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ENG 3504-001: Coming of age in American film and literature

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Coming of Age in American Film and Literature  
English 3504—Spring, 2005

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Required texts:

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

**COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**  
(read the following carefully; these words constitute our contract,  
and I will request your written agreement to them)

*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 Hines)

*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)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** We will examine artistic impressions of teenage and other “coming  
of age” experiences as projected through the lenses of film and literature. We’ll also work to  
“read” film as closely as we’ve been trained to read literature, and we’ll consider such questions  
as these: why are there so many movies, novels, and short stories set in or around the high school  
years? Are they realistic? If not, what are they trying to tell us (or sell us)? Do literary and  
cinematic artists tend to highlight different features of the lives of teenagers? Does either do it  
better? Is there a genre of such films that corresponds to the *Bildungsroman* in literature? are  
they all aimed at teenagers? Are they realistic? What has the word “teenager” come to mean, and  
how did this relatively recent concept arise, and why? Class participation is required in this
discussion-based course, so you must be prepared for each class meeting by reading the material carefully beforehand in order to fully participate in our discussions.

Again, we will work to “read” and interpret film as closely as we’ve been trained to do so with literature. I know from teaching such courses before that some of you will resist this requirement, dismissing efforts to think more deeply about movies with such comments (or thoughts) as, “Come on, it’s just a movie!” Such responses mostly come from a lifetime of watching movies for entertainment. However, as we will discover, how movies work, and how they function in society, are very complex and interesting issues.

Note that the usual suspects will certainly enter the room: race, class, gender, and sexuality, and much of what comes with them. Some of the works we’ll study contain a good deal of controversial themes, “bad” language, 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 more fully the circumstances of others before judging them.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To gain insight into both literary and cinematic techniques of creating meaning
- To understand the creation and rise of the “American teenager” as a social and cultural phenomenon, and to examine the influences that literature and film have had in the shaping of this phenomenon
- To understand the standard elements and techniques of “coming of age” narratives, and to appreciate thoughtful, creative variations on these elements and techniques
- To encourage consideration of how cultural factors intersect with others, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and religious preference
- To practice articulating your well-considered responses to the issues raised by the course, both verbally and in writing

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

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>1st Formal essay (4-5 pages)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Formal essay (6-8 pages)</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation/presentation/quizzes/attendance</td>
<td>20%</td>
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INFORMAL PRESENTATIONS: During the first week of class, you will sign up for a particular reading or film on the “Daily Schedule.” For the day that we’ll discuss that reading or film, you will formulate two critical questions (and answers) that engage with the readings and that you will present to your fellow classmates. You will also turn in a 1-2 page summary of own answers to your questions. You will be given a letter grade for this portion of your participation grade.
REGARDING READING: 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. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—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 efforts (and to facilitate class discussion), I will occasionally give “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will be unannounced beforehand and they cannot be made up. 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.

REGARDING WRITING: When the final formal essay is turned in, it MUST be accompanied in a folder by all notes and drafts written towards it, with the final copy of the essay on top of these materials. I will use these materials to gauge and offer comments on your writing process. I WILL NOT GRADE a final essay that is not accompanied by material that clearly demonstrates several earlier stages leading up to the final draft, so be sure to save all such materials (if you do most or all of your writing on a computer, print out occasional drafts to include with your final copy). Essays unaccompanied by materials that clearly demonstrate several stages of development toward the final copy will receive an automatic ZERO. Note that this requirement only applies to the final essay, not the first one.

All writing assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on their due date. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late.

FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: If you have a disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, let me know; also, if you haven’t contacted the Coordinator of Disability Services (581-6583), do so as soon as possible.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend every scheduled class, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “daily schedule.” More than two missed classes will lower your final grade by one letter grade for each subsequent absence. Missing class frequently will also harm your grade on the reading quizzes. In addition, note that coming to class “prepared” means coming to class with that day’s assigned reading—anyone who does not have the day’s assigned reading with them will 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 developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this course on time because of other commitments, you’ll need to drop this course. Finally, you are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Get the telephone number of one or two other students in class, or get in touch with me, so you can find out about missed assignments before you come to class.

MISSED QUIZZES AND EXAMS, AND LATE PAPERS: 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. Regarding exams, there will be no make-up exams in this course. Students who miss either the midterm or final exam, for whatever reason, will be required to write a formal, eight-page essay on a topic of the professor's choice. Again, papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. You may turn in the two essays before their due dates if you know you must miss class that day.

E-MAIL ACTIVITY: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to this course. You already have a free EIU e-mail account, which I prefer that you use. You can use a commercial account for this course, but you MAY NOT use a free web-based account (such as Hotmail or Yahoo) because they often cause problems with listserv subscriptions. Our class discussions will carry over onto the e-mail listserv, and I will occasionally send informational messages to the entire class. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Getting an e-mail account AND CHECKING IT REGULARLY is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message at the above address by Friday, January 14 at 5:00 p.m. to confirm that you have established an account, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I will therefore drop you. See the Daily Schedule below regarding what to include in this message.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). The best way to demonstrate that you are an active, engaged, and interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. 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 will have the same question.

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 3504: DAILY SCHEDULE

Note: This schedule may change; any changes will be announced in advance. Reading and writing assignments are to be completed by the dates on which they appear on the syllabus. BE SURE to bring the appropriate book or books to class if a reading assignment is listed for that day; students who show up without a copy of the day’s reading assignment may be marked absent.

JAN 13 Introduction to the course

- In-class film-screenings: Rebel without a Cause and clips from Blackboard Jungle

F JAN 14 By 5 p.m. today, carefully read the policies and procedures for this course, and then send a message to Dr. Engles (cftde@eiu.edu). In your message, 1) explain which course you are in (English 3705); 2) describe yourself in whatever ways you choose, including your career aspirations; 3) write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the course policies and procedures (or, if you question or disagree with any of them, explanation of those impressions as well); and 4) be sure that, as with all e-mail messages, you “sign” it by adding your name at the end.

JAN 20 Readings for today:

- Salinger, Catcher in the Rye, 1-44
- also read handout from last Thursday, Patrick McCord, “Writing in Light: Critical Analysis of Movies” (2002), AND be able to apply to Rebel without a Cause two of the cinematic terms that McCord defines and explains --how can these two terms be used to explain or understand an important moment, effect, meaning, or quality of this film?

JAN 27 Finish Catcher in the Rye; in-class film screening: The Smell of Burning Ants

FEB 3 Plath, The Bell Jar (read first half); in-class film screening: Killing Us Softly III

FEB 10 Plath, The Bell Jar (second half); in-class film screening: Whatever

Coming Attraction: The Rest of this Schedule . . .