

## Contemporary American Fiction

English 429C | Spring 2021 | UVic  
An online course for 40 students  
Meetings: MW 2:30-3:20pm  
Office Hours: M, 1-2pm + 3:30-4:30pm  
Jentery Sayers (he / him / his; [jentery@uvic.ca](mailto:jentery@uvic.ca))  
With Faith Ryan (she / her / hers), TA

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## Territory Acknowledgement

As researchers and instructors who have the privilege to live and work as guests on these lands, we acknowledge with respect that the University of Victoria is located on the unceded territory of the Lekwungen peoples and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

## Description

This course surveys American fiction since the 1980s, attending to key issues and styles at play during the period, with an emphasis on prominent authors and novels. It is not a special topics course, but we will discuss the aesthetics and politics of home, family, and kinship in novels that engage critically with norms in America. You'll learn what's unique

about American fiction since 1980, how to talk about the last 40 forty years as a literary period, and how to write about contemporary fiction for popular and academic audiences.

## Aims

You'll have the opportunity to:

1. Read and analyze contemporary American fiction (1980s to the present) by attending to six dimensions of literature: narrative, power, language, history, aesthetics, and reception.
2. Identify key passages, terms, and themes from a selection of contemporary American novels.
3. Communicate the cultural, social, and literary significance of contemporary American fiction, with an emphasis on issues of home, family, and kinship.
4. Demonstrate an awareness of the techniques critics use to interpret contemporary American fiction, including close reading, contextualization, deconstruction, and evidence-based inquiry.

## About Us

My name is Jentery Sayers (he / him / his; jentery@uvic.ca). I'm a settler scholar and associate professor of English and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought (CSPT) at UVic. I also direct the [Praxis Studio](#) for Comparative Media Studies. I did my MA and PhD in English at the University of Washington in Seattle, and I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, where I got my BA and BS at Virginia Commonwealth University. I've been at UVic since 2011, and I teach courses on American fiction, media and cultural studies, and experimental prototyping. This is the 36th class I've taught here, but only my fourth online. I'll be learning a bit as we go. Thanks for your patience.

And my name is Faith Ryan (she / her / hers). I'm a settler on unceded Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ lands, and I am grateful for the years I've been able to study here. I'm a graduate student in English at UVic, and I did my BA at UVic as well. I'm originally from Ogden, Utah, but I spent most of my high school years in the lower mainland BC. I like contemporary Canadian and American fiction and approaching culture, in all its forms, from a disability studies perspective. Feel free to reach out over the term, even if you're unsure whether it's something I can assist you with. If it isn't, then I can point you in the right direction. I hope you enjoy the course!

## Assignments

We are asking you to respond to four [prompts](#) this term, and we'll invite you to revise one of those responses, if you wish. Each response will constitute 25% of your final grade.

There are no quizzes, exams, discussion forums, or student presentations in this course. There is no participation mark, either. Jentery will mark your responses to the prompts and provide feedback on your work.

All the [prompts](#) are included in this outline, and due dates are provided in the [schedule](#). Please submit each of your responses via Brightspace. (See submission links in the [schedule](#).) We cannot accept submissions by email. Thank you for understanding.

Please note that three of the four [prompts](#) afford three ways to respond to them, and not all responses are academic essays. You should pick *one* of the three options in the prompt. Also note that you may respond to the first three prompts—Prompts [A](#), [B](#), and [C](#)—in whatever order you wish, but you should respond to each of these prompts only once. Prompt [D](#) is attended as the fourth assignment, due at the end of term.

## Meetings

We will meet on *Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:30 to 3:20pm*. Please check your email and/or Brightspace for the Zoom URL, which will remain the same throughout the entire term.

Meetings will combine lecture with group discussion and the occasional breakout room. Please come to each session prepared to discuss the assigned material and participate in discussion. We will invite you to comment on the [novels](#) we're reading, talk about them with other people in the class, and share your perspectives on related issues and topics. Your contributions during a given meeting may be communicated through text, audio, and/or video in Zoom.

A video recording of each meeting will be circulated, with your permission, via Brightspace.

## Workload

One of the most important things to know about this course is that *we'll opt for care in every instance*. If the workload becomes too much, or we're juggling more than we should, then we'll cut materials, including assignments, as we go. We've planned for the maximum in advance, under the assumption that we won't get to everything. And that's totally fine.

We suggest dedicating an average of four (4) to seven (7) hours of study (reading novels and writing responses) each week to this course, plus 1.5 hours for the weekly [meetings](#). To frame expectations and decrease overwork, we assign in the [schedule](#) a number of recommended hours to each week of the course, and we communicate progress in terms of weeks toward completing the course, partly because online learning makes time weird for us all, and focusing on anything is a struggle during a pandemic.

Of course, four to seven hours per week is only a guideline. You may find that you need (or want) more or less time depending on the activity, your preferences, what you can manage

during a given week of life and online learning, and your own familiarity with the novels and concepts involved.

## Novels

Here's a list of the novels we'll read this term. They're available at the [UVic Bookstore](#). You are also welcome to read them as ebooks on a tablet or in your browser, if you'd prefer. You should spend no more than \$102 (before taxes) on these books. Purchasing used copies or ebooks, or relying on subscription services, will save you money.

- *The House on Mango Street* (1984), by Sandra Cisneros
- *Beloved* (1987), by Toni Morrison
- *Geek Love* (1989), by Katherine Dunn
- *Salvage the Bones* (2011), by Jesmyn Ward
- *Homegoing* (2016), by Yaa Gyasi

We're encouraging you to listen to *Beloved* as an audiobook, read by Morrison herself. We'll discuss the logistics of this decision during our meetings and determine whether it's feasible. Thank you for your patience.

## Schedule

Here's our schedule for the term. We've designed it to scaffold the learning process by presenting the course as a series of weeks, each with instructions and (where applicable) assignments, accompanied by a number of recommended hours to spend on the tasks at hand. The final week corresponds with the completion of the course (during UVic's exam period).

We will use a Brightspace announcement to notify you of any changes to the schedule.

### Week 1 (Jan. 11 and 13): Hello!

This week's reading should consume no more than *two hours* of your time.

You do not need to prepare for our first meeting on Monday, January 11th.

By Wednesday, January 13th at 2:30pm, please:

1. Take a moment to read the entire course outline, including all the [policies](#) and each of the [prompts](#), as well as the weeks outlined in this schedule. No worries if you don't quite grasp what's happening in the prompts. We'll elaborate on each of them later in the term.
2. Email us any questions or concerns you have about the course. You are also welcome to make an appointment.
3. Purchase or acquire the [novels](#) for this course. There should be five of them: *The House on Mango Street*, *Beloved*, *Geek Love*, *Salvage the Bones*, and *Homegoing*.

## Week 2 (Jan. 18 and 20): *The House on Mango Street*

This week's reading should consume no more than *four hours* of your time.

By Monday, January 18th at 2:30pm, please read *The House on Mango Street* through the story, "Hips" (through page 52). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, January 20th at 2:30pm, please finish *The House on Mango Street* (through page 110). Take notes as you read.

Note that *The House on Mango Street's* chapters are not numbered and function more like stories or vignettes ("lazy poems").

Content warnings for the book: domestic abuse, sexual assault, sexism, racism, xenophobia, fatphobia, death

## Week 3 (Jan. 25 and 27): *Beloved*

This week's reading should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

By Monday, January 25th at 2:30pm, please read *Beloved* through Chapter 6 (through page 75). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, January 27th at 2:30pm, please read *Beloved* through Chapter 18 (through page 195). Take notes as you read. Please also select a **prompt** to which you'll respond for the first assignment, which is due by Monday, February 8th. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Please leave Prompt D for the final / fourth assignment.

Note that *Beloved's* chapters are not numbered. It has three sections, which are numbered.

Content warnings for the book: racism, racial slurs, slavery, torture, sexism, sexual assault, physical violence, death, alcohol, domestic abuse, animal cruelty, death of a child

## Week 4 (Feb. 1 and 3): *Beloved*

This week's reading should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

By Monday, February 1st at 2:30pm, please read *Beloved* through Chapter 25 (through page 277). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, February 3rd at 2:30pm, please finish *Beloved* (through page 324). Take notes as you read.

Note that *Beloved's* chapters are not numbered. It has three sections, which are numbered.

Content warnings for the book: racism, racial slurs, slavery, torture, sexism, sexual assault, physical violence, death, alcohol, domestic abuse, animal cruelty, death of a child

## Week 5 (Feb. 8 and 10): First Assignment and Recap

This week's writing should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

By Monday, February 8th at 2:30pm, please submit via Brightspace (link coming soon) your first response to a **prompt**: Prompt A, B, or C. You should respond to each prompt *only once* and select *one* of three options provided. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Please leave Prompt D for the final / fourth assignment.

By Wednesday, February 10th at 2:30pm, please review your notes for *The House on Mango Street* and *Beloved*. Please also select a **prompt** to which you'll respond for the second assignment, which is due by Wednesday, March 3rd. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Please leave Prompt D for the final / fourth assignment.

### **Week 6 (Feb. 15 and 17): Take a Break**

We do not meet this week. It's reading break. Enjoy it!

### **Week 7 (Feb. 22 and 24): *Geek Love***

This week's reading should consume no more than *seven hours* of your time.

By Monday, February 22nd at 2:30pm, please read *Geek Love* through Chapter 11, "Blood, Stumps, and Other Changes" (through page 145). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, February 24th at 2:30pm, please read *Geek Love* through Chapter 25, "All Fall Down" (through page 322). Take notes as you read.

Content warnings for the book: ableism, body shaming, domestic abuse, death, torture, physical violence, sexual assault, death of a child, sexism, racism, identity jokes, vulgarity

### **Week 8 (Mar. 1 and 3): Second Assignment and *Geek Love***

This week's reading should consume no more than *one hour* of your time. This week's writing should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

By Monday, March 1st at 2:30pm, please finish *Geek Love* (through page 348).

By Wednesday, March 3rd at 2:30pm, please submit via Brightspace (link coming soon) your second response to a **prompt**: Prompt A, B, or C. You should respond to each prompt *only once* and select *one* of three options provided. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Please leave Prompt D for the final / fourth assignment.

Content warnings for the book: ableism, body shaming, domestic abuse, death, torture, physical violence, sexual assault, death of a child, sexism, racism, identity jokes, vulgarity

### **Week 9 (Mar. 8 and 10): *Salvage the Bones***

This week's reading should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

By Monday, March 8th at 2:30pm, please read *Salvage the Bones* through "The Fifth Day: Salvage the Bones" (through page 107). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, March 10th at 2:30pm, please read *Salvage the Bones* through "The Tenth Day: In the Endless Eye" (through page 214). Take notes as you read. Please also select a [prompt](#) to which you'll respond for the third assignment, which is due by Wednesday, March 24th. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Please leave Prompt D for the final / fourth assignment.

Note that *Salvage the Bones's* chapters are numbered as days ("The Fifth Day" and "The Tenth Day," for instance).

Content warnings for the book: animal cruelty, dog fighting, natural disaster, racism, sexism, alcohol, addiction, physical violence, death

### **Week 10 (Mar. 15 and 17): *Salvage the Bones* and Recap**

This week's reading should consume no more than *two hours* of your time.

By Monday, March 15th at 2:30pm, please finish *Salvage the Bones* (through page 258). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, March 17th at 2:30pm, please review your notes for *Geek Love* and *Salvage the Bones*.

Note that *Salvage the Bones's* chapters are numbered as days ("The Fifth Day" and "The Tenth Day," for instance).

Content warnings for the book: animal cruelty, dog fighting, natural disaster, racism, sexism, alcohol, addiction, physical violence, death

### **Week 11 (Mar. 22 and 24): Third Assignment and "Other Formats"**

This week's writing should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

For our meeting on Monday, March 22nd at 2:30pm, please come prepared with the title, author(s), and publication date of *one* work of American fiction in a format *other than the novel* (so . . . comics, graphic novels, short fiction, interactive fiction, and even games) you feel would contribute meaningfully to the conversations we're having about contemporary American fiction this term. How, under what assumptions, and to what effects might we expand our discussions of contemporary American fiction beyond the novel? Write a sentence or two describing the work you selected and be prepared to share it as well as the title, author, and publication date with us.

By Wednesday, March 24th at 2:30pm, please submit via Brightspace (link coming soon) your third response to a [prompt](#): Prompt A, B, or C. You should respond to each prompt *only once* and select *one* of three options provided. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Please leave Prompt D for the final / fourth assignment.

### **Week 12 (Mar. 29 and 31): *Homegoing***

This week's reading should consume no more than *six hours* of your time.

By Monday, March 29th at 2:30pm, please read *Homegoing* through the story, "James" (through page 110). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, March 31st at 2:30pm, please read *Homegoing* through the story, "Willie" (through page 221). Take notes as you read. Please also review [Prompt D](#), a response to which is due by Monday, April 19th.

Note that *Homegoing's* chapters are not numbered and function more like stories or vignettes.

Content warnings for the book: slavery, racism, racial slurs, sexual assault, torture, sexualized violence, death, drug abuse, physical violence, trafficking, police brutality, death of a child, domestic abuse, alcohol, homophobia, sexism, addiction, hate crimes

### **Week 13 (Apr. 5 and 7): Revisions and *Homegoing***

This week's reading should consume no more than *three hours* of your time. This week's optional revisions should require no more than *three hours* of your time.

By Monday, April 5th at 2:30pm, please finish *Homegoing* (through page 300). Take notes as you read.

By Wednesday, April 7th at 2:30pm, please submit via Brightspace (link coming soon) your revised response to a previous prompt: Prompt [A](#), [B](#), or [C](#). This assignment is *optional*. If you decide to revise, then we recommend reviewing the prompt as well as our feedback on your initial response.

Note that *Homegoing's* chapters are not numbered and function more like stories or vignettes.

Content warnings for the book: slavery, racism, racial slurs, sexual assault, torture, sexualized violence, death, drug abuse, physical violence, trafficking, police brutality, death of a child, domestic abuse, alcohol, homophobia, sexism, addiction, hate crimes

### **Week 14 (Apr. 12): Review**

There's no assigned reading or writing this week, but we recommend starting on the [fourth assignment](#), if you've not already.

By Monday, April 12th at 2:30pm, please review your notes for each of the five novels we read this term. We'll also complete course experience surveys on the 12th.

### **Finale (Apr. 19): Fourth Assignment**

This week's writing should consume no more than *seven hours* of your time.

By Monday, April 19th at 5pm, please submit via Brightspace (link coming soon) your response to [Prompt D](#). Extensions until Thursday, April 22nd at 5pm will be available upon request by email.

Thank you! We hope you enjoy your summer.

## Policies

Here are the policies for English 429C, "Contemporary American Fiction."

## Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this 400-level English course.

## Brightspace

We will rely as little as possible on Brightspace for this course. We will not use it for discussions, surveys, or polls, and you won't need it to write or produce any of your assignments. You should be able to find most of what you need here, in this syllabus, which, for the sake of access, we copied into Brightspace. This way, you can rely entirely on Brightspace, if you prefer it.

But we will only use Brightspace for the following, most of which may arrive as emails in your inbox (see your Brightspace settings):

1. Class announcements (one each week).
2. Circulating video recordings of Zoom meetings (as part of the weekly class announcement).
3. Accessing your responses to the four [prompts](#). Links to submit those four assignments are available in the [schedule](#). This means you'll need to log into Brightspace at least four times (once per submission) this term.
4. Returning feedback and your marks.

If you cannot access the course Brightspace, then please let us know.

## Assessment

Responses to two of the four prompts are required to pass this course. Failure to complete these two assignments will result in a failing N grade (calculated as a 0 for your GPA).

We will use UVic's [official grading system](#) to assess your four responses. We do not post marks publicly or outside our offices, and we do not use plagiarism detection software.

## Late Submissions and Extensions

If you need to request an extension or you're concerned about the possibility of a late submission, then please email us. We understand that extensions may be necessary for numerous reasons, especially right now.

## Communications

The best way to communicate with us is by email ([jentery@uvic.ca](mailto:jentery@uvic.ca)), during weekly meetings (MW, 2:30-3:20pm) and office hours (M, 1-2pm and 3:30-4:30pm), and by appointment (phone or Zoom).

We respond to work email between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

## Feedback

Jentery will provide feedback via Brightspace on each of the four assignments.

Throughout the term, we'll request feedback from you on how the course is going. We'll also ask you to complete Course Experience Surveys at the end of term.

## Attendance and Participation

Please attend the weekly Zoom meetings (MW, 2:30-3:20pm) and participate in those discussions via text, video, and/or audio. Video recordings of these meetings will be circulated via Brightspace.

There is no participation mark for this course.

## Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. We are expected to adhere to [UVic's equity and human rights policies](#). You should alert me immediately if you have any questions about these policies and their application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

## Academic Integrity

We are expected to adhere to [UVic's academic integrity policy](#) and be aware of the policies for the evaluation of student course work. Violations of the integrity policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review. We do not use software to detect plagiarism in essays or any other assignments.

## Copyright

All course materials are made available for educational purposes and for the exclusive use of students in this course. The material is protected under copyright law, even if not marked as such. The syllabus itself is licensed [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). Any further use or distribution of materials to others requires our written permission, except under fair dealing or another exception in the Copyright Act. Violations may result in disciplinary action under the Resolution of Non-Academic Misconduct Allegations policy (AC1300).

## Accessibility and Accommodation

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach us and/or the [Centre for Accessible Learning \(CAL\)](#) as soon as possible. CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals.

## Diversity and Inclusion

We want to create a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and also honours your identities across race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, and ability. Integrating diverse and different experiences is important for any critical approach to fiction. We (like many people) are still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something is said in class (by anyone, including one of us) that makes you feel uncomfortable, don't hesitate to talk with us. If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your University records, please let us know. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impeded by your experiences outside class, please don't hesitate to talk with us. We want to be a resource for you. You can also submit anonymous feedback, which, with your permission, we may use to make a general announcement to the course. If you prefer to speak with someone outside the course, Michael Nowlin (Chair, Department of English), is an excellent resource. Finally, please contact us or submit anonymous feedback if you have any suggestions to improve the quality of the course.

(Language for this policy was drawn from the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University, and from the work of Monica Linden, in particular.)

## Online Conduct

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting critical academic discourse while providing a respectful and supportive learning environment. All members of the University community have the right to this experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. The University will not tolerate racism, sexualized violence, or any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Please be advised that, by logging into UVic's learning systems and interacting with online resources, you are engaging in a University activity. All interactions within this environment are subject to University expectations and policies. Any concerns about student conduct may be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the appropriate University policy. To report concerns about online student conduct, email [onlineconduct@uvic.ca](mailto:onlineconduct@uvic.ca).

## Basic Needs

We want you to thrive in this course and everywhere else. Please let us know as early as possible if you have any concerns or if you require any assistance to succeed. We'll do our best to help.

If you need to cover gaps in care, then please don't hesitate to bring your children to class meetings. Babies who are nursing are always welcome, as we do not want you to choose between feeding your child and continuing your education.

UVic takes student mental health very seriously, with a [website](#) full of resources. We offer services such as assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and academic concerns. Services for students also include crisis and emergency mental health consultation and confidential assessment, counselling services (individual and small group), and referrals. Many of these programs are connected with Health Services, which you may contact by phone.

The [Student Services website](#) lists several policies that you might want to know about and may make your life at UVic safer and easier. Only some of them are directly related to this course, but all of them are still important.

(Language for this policy was drawn from the work of Richard Pickard at UVic.)

## Prompts

Here are the four prompts for this course. Please note that Prompts A, B, C each have three options for responding. You should pick *one* of the three options, and you should respond to each prompt only once. You can respond to Prompts A, B, and C in any order you wish. Prompt D, however, is intended for your fourth assignment, due by April 19th (the end of term).

### Prompt A

*Analysis:* This prompt emphasizes close reading, without much (if any) need to read beyond the novel you've selected as your primary source. For it, you have three options: narrative, power, and language. Please choose one.

Your response will constitute 25% of your final mark. We will use the [rubric](#) and UVic's [official grading system](#) to assess your response.

#### *Prompt A, Option 1: Narrative*

What is significant about the novel's narrative?

Write an academic argument in 750-1000 words (MLA format) about how the narrative of a novel in this course is constructed and why its construction is compelling or unique. As

you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the novel (its plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What is the form of the novel? How are pieces of the story stitched together?
- How is time structured? Is it chronological? Non-linear?
- How does the novel flash back or flash forward?
- How is the story focalized? Who presents it? What do they remember, know, ignore, or forget? How do they travel from place to place or moment to moment?
- Are there ghosts? If so, then how do they communicate with the present?
- While reading, what must we assume or suspend?
- Does the narrative have a clear beginning, middle, and end? If so, then where are they?
- Is there resolution on the last page? How does that resolution, or lack thereof, affect your interpretation of the novel?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write 750 to 1000 words about the overall narrative form of the novel and to also interpret a specific passage or two where the novel's narrative structure clearly influences how the story unfolds. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a thesis. An academic thesis should be contestable (people should be able to disagree with it), grounded in detail (evidence-based), interpretive (not merely descriptive), and relevant to current research in the field. A convincing argument answers the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question common in literary and cultural criticism, and it sparks discussion rather than foreclosing it.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

*Prompt A, Option 2: Power*

What is significant about how power operates in the novel?

Write an academic argument in 750-1000 words (MLA format) about how power operates in one of the assigned novels and explain why the novel's approach to power is compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the novel (its plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- Who has agency or mobility in the novel? In what situations? In relations with whom?
- How do racism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, fatphobia, capitalism, and/or sexism operate in the novel?
- What do characters assume about each other? About the environment? About nonhuman animals in the novel?

- Whose perspectives and which positions are treated as the default or norm?
- Who gets to speak, to whom, and when? Who remains (mostly) silent?
- Who is considered to be an expert, in which situations, and under what assumptions?
- How do characters switch codes or change their behaviours across situations? How do they identify, and when?
- Who is the novel's intended audience, and how does the novel speak to or for them?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write 750-1000 words about how power operates in the novel and to also interpret a specific passage or two where power clearly influences how the fiction unfolds. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a thesis. An academic thesis should be contestable (people should be able to disagree with it), grounded in detail (evidence-based), interpretive (not merely descriptive), and relevant to current research in the field. A convincing argument answers the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question common in literary and cultural criticism, and it sparks discussion rather than foreclosing it.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

### *Prompt A, Option 3: Language*

What is significant about the use of language(s) in the novel?

Write an academic argument in 750-1000 words (MLA format) about one of the assigned novel's approaches to language and explain why its approach is compelling or unique. As you write, consider describing the general characteristics of the novel (its plot, genre, characterization, setting, and style) but also interpreting one or two key passages in detail.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- How would you describe the language of the novel? What adjectives would you use?
- Which metaphors and phrases are repeated throughout it?
- How do characters speak to each other? To themselves? How many languages or dialects do they use? How do they translate or switch across languages?
- If there's a narrator, then how would you describe their voice, style, and position?
- How, if at all, does the novel combine or mix languages?
- When is the prose also poetic? Abstract? Gestural? Palpable?
- When does the language convey information? When is it ambiguous? What goes unsaid or unwritten?
- Does the novel create its own language? Its own words? If so, then how and why?
- What is the social, cultural, or political function of language in the novel? How does it connect people? Separate them?
- When do characters miscommunicate, and to what effects on the fiction at hand?
- How does the novel sound when you read it aloud?

- How does the language represent or perform history? When is the writing a record or document of what happened? When isn't it, and why?
- Does the language correspond with your everyday life? What must you translate or look up? To what effects on your interpretation?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write 750-1000 words about the overall use of language(s) in the novel and to also interpret a specific passage or two where you consider the use of language to be especially significant. Since you're writing an academic argument, you should probably include a thesis. An academic thesis should be contestable (people should be able to disagree with it), grounded in detail (evidence-based), interpretive (not merely descriptive), and relevant to current research in the field. A convincing argument answers the "so what?" (or "why does this matter?") question common in literary and cultural criticism, and it sparks discussion rather than foreclosing it.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

### Prompt B

*Contextualization:* This prompt focuses on the contexts that shape interpretation. It requires some reading beyond the assigned novels. For it, you have three options: intended audience, geographic setting, and a past event. Please choose one.

Your response will constitute 25% of your final mark. We will use the [rubric](#) and UVic's [official grading system](#) to assess your response.

#### *Prompt B, Option 1: Intended Audience and Reception*

Who is the novel's intended audience, and how was the novel received across venues?

In 500-750 words (MLA format), assess an assigned novel's reception and also identify and describe its intended audience(s). As you write, consider the details that matter for audience and reception: date of publication, publisher, awards, and the author's publication history, including fiction as well as editing and nonfiction. Also consider various venues for reception: everything from the CBC and *New York Times* to social media and Goodreads to journal articles in the MLA International Bibliography. When identifying intended audiences, please be as specific as possible.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- When was the book published? By whom?
- Who did the original cover art? What was on the cover?
- Was the novel the author's first book? Their last or most recent book? Somewhere in between? How similar is it to their other books?
- What awards, if any, did the book receive?
- How many editions now exist?

- Where was the book reviewed? Who reviewed it? Were the reviews positive? What did they focus on? What role did the author's reputation play in the reviews? How were these reviews or venues biased?
- How did reviews differ from one venue to the next? What do you make of these differences?
- How is the book rated by social cataloguing and commerce sites? What sort of comments do people leave about it?
- Is there any tension between the "popular" and "critical" reception? If so, then what do you make of it?
- How much scholarship has been written about the book? Where is the book popular? Who tends to identify with it?
- Does the book have a fan culture or subculture? If so, describe it.
- How would you describe the book's intended audience? Who, exactly, are they? Why does this audience matter when reviewing the book? See if the book has a dedication and/or acknowledgments.
- Did the book become something else, such as a movie or play? How well was the adaptation (or remake) received? To what effects on the novel's reception?

If you choose this option, then feel free to use 500-750 words to assess the overall reception of an assigned novel, with details drawn from a range of reviews, comments, and publications (both popular and academic) and attention given to the particulars of its intended audience(s). Since you're assessing the reception of a novel and describing its intended audience, you don't need to make an academic argument. (This is not a close reading assignment.) Feel free to write for a broad, non-expert audience: people who, generally speaking, are interested in contemporary fiction. However, your assessment should be clear and thorough, and your descriptions should be precise. You should draw upon at least *ten* different sources across news outlets (such as newspapers, websites, and radio), social media, blogs, and academic journals.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

*Prompt B, Option 2: Geographic Setting*

What is the geographic setting of the novel, and why is that setting significant?

In 500-750 words (MLA format), describe one geographic setting of an assigned novel and explain why that setting is significant. Of note, this geographic setting should be an actual place that exists or once existed on Earth. As you write, consider the details that matter for the geography of the fiction at hand: names of countries and states / provinces, demographics, capital cities, urban and rural locations, histories of place, climate, landscape, (official) language(s), Indigenous and settler groups, and population numbers. To acquire this information, you may want to consult a variety of sources, including academic, official, and government publications as well as records such as census data. While you may refer to passages in your assigned novel, the emphasis of this assignment

should be on the particulars of an actual, geographic setting and its significance in the fiction (or when interpreting the fiction).

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- Where does the novel take place?
- Where do characters say they are from? Where are they going? Where do they feel like they belong?
- What language(s) do they speak? How is the language tied to a geographic location?
- How does the novel describe its settings? From whose perspective(s)?
- What values does the novel associate with land? With rural areas? With urban areas?
- How is history tied to people and places in the novel?
- How is nature described? How are art and culture described? Where are they located?
- When you talk about settings in the novel, how specific can you get? Country? City? Neighbourhood? Street? Building? Why does this specificity matter?
- How, if at all, does the novel address the land on which it is set? On which it was written?
- How do questions of geography correspond with the aesthetics or politics of the novel? What social or cultural issues does geography address?
- Have you been to places referenced in the novel? If so, then to what effects on your interpretation of it?

If you choose this option, then feel free to use 500-750 words to describe one particular geographic setting in the novel, with details and even data drawn from a range of venues and publications. Since you are describing the setting of a novel and explaining its significance, you don't need to make an academic argument. Feel free to write for a broad, non-expert audience: people who, generally speaking, are interested in contemporary fiction. When you address the significance of the geographic setting, you can focus on the particulars of that setting instead of passages from your selected novel. (This is not a close reading assignment.) However, your description of a geographic setting should be precise, drawing upon at least *five* different reliable sources.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

*Prompt B, Option 3: A Past Event*

When is an historical event mentioned in the novel, and why is that event significant?

In 500-750 words (MLA format), describe one historical event mentioned in an assigned novel and explain why that event is significant. Of note, this event should be an actual event that occurred on Earth. As you write, consider the details that matter for histories of events: names, participants, dates, locations, descriptions, documentation, controversies, memories, and days of remembrance. To acquire this information, you may want to consult a variety of sources, including academic, official, and government publications as well as

historical records. While you may refer to passages in your assigned novel, the emphasis of this assignment should be on the particulars of an actual, historical event and its significance in the novel (or when interpreting the novel).

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What are the histories and events upon which your selected novel relies?
- To which documents or records do characters refer?
- What events are remembered or mentioned often in the novel?
- How is the event coded? With what or whom is it associated?
- Which historical events do the characters attend or participate in? Which events do they study or research?
- Which events haunt the novel or its characters?
- Which events are represented, revised, or illustrated by the novel?
- When does the novel read more like nonfiction than fiction? Which historical events are used as material for that nonfiction?
- Which events do we (as readers) assume actually happened? Which events appear to be fabricated?
- How, if at all, does the novel address the land on which it is set? On which it was written?
- When do you trust the novel's account of history or reality? When don't you? Or should you? Why?
- How would (or do) you draw boundaries between fiction and history in this novel?

If you choose this option, then feel free to use 500-750 words to describe one historical event mentioned in the novel, with details and even data drawn from a range of venues and publications. Since you're describing an event and explaining its significance, you don't need to make an academic argument. Feel free to write for a broad, non-expert audience: people who, generally speaking, are interested in contemporary fiction. When you address the significance of the event, you can focus on the particulars of that event instead of passages from your selected novel. (This is not a close reading assignment.) However, your description of an event should be precise, drawing upon at least *five* different reliable sources.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

### Prompt C

*Experiment:* This prompt emphasizes the integration of fiction into everyday life. It involves some experimentation beyond the essay format. For it, you have three options: mimicry, podcast, and workshop. Please choose one.

Your response will constitute 25% of your final mark. We will use the [rubric](#) and UVic's [official grading system](#) to assess your response.

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*Prompt C, Option 1: Mimicry*

What do we learn from mimicking the writing we read?

Please identify an event or everyday occurrence from this term (something, for instance, that just happened to you or something you do routinely) and write roughly 500 words about it in the style or voice of an assigned novel. Please also write about 300 words reflecting on what you learned about the novel (in particular) and fiction (in general) from this act of mimicry.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- How would you describe the style or voice of the novel you're about to mimic? Where possible, pick precise adjectives to describe it.
- If the novel had (has?) a personality, then what would it be, or how would you describe it?
- Which passages do you find most compelling? Why?
- How long are the sentences? The paragraphs?
- When is the novel specific or detailed? When is it vague? Why?
- What kind of vocabulary is used?
- How is dialogue written or expressed?
- What tense is most common?
- What types of literary devices and figurative language are preferred?
- Do you notice any unique punctuation?
- Does the writing tend to "record" or "capture" what happened, or does it project its own world? Or . . . ?
- When does the novel make you laugh? Why?
- When does the novel make you cry? Why?
- When does the novel bore you? Why?
- When can't you put the novel down? When do you put it down? Why?
- What positions, perspectives, and experiences are represented by or in the novel?
- How is the novel narrated?
- How does it sound when you read it aloud?
- With which assigned novel do you most identify? Least identify? To what degree is identification tied to mimicry?
- How can you mimic the writing sincerely, without irony, parody, or appropriation? What or whom should you *not* mimic?

If you choose this option, then feel free to write a short, creative piece of mimicry (500 words) based on your own, recent experiences, together with a reflection (300 words) on what you learned from the process. Of course, the reflection may be informal, written in the first person, and steeped in your own perceptions of the writing experience as well as your own relation to the selected novel. However, it should be precise and anchored in detail, and it should demonstrate some self-awareness of the decisions you made and their (potential) effects. The style of a compelling act of mimicry should be difficult to discern

from the style of the original text, but the content should be grounded in (or represent) *your* everyday life.

Please submit your response as a DOCX, RTF, HTML, or PDF file. Feel free to include images (where applicable) as figures in the document.

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*Prompt C, Option 2: Podcast (Audio or Video)*

What do we learn from talking about novels with an audience?

Please identify an assigned novel and create part (3 to 5 minutes) of a podcast episode that reviews the novel for a specific audience of your choice. The episode should be composed with a particular podcast (that already exists) in mind, and you should identify the podcast and provide its URL in writing. Alternatively, you can imagine a podcast or online publication you want to see (hear? watch?) in the world. In that case, you should give it a name / title. Either way, your excerpt should be accompanied by a script or transcript consisting of 500-750 words. You should also avoid recommending the book to your listeners or rating it for them. (Your review should not be about consumers' purchasing decisions.) You should instead focus on which aspects of the novel make it important or relevant right now.

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What are some podcasts you enjoy? Why do you listen to them? How do they engage fiction and culture? If you were to write a review for them, then what would it sound like? What sort of content would be appropriate?
- What sort of podcast do you want to see (hear?) in the world? How would it engage fiction and culture? If you were to write a review for it, then what would it sound like? What sort of content would be appropriate?
- How does talking about a book differ from writing about it? How would your style, delivery, and audience change across modes?
- What makes a good book review? When do you consult them? Why do others consult them? Why listen to one instead of reading it?
- In a review, how do you balance attention to the particulars of a novel with your general impressions of it?
- Who is the intended audience for your podcast? What would they expect from a review? Where and how would they listen to you? With headphones or ear buds? In a car? At home?
- If you read a passage from your novel aloud, then what does it sound like? Will you read passages aloud in your podcast?
- Have you heard the author of your novel read aloud? If so, then what do they sound like? How could you include their voice in your podcast?
- What other sounds may accompany your voice and review?

If you choose this option, then feel free to compose a review (3-5 minutes) of your selected novel and submit it as an MP3 or WAV file. We will assess your podcast for its content, not its production. Please do not spend time on the particulars of either recording (including acoustics) or post-production (including editing and effects). Focus on content. You should submit your WAV or MP3 file with either a script (500-750 words) written prior to the podcast (recommended) or a transcript (500-750 words) produced from it. For radio and podcasts, speaking 150 words per minute is the average. With your script or transcript, please provide the title and URL for the podcast you have in mind or the title of the podcast you're imagining / creating.

If you would prefer to approach this option via video, then feel free. MP4, MOV, and AVI formats are fine.

*Prompt C, Option 3: A Workshop*

What do we learn from workshopping or teaching novels?

Please identify an assigned novel and write a plan for workshopping it with a specific audience of your choice (other undergraduate students, Grade 12 students, or a club / organization at UVic, for instance). Be sure to identify the audience in your plan, which should be 500-750 words for a workshop lasting 30-45 minutes. It can follow whatever format you prefer, from an outline to a prompt to slides to a comic / wireframe to something more experimental. Its goals, however, should be clear and also achievable in 30-45 minutes. (Consider having only two or three goals.) It should also focus on a specific aspect of the novel. (You can't do much in only 30-45 minutes.) Assume that all workshop participants have read the novel at hand. (One can dream?)

Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What about the novel do you want other people to know about? Or to focus on? What sticks out to you as particularly interesting?
- How would you teach this novel or an aspect of it?
- Who is your audience, what do they know, what do they want to learn, and what do they care about?
- What do you enjoy doing, and how might that translate into this workshop? How might you perform or enact what you enjoy or care about in this context?
- What about the novel needs to be, or should be, discussed right now?
- How would you share the goals of the workshop with your audience? Would you state them early and up front? Allow the goals to unfold more organically? Or . . . ?
- What approach is appropriate for the situation and context? How would you describe yourself as a facilitator of the workshop? What would be your style, persona, and role?
- How would you keep participants engaged and invested?
- Would workshop participants collaborate? Would they produce anything together or individually by the end of the workshop? Or would you focus more on the moment (talking, sharing, being present)?

- Would the workshop unfold in person / in situ? Or would it be conducted remotely? Could it work across both settings? Where, in short, would it occur? Consider the space of place.
- Which media are best for your plan and your approach? What are you most comfortable with? Would the workshop involve screens? Paper? Video? Audio? Writing? Drawing? Go with whatever appeals most to you and seems appropriate for the context, plan, goals, and novel at hand.
- Try enacting or role-playing your workshop, even if alone. What did you learn from this experiment?

If you choose this option, then feel free to compose a workshop plan (500-750 words) for a 30- to 45-minute workshop about your selected novel and submit it as a PDF, DOCX, RTF, PPTX, GSLIDES, JPG, PNG, MOV, AVI, MP4, MP3, and/or WAV file. We will assess your workshop plan for its content, not its production. If you use video, audio, slides, or the like, please do not spend time on the particulars of recording (including acoustics), design (including layout and graphics), or post-production (including editing and effects). Focus on content. You may submit your plan with whatever other workshop materials you'd use or like to use.

### Prompt D

Prompt D will have one option and will be published here and on the course Brightspace in February or early March. A response to it will be due by April 19th. It will engage the dynamics of the course as it unfolds in January and February and also address issues and questions that emerge during our regular meetings on Monday and Wednesday. Thank you for your patience.

### Rubric

We will use the following rubric to assess all responses to the [prompts](#). This rubric aligns with UVic's [official grading system](#).

**90-100 (A+):** The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is incredibly focused and coherently integrates material from the selected novel(s). It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects in-depth engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are incredibly persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is exceptional for undergraduate work and could be published with the appropriate venue.

**85-89 (A):** The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is focused and coherently integrates material from the selected novel(s). It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects in-depth engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are incredibly persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is outstanding. With a few revisions, it could be published with the appropriate venue.

**80-84 (A-):** The content exceeds expectations of the prompt. It is focused and integrates material from the selected novel(s). It demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects a meaningful engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is excellent. With some revisions, it could be published with the appropriate venue.

**77-79 (B+):** The content exceeds some expectations of the prompt. It is focused and integrates material from the selected novel(s). It demonstrates some awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects a meaningful engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are mostly persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is very good work.

**73-76 (B):** The content meets the expectations of the prompt. It is focused and integrates material from the selected novel(s). It demonstrates some awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects a meaningful engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are often persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is acceptable.

**70-72 (B-):** The content meets some expectations of the prompt. It is occasionally focused and may integrate material from the selected novel(s). It may demonstrate an awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it may consider multiple perspectives when appropriate. It reflects some engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are occasionally persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is almost acceptable.

**60-69 (C or C+):** The content does not meet most expectations of the prompt. It is rarely focused and may not integrate material from the selected novel(s). It does not demonstrate awareness of its own limitations or implications, or it does not consider multiple perspectives. It reflects some engagement with the selected novel(s), but the composition and, where applicable, argument are not persuasive. Overall, the response to the prompt is not acceptable.

**50-59 (D):** The content does not meet expectations of the prompt. It is not focused and does not integrate material from the selected novel(s). It does not demonstrate awareness of its own limitations or implications, or it does not consider multiple perspectives. It does not reflect engagement with the selected novel(s), and the composition and, where applicable, argument are not sound. Overall, the response to the assignment is not acceptable.

**0-49 (F):** The content is missing or falls incredibly short of the word count (or minute count).

(Aspects of this grading rubric were borrowed from a syllabus by Mark Sample.)