

## **ENGL1590: Introduction to Literature: Work, Family, and Community**

**Dr. Sherry Linkon**

[slinkon@ysu.edu](mailto:slinkon@ysu.edu)

### **Course description:**

This course is designed to help you learn three things:

- How to read literature actively and critically, using six core strategies
- To understand literature as a reflection of human experience that can help you gain insight into your own life as well as the different perspectives of the author and characters
- To understand how work, family, and community together shape people's lives, perspectives, and opportunities

Reading literature well requires that we do several things that don't necessarily come naturally:

- Respond thoughtfully to the text as we read (and pay attention to our own responses)
- Ask thoughtful questions about the text
- Summarize or paraphrase the text
- Notice important features of the text – images, references, structure, tone, and so on
- Think about the relationship between texts and between texts and the time, place, and situation when they were written and read
- Reread and rethink in light of new information and ideas
- During the first half of the semester, we'll work with these strategies one at a time, spending about a week on each. During the second half of the semester, we'll look at how these strategies fit together.

### **Required Books**

Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace*

Paul Lauter & Ann Fitzgerald, eds., *Literature, Class, and Culture: An Anthology*

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*

### **WebCT**

Throughout the semester, we will use WebCT as a kind of "virtual classroom." You'll submit your short assignments about 12 hours before class, using WebCT's "assignment drop-off box," and we'll use the discussion feature for small group and full class communication. WebCT allows people who are shy about talking in class

to “speak” to others in writing, and it keeps a record of what people “say,” so you can reread things later. Some course materials may also be distributed via WebCT, and I will use WebCT to make announcements. You should check WebCT at least every other day during the week to be sure you don’t miss important information.

One of the things I like about WebCT is that it allows you to turn assignments in before class. This gives me a better idea of what you’re thinking and what difficulties (if any) you’re having, so I can teach you better. However, it also means that you may have to shift the timing for doing homework for this course, in order to turn your assignments in the night before class meets, not at the start of class. Except for the final portfolio, papers turned in at class time will be considered late. Aim to complete reading assignments at least 48 hours before class meets, so that you can complete the papers in time to submit them in WebCT by midnight the evening before class meets.

During the first half of the semester, you’ll only need to use WebCT to check for announcements and to turn in your short assignments. During the second half of the semester, we’ll use WebCT for on-line discussions, so you’ll need to spend 1-2 hours a week on WebCT during the second half of the term. I recommend that you build this time into your schedule on campus, since the computers here are faster than what most of us have at home. If using the internet is a serious problem for you, come talk with me immediately.

### **Assignments and Grading**

As you learn and practice the six strategies, you’ll complete twelve short (1-2 page), informal assignments, six during each half of the term. At the end of the semester, you will submit your six best pieces, plus an analysis of your own work that demonstrates how your ability to use these strategies has improved. I encourage you to revise the six that you choose to submit as your portfolio, making them as good as they can be.

In addition to these assignments, you have a few other opportunities to earn credit in this course, including being a regular, active participant in your reading group (a small group of six or seven members of the class, with whom you’ll meet every week during class); participating effectively in the on-line discussion; or communicating on-line or in person with me in ways that either advance or demonstrate your learning in this course.

I will calculate final grades using a point system, with 100 points possible during the semester. Points can be earned as follows:

Activity	Points available	Due Dates
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Strategy assignments	5 points each for on-time assignment, 1 point for late assignments, for a total of 60	Weekly, except for weeks 1, 8, and 15
Final portfolio	30 points possible; a grading rubric will specify how these points will be awarded	December 7
<p>Note that the first 2 activities are worth up to 90 points. The remaining 10 points will reflect your engagement with the course, and they may be earned in a variety of ways. Note that more than 10 points are available through these activities, so you may make up for poor performance on the formal assignments by investing more time in these activities.</p>		
<p>Active participation in your reading group's discussions in class.</p> <p>Of course, you have to be here to do that, so attendance counts, but just being present isn't enough. Active participation means joining in the conversation, and speaking up when your group reports on its ideas to the whole class.</p>	5 points for consistent participation throughout the semester	All semester
Positive contributions to your group's on-line discussions (to be held during the second half of the semester)	1 point for every thoughtful response or reflection posted to your group, up to 10 for the semester – see the guidelines for on-line discussion for explanation of what counts as a "positive contribution."	Any time during the second half of the semester
<p>Good questions about specific readings or course themes, submitted to me in WebCT mail.</p> <p>To earn credit for this, your question should be so interesting that I want to bring it back to the class to further our conversation. I will give</p>	1 point each, but no more than 3 for the semester	Any time

out these points sparingly.		
Coming to see me at some point during the semester. To earn points for this, you don't even have to come with a question or a purpose. Just come visit.	2 points, available just once per person	Any time

Course grades will be assigned as follows:

90-100 = A

80-89 = B

70-79 = C

60-69 = D

59 or less = F

### Course Policies:

**Attendance and Participation:** Attendance is important for two reasons: in class, I'll show you how to use the strategies that form the core of the course, and we'll discuss the ideas and readings in class. Of course, just being here isn't enough. You need to come to class prepared, pay attention, work well with your reading group, ask questions, and generally be *present* in the full sense of that word.

**Plagiarism:** Direct quotes, paraphrases, specific information, or ideas taken from other sources must be cited. Otherwise, you're plagiarizing, which is a form of stealing. YSU takes plagiarism very seriously, and it's especially important in writing courses (where you're supposed to be learning how to write things well yourself, not steal from others). If you plagiarize, you will fail the course.

**Incompletes:** If something beyond your control prevents you from completing the course, and if I believe that you have learned the core ideas of the course well enough to complete the projects on your own, you may take an incomplete and finish the course requirements later. You then have 1 year to complete the course requirements; if you don't complete them, the incomplete will change to an F on your transcript.

**Students with Disabilities:** If you have a certified disability of any kind that might affect your work in this course, please let me know. I will be happy to work with you to facilitate your success in this course.

**Classroom behavior:** This classroom should allow everyone equal opportunity to learn. I hope we'll have fun, but I also want you to learn. To help make that happen, please follow these basic rules:

- Unless you're dealing with a medical emergency related to an immediate family member, please turn off your cell phone during class.
- Listen to others and respond to their ideas with respect, even if you disagree.
- Be here on time.
- Ask questions.

**Office hours:** My office hours are set aside specifically for me to talk with you. I *like* to talk with you. Studies show that students who talk with their professors outside of class learn better and get better grades.

### Course Schedule

Week/Dates	Focus	Reading	Assignments
1 – 8/24 & 8/26	Introduction to the course		Sign into WebCT and send me a message using WebCT mail
2 – 8/31 & 9/2	Responding to what you read	Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing" (Lauter 307)	Keep a journal of your experience reading Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing"  Submit your journal to me by 2 am on Thursday, using WebCT's assignment drop off box
3 – 9/7 & 9/9	Asking questions about what you read	Kenneth Patchen, "The Orange Bears" (Lauter 559)  Rebecca Harding Davis's story, "Life in the Iron Mills" (Lauter 471)	Develop two discussion questions for "Life in the Iron Mills," and write a paragraph explaining why you think each is "generative." Submit your questions and notes to me, in WebCT's assignment drop off box, by 2 am on Thursday.
4 – 9/14 & 9/16	Summarize the text	Arthur Miller's play, <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	Write a summary of Miller's play. Deliver it WebCT's assignment drop off box by 2 am on Thursday
5 – 9/21 & 9/23	Notice features of the text	Two poems by Patricia Dobler (Lauter 110 &	Complete the "features of the text" worksheet

		418) Sholem Asch, "The Triangle Fire" (Lauter 515)	(you can download this from WebCT). Deliver it to the WebCT assignment drop off box by 2 am on Thursday.
6 – 9/28 & 9/30	Contextualize the text	Thomas Bell's <i>Out of This Furnace</i>	Complete the contextualizing assignment and submit it to WebCT's assignment drop off box by 2 am on Thursday
7 – 10/5 & 10/7	Reread & rethink	Reread the Dobler & Patchen poems	Write 1-2 pages discussing how your understanding of these poems has changed since we first read them. Submit your paper to WebCT's assignment drop off box by 2 am on Thursday
8 – 10/12 & 10/14	More rethinking	Free week!	Free week!
9 – 10/19 & 10/21	How does work shape the lives of individuals?	Deborah Boe, "Factory Work" (Lauter 61) Harvey Swados, "On the Line" (Lauter 96)	Complete 1 of the 6 strategies for the Swados piece. Send it to your small group by 2 am on Tuesday.
10 – 10/26 & 10/28	How does work shape family life?	Francisco Jimenez, "The Circuit" (Lauter 133) Peggy Gifford, "The First Transplant" (Lauter 150)	Complete 1 of the 6 strategies for the Gifford poem. Send it to your small group by 2 am on Tuesday.
11 – 11/2 & 11/4	How does work shape communities?	Jack London, "South of the Slot" (Lauter 260)	Complete 1 of the 6 strategies for the London story. Send it to your small group by 2 am on Tuesday.
12 – 11/9 (no class 11/11 – Veteran's Day)	How do social structures shape people's	Read Kurt Vonnegut's <i>Player Piano</i>	Complete 1 of the 6 strategies for this week's reading. Send

	work lives?		it to your small group by 2 amon Tuesday.
13 - 11/16 & 11/18	How do social structures shape community life?	Read "The Lesson," by Toni Cade Bambara (in Lauter)  Raymond Williams, "From <i>Culture and Society, 1780-1950</i> " (Lauter 602)	Complete 1 of the 6 strategies for the Bambara story. Send it to your small group by 2 amon Tuesday.
14 - 11/23 (No class 11/25 - Thanksgiving)	What are the qualities of a good community?	Bruce Springsteen, "My Hometown" (Lauter 417)  Billy Joel, "Allentown" (Lauter 585)  Ernesto Galarza, "From <i>Barrio Boy</i> " (Lauter 312)	Complete 1 of the 6 strategies for the exerpt from Galarza's autobiography. Send it to your small group by 2 am on Tuesday.
15 - 11/30 & 12/2	What is good work?		Work on your final portfolio
Finals week			Final portfolio due on Tuesday, December 7, by 2 pm, in my box in the English department