which one you’re in (English 2011)
- describe yourself in whatever ways you like, including your career aspirations
- After reading the above “course policies and procedures” carefully, write a statement in this e-mail saying that you have read and agree with them (also, if you disagree with any of them, describe those)
- finally, as with all e-mail messages to your teachers, type your full name at the end of it

T AUG 28 Read up to page 100 of *Catcher in the Rye* by class time; we will discuss these pages and *Rebel without a Cause*

(to be continued . . .)