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ENG 2011G-700: Literature, the Self and the World (Fiction)

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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 requires regular, dedicated 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 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:

- Final exam 25%
- Essay (6-8 pages) 35%
- Participation/ quizzes/ attendance 30%

Note: There will be no makeup exams in this course; if a student misses the exam, the makeup assignment will be another formal, eight-page essay on a topic chosen by Dr. Engles.

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. The final paper 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 the paper 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 help to ensure that everyone does the reading, and they also reward those who attend class regularly and on time.

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. I will occasionally send messages to the entire class, and our class discussions might sometimes carry over onto the e-mail listserv. I will subscribe you to the listserv after you send me a message about yourself (from an email account that you use frequently). Send an email message to Tim Engles at tdengles@eiu.edu by Wednesday, February 18 at 6:00 p.m. 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, so please don’t. 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 one 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.”