

**EN200 A&B: Foundations of Literary Studies**  
**4 Credits \* Fall 2025**

**Professor:** Dyani Johns Taff

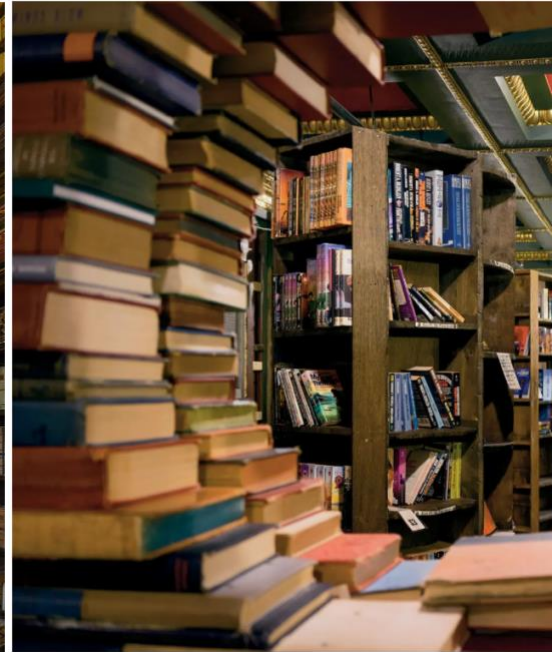
**Class Time:** TR: A 9:30-10:45; B 11:00-12:15

**Class Location:** A: Lovejoy 119; B: Lovejoy 103

**Contact:** dtaff@colby.edu

**Office:** Miller 225

**Office Hours:** M 1-3 & By Appt.



Inside the Last Bookstore in downtown L.A. Joe Leavenworth

Duke Humphrey Reading Room at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK

**Course Description**

The central purpose of this course is to introduce you, as per the title, to the foundations of literary studies; that is, our task will be to discuss and practice how to read and write about literature according to the conventions of the academic discipline of literary studies. To approach this task, we will read widely across the various kinds of literature—poetry, essays, a play, and a novel—written in English in time periods from the medieval to the twenty-first century. We will define key disciplinary terms and concepts and put them to use in analytical close readings of our texts. We'll consider some authoritative answers to the question "What is Literature?" and we'll attempt some answers of our own. We'll explore not just *how* to read literature but also *why* we might want or need to do so. What does reading literary texts do to you and how? What can you do with literary texts? What does literature enable us to feel, experience, or describe? How do stories shape our interior and exterior worlds?

**Texts**

Please buy the following books in hard copy (not ebook) as soon as possible. **If you have trouble locating or paying for these books or paying for printing, contact me and I can help.**

- William Shakespeare, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, Modern Library Classics, 2008, ISBN: 9780812969122
  - **NOTE:** You may use or buy another edition of the play, **as long as it has good notes**. If you're not sure what to buy, or if your edition will work, get in touch.
- Louise Erdrich, *The Sentence*, Harper Collins, 2021, ISBN: 9780062671134

All other texts will be provided as PDFs on our Google Drive (accessible through Moodle). **You are responsible for printing these texts and bringing hard copies** to class. You have two main options for printing:

- Acquire a folder or binder and print our readings as you go on a personal printer or at the library.
- Print and bind all of our readings at the same time, using a printing company such as [SBS Carbon Copy](#) (in downtown Waterville) or [FedEx](#). FedEx will ship your print to you for a fee or you can pick up for free.

**You must bring your course texts—books and hard copy PDFs—to class with you each day.** If you do not have your course texts, you will be marked **absent** for the day.

Since we will write frequently in this course, I recommend buying a book about writing. My two favorites are Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say*, 5th edition (ISBN: 9780393538700) and Trimble's *Writing With Style*, 3rd edition (ISBN: 978-0205028 80). We may read excerpts of these books during the semester, which I will provide as pdfs; both are excellent, friendly guides to learning to write well. The [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) and the [Colby College Library "All About Citations" Guide](#) are excellent, free resources for citation, grammar, and writing help.

### **Grading System**

I take a holistic approach to grading, aiming to reward process, collective support, and *learning* in as many forms as we can imagine it. I am inspired by the research of scholars including Alfie Kohn, Asao Inoue, Cathy Davidson, and Jesse Stommel; their work and my own observations of students during my seventeen years of teaching have led me to believe that numerical and letter grades are not especially useful tools for assessment and feedback. They can, in fact, cause harm and reflect systemic biases.

I have modeled our assignments and assessment structure on labor-based contract grading and ungrading systems. These systems seek to measure students' work differently, accounting for as many modes of learning as possible, and seeking to create equitable, socially just classrooms where students feel comfortable taking risks, exploring and being brave about new ways of speaking, reading, and writing, and even experiencing failure: these are key aspects of the process of learning.

We will work together—as a class community as well as in our one-on-one meetings—to reflect on and assess the work—the labor—that I ask you to complete this semester. I have designed all assignments for this course with care; everything I ask you to do is meant to support your work in **four core areas** that I take to be vital to learning at the college level:

### 1. Community

Proximity—simply being together in a room—does not equal community: making our class into a community takes the hard, rewarding work of being an engaged citizen. Assignments include: arriving on time to class sessions having completed **reading and other assignments**, **participating** fully during class **verbally or otherwise**, large and small group work, formal and informal **peer review** and class **discussion leadership** activities.

### 2. Textual Engagement

Our texts are essential materials for learning in this course; they function like lab equipment for a science course or paints and brushes for an art course. We'll learn about literature, transformation, genre, canon making and breaking, writing, ourselves, and each other by *reading* and engaging actively with our texts both before and during class. To promote active reading, and to extend our learning community beyond the classroom, you will form **Read Aloud groups** with your peers and you will keep **prep books** to document your philological research and preparation for class.

### 3. Writing

We often think of writing as a medium of communication, which it is. But writing can also serve as a means for thinking itself; I often use messy drafts and freewriting to work out what I *actually* think or feel about a topic, or to organize my understanding, or to work through or synthesize complex or overwhelming scholarly work. We will do many kinds of writing, informal and formal, in this class; your longer assignments will include a **Most Important Word Essay** (1000-1500 words) and a **Final Project** focused on showcasing your semester's worth of studying literature. Your blue books will directly support your work for these assignments. We will engage in drafting, peer-review, and revision work throughout the semester, and you will **meet with me 1-1 at least once** to discuss your writing.

### 4. Reflection and Revision

As you complete your work for this course, I want you to think actively about *why* and *how* you are doing the work you are engaged in, and about how your work will influence your next steps within and beyond my course. Honest reflection is a powerful tool, and sustained learning cannot take place without it. To promote reflective thinking, you will track your time in a **labor log** for a month, and complete two detailed **self-assessments** (one at mid-semester and one at the end).

Detailed assignment directions are available on Moodle and in the assignment handbook.

**You will assess your work in these core areas, and I will use your self-assessments to arrive at your course grade.** As a general baseline, completing all assignments in a timely, thoughtful manner will earn you a B; rushed, missing, or otherwise lack-luster work will earn you a lower grade; work that exceeds expectations, deepens your own or the community's learning, or otherwise goes **above and beyond** will earn you a higher grade.

### **Community Care Policies and Resources**

We are subject to a welter of social, political, environmental, and other circumstances that can affect our mental and physical health. In response, **we need to prioritize an ethic of care: caring for yourself and caring for your community.** Here are policies designed to promote self and community care:

- **Attendance and missing class:** In order to create and sustain a compassionate community, we all need to commit to preparing for class, showing up, and attending to what members of our community (students and professor) say and ask of us. That said, our lives are complicated; if, for any reason at all, you are unable to attend one or more of our class sessions, you may complete an **alternative attendance** assignment, described in the in-class notes document, that will count for participation in the missed session.
  - \*\*\*We'll need a critical mass of folks in class each week. Participating asynchronously (after class has happened) will mean that you will miss out on group work and real-time insights. **Please prioritize synchronous, in-person participation**, but use this option as a back-up whenever you need to.
  - **Masking in class is optional**, but I encourage you to wear a mask if you have a cold or other respiratory illness, if you have recently traveled by bus, train, or plane, if you think you might have been exposed to someone who is sick, or for any other reason that you might have to keep germs in or out. I will always have masks on hand; just ask if you need one.
- **Late work:** Completing course assignments on time is part of how you show your commitment to community, textual engagement, and writing work. Completing assignments on time will also save you from the stress of having assignments pile up. And yet, we all sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed or in need of more time for one reason or another. One or two late assignments is fine. Chronic lateness will affect your grade because it will affect your ability to complete the course work in a thoughtful, timely way.
- **Academic Support:** The Dean of Studies office offers comprehensive academic support in the form of academic success programs, learning consultants, tutors, and much more. [Consult the academic success page to learn more.](#)
- **Financial Security:** If you need support so that you can buy textbooks or food, pay rent, buy or borrow a laptop or interview clothes, or any other kind of financial relief, [contact your class Dean](#) (they are friendly and ready to help! If you want help reaching out, let me know!).
- **Counseling Services:** [Colby College provides cost-free mental health and counseling services](#) to help you manage challenges that threaten your personal or academic wellbeing. **Getting help when you need it is the smart, courageous thing to do.** I am not a mental health professional, but I can make you an appointment, walk with you to Counseling Services, discuss coursework-related stress (and make plans to alleviate it), or help you to see or know when you need to get help beyond my expertise. **Email me any time.**

- **Access and Disability Services:** In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, reasonable accommodations will be provided to qualified students with documented disabilities. Students seeking accommodations should start by contacting the [Office of Student Access & Disability Services](#).
- **The Farnham Writers' Center:** From the FWC's website: "The FWC is a place for you to get skilled feedback on your writing. Our peer writing tutors have experience working with Colby's diverse student populations, and they are eager to engage you in collaborative conversations about your writing." [To learn more and to make an appointment, visit their website](#). The Writers' Center also has a Multilingual Writing Specialist, Dr. Chaoran Wang, who meets individually with international and multilingual students and provides workshops to support multilingual writers. You can reach her at [chaowang@colby.edu](mailto:chaowang@colby.edu). Please feel free to contact her, either to discuss your writing concerns and issues in general or to discuss a specific course-related writing assignment.
- **Academic Integrity:** Please read [the Colby Affirmation](#) and review Colby's policies and resources regarding [academic integrity](#). It is the responsibility of every student and faculty member to be familiar with, and comply with, these expectations for honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility. If you have any questions at any time about whether or how to cite a source, about when it's ok to collaborate and when you must work alone, or other topics relating to your own or others' conduct, please ask me! I am happy to explain how to correctly give credit where credit is due or to discuss other concerns.
- **Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT** are tools that generate text probabilistically, outputting the most likely next word. They are trained on large amounts of text taken from the internet *without the writers' permission*. I do not yet know, fully, what I think about LLMs. I do know two things:
  - ChatGPT and other LLMs raise **serious labor and ethics concerns**: who's making money from these tools? Who's losing jobs? What happens when it is *so* easy to generate plausible but fake, misleading, harmful information?
  - **Writing is thinking** and thinking well is difficult and vital. Reading difficult texts with care and attention changes your brain. If you let the LLM do your reading, summarizing, or writing for you, you are not learning to *think*.

**For this course, please do all of your own reading and writing at each stage, including summarizing, brainstorming, drafting, revising, and polishing.** Reading and writing are hard and time consuming, but putting in that time will enable your intellectual growth, deepen your understanding of our texts, and hone your communication skills. If you would like to experiment with an LLM (and analyze and cite what it generates!), get in touch and we can discuss your plans.
- **Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement:** Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. [Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct](#) (including, but not limited to sexual assault and sexual harassment). If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490) or Kate Smanik, the Confidential Resource Advisor and Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life (207-859-4272).



- Please note that as your professor, I am designated a “responsible employee,” a legal category that requires me to report to the Title IX Coordinator, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4266), if you disclose an experience related to sexual misconduct. This is not as scary as it sounds: if I contact Emily, she and her office will email you. If you want to follow up, you can. If not, you don’t have to.
- **I will support you whatever you decide:** I can connect you to community resources for dealing with sexual misconduct without you needing to disclose specific information to me. If you wish to disclose a specific incident to me, I will help to connect you to Emily Schusterbauer. The college will take initial steps to address the incident(s), protect and support those directly affected, and enhance the safety of our community. Emily will work with you to determine the best way to proceed.
- **Bias Incident Prevention and Response Team (BIPR):** From the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion website: “BIPR is a non-disciplinary body charged with both responding to bias incident reports and implementing educational initiatives designed to decrease the frequency of bias incidents in our community. Community members who have experienced and/or witnessed a bias incident are encouraged to submit a BIPR report or contact BIPR chair Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).” [To submit a Bias Incident Report, click this link.](#)

### Course Schedule

The following schedule will give you an overview of our readings, topics, and schedule of assignments for the semester.

**\*\*\*This schedule is subject to change, as needed, throughout the semester.** Our Moodle site will be our home base: I will update checklists and assignments there regularly.

**Reminder:** for a 4-credit course, you should expect to spend approximately 8 hours per week on your work *outside of class*. Some weeks you will need more than 8 hours and some less; I have designed my assignments with that time frame in mind. Plan your time outside of class accordingly and get in touch if you have questions!

	Readings and Assignments
Week 1:	<p><u>Th Sept 4:</u> Course Introductions; read Alfie Kohn, “The Case Against Grades” and listen to The Ezra Klein Show, “This is your Brain on Deep Reading.”</p> <p><b>Begin your Labor Log, buy our course books, and make a printing plan!</b></p>
Week 2:	<p><b>Unit 1: Poetry</b></p> <p><u>T Sept 9:</u> Marianne Moore, “Poetry”; Oliver Burkman, from <i>Four Thousand Weeks</i>; Rachael Meager, “Thinking is difficult.” <b>Form Read Aloud Groups and Schedule First Meeting.</b></p>

	<p><u>Th Sept 11</u>: Theodore Roethke, “My Papa’s Waltz”; Edna St. Vincent Millay, “First Fig,” “Second Fig,” and “I, Being Born a Woman and Distressed”; Joy Harjo, “Ah, Ah” and “Invisible Fish”; Louise Erdrich, “The Butcher’s Wife,” “I was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move,” and “Birth.”</p>
<b>Week 3:</b>	<p><u>T Sept 16</u>: Old English riddles; Hester Pulten, “View But This Tulip,” “The Pismire,” and “Upon the Death”; Noah Baldino, “Passing.”</p> <p><u>Th Sept 18</u>: Natasha Trethewey, “Flounder,” “Graveyard Blues,” and “Elegy”; Audre Lorde, “Coal,” “The House of Yemanjá,” “Echoes,” and a short essay, “Poetry is Not a Luxury.”</p>
<b>Week 4:</b>	<p><u>T Sept 23</u>: Yusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It,” “Banking Potatoes,” “The Smokehouse,” and “Sunday Afternoons.”</p> <p><u>Th Sept 25</u>: Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues,” “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Dream Variations,” “Cross,” “Song for a Dark Girl,” “Harlem Sweeties,” “Harlem,” “Theme for English B,” and “Dinner Guest: Me.”</p>
<b>Week 5:</b>	<p><u>T Sept 30</u>: Re-read one Hughes, Komunyakaa, Lorde, or Trethewey poem; Lavelle Porter, “Should Walt Whitman Be #Cancelled?” and Natasha Trethewey, “On Whitman, Civil War Memory, and My South.”</p> <p><u>Th Oct 2</u>: Walt Whitman, <i>From</i> “Song of Myself,” “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” and “A Noiseless Patient Spider”; Emily Dickinson, poems 124 (both versions), 260, 269, 314, 359, 445, 479, 533, 588, 591, 620, 935, 1096, 1108, 1263, 1773, and 1788.</p> <p><b>Labor Log and Reflection DUE F Oct 3 by 11:55pm</b></p>
<b>Week 6:</b>	<p><b>Most Important Word (MIW) Essay DRAFT DUE M Oct 6 by 11:55pm.</b></p> <p><u>T Oct 7</u>: Peer Review Workshop and 1-1 Writing Meetings</p> <p><u>Th Oct 9</u>: Peer Review Workshop and 1-1 Writing Meetings</p> <p><b>MIW Peer Review Letters DUE F Oct 10 by 11:55pm</b></p>
<b>Week 7:</b>	<p><u>T Oct 14</u>: NO CLASS: Indigenous People’s Day</p>

	<p><b><u>Unit 2: What IS Literature?</u></b></p> <p><u>Th Oct 16:</u> Philip Sidney, from <i>A Defense of Poetry</i>; Terry Eagleton, from “What is Literature?”</p> <p><b>MIW Prep Books and Essays DUE F Oct 17 by 11:55pm.</b></p>
<b>Week 8:</b>	<p><u>T Oct 21:</u> Ursula K Le Guin, “Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction”; Toni Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken.”</p> <p><u>Th Oct 23:</u> Frances Dolan, from <i>True Relations</i>; Erick Keleman, “Why Study Textual Editing and Criticism”; Shakespeare, <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i>, Act 1.</p> <p><b>Mid-Semester Self-Assessment DUE F Oct 25 by 11:55pm</b></p>
<b>Week 9:</b>	<p><u>T Oct 28:</u> Shakespeare, <i>Midsummer</i>, Acts 2-3.</p> <p><u>Th Oct 30:</u> <b>Robinson Room: Special Collections Visit</b>; Shakespeare, <i>Midsummer</i>, Act 4.</p>
<b>Week 10:</b>	<p><u>T Nov 4:</u> Shakespeare, <i>Midsummer</i>, Act 5; excerpts from Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>, book 4, translated by F.J. Miller and Arthur Golding.</p> <p><u>Th Nov 6:</u> Louise Erdrich, <i>The Sentence</i>, pp. 1-85 (up to “Black Snow”).</p> <p><b>Final Project Declaration of Intent DUE F Nov 7 by 11:55pm</b></p>
<b>Week 11:</b>	<p><u>T Nov 11:</u> Louise Erdrich, <i>The Sentence</i>, pp. 86-169 (up to “Let Me In”).</p> <p><u>Th Nov 13:</u> Louise Erdrich, <i>The Sentence</i>, pp. 170-231 (up to “Minnesota Goddamn”).</p>
<b>Week 12:</b>	<p><u>T Nov 18:</u> Louise Erdrich, <i>The Sentence</i>, pp. 232-312 (up to “Rugaroo”).</p> <p><u>Th Nov 20:</u> Louise Erdrich, <i>The Sentence</i>, pp. 313-end.</p>
<b>Week 13:</b>	<p><u>Nov 24-28:</u> <b>NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Recess</b></p>



<b>Week 14:</b>	<p><b>Final Project DRAFT DUE M Dec 1 by 11:55pm.</b></p> <p><u>T Dec 2</u>: MANDATORY ATTENDANCE: Final Project Peer Review Workshop. <b>Written comments on projects DUE to your peers by T Dec 2 11:55pm.</b></p> <p><u>Th Dec 4</u>: Final Project presentations</p> <p><b>Final Project DUE F Dec 5 by 11:55pm.</b></p>
	<p><b>Final Self-Assessment DUE F Dec 12 by 11:55pm.</b></p>