ENG 2009G-051: Race, Age, and Gender in "Coming of Age" Narratives

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Race, Age, and Gender in “Coming of Age” Narratives
English 2009—Summer, 2013

Instructor: Tim Engles
Office: CH 383
Instructor’s e-dress: tdengles@eiu.edu
Office hours: 12:15 – 1:15, Mon, Tues, Wed and by appointment

Written Texts:

J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye (1951)
Brian Ascalon Roley, American Son (2001)
Craig Thompson, Blankets (2003)

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, and misunderstand, “the world.” We will consider literature (and film) as both shaping and reflecting forces, asking how they seem to reflect artistic intentions and social values, and whether they help to shape social values, beliefs, and behaviors.

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), quizzes (primarily meant to help keep you reading), a formal essay, and two examinations.

Finally, note that some of the works that we will study contain “bad” language, strong sexual content, and controversial themes. 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, you should 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.

REGARDING READING: Again, a primary purpose of this course is to help you develop your skills in the art of textual analysis. Consequently, you must do the readings, and you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—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 give frequent “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will not be announced and they cannot be made up.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal essay (6-8 pages)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation/quizzes/attendance</td>
<td>20%</td>
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</tbody>
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REGARDING WRITING: Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not (it’s okay to turn in papers earlier). Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. Be mindful also of the dire consequences of plagiarism, as described below.

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.” More than two missed classes will lower your class participation grade (which is 20% of your final grade) to an Zero. Also, coming to class “prepared” means coming to class with your copy of that day’s assigned reading—**anyone who does not have a copy of the day’s assigned reading with them may be considered absent.**

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 repeatedly 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.

MISSED QUIZZES: Again, because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, quizzes 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. At the end of the semester, the average grade on these quizzes will constitute a major portion of your class participation grade. Because I recognize that students must be absent sometimes, I will drop your lowest quiz score before figuring the average grade.
CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). BE SURE to bring the day’s reading assignment with you, and be ready to talk about it. The best way to do well in this course and to demonstrate that you are an active, interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say.

Sensitive issues tend to arise within a course of this sort, so we must respect the opinions of others—at times it will help to respond to ideas rather than to the person stating them. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. (Also, please do not use a computer or your phone, chew gum, or eat food during class, activities which can be distracting to others—drinking beverages is okay. Please also silence your phone. Finally, no caps, please, as they’re anti-social in a classroom setting. If you must wear one, turn it backwards so we can see your eyes.)

EMAIL ACTIVITY: Enrollment in this class requires checking your email frequently for messages pertaining to the course (preferably every day). We will use email for announcements and assignments, and email is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all emailed questions and comments.

Using email is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an introductory e-mail message (tdengles@eiu.edu) by Thursday 16 at 5:00 p.m., I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. In that message, (1) tell me which course you’re in (English 2009); (2) describe yourself in whatever way you choose, including your major and career aspirations; (3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with (or perhaps in part disagree with, which is fine, if you explain why) these course policies and requirements; and (4) as with all emails you send to instructors, “sign” it by adding your name at the end of the message.

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.”
ENGLISH 2009: DAILY SCHEDULE
(this schedule may be subject to change)

M MAY 13 Introduction to the course
  • In-class film-screening: Blackboard Jungle (1954)

T May 14 J. D. Salinger, Catcher in the Rye

W May 15 Catcher in the Rye

R May 16 Catcher in the Rye; begin The Bluest Eye
  • In-class film-screening: The Smell of Burning Ants (Jay Rosenblatt, 1994)
  • 5 p.m.: deadline for sending an e-mail message to Dr. Engles (tdengles@eiu.edu); see above for what to include in the message

F May 17 The Bluest Eye

M May 20 The Bluest Eye
  • In-class film screening: Pam Tom, Two Lies (1990)

T May 21 Alison Bechdel, Fun Home

W May 22 Fun Home

R May 23 Fun Home

F May 24 Exam One

M May 27 Memorial Day – No class

T May 28 Brian Ascalon Roley, American Son
  • ALSO! read handout received on Monday: “What Is Good Writing?” “The Writing Process” and subsequent sections, and sample student essay
  • Before class, write briefly about two particularly strong qualities of the sample student essay; what did this writer do especially well?

W May 29 American Son

R May 30 American Son

F May 31 Daniel Woodrell, Winter's Bone

M June 3 Winter's Bone
T June 4  *Winter's Bone*; Craig Thompson, *Blankets*

W June 5  *Blankets*

- Formal essay due at the beginning of class

R June 6  *Blankets*

F June 7  **Final Exam;** tearful, heartfelt farewells, etc.