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# Engl 2257
# Survey of World Literature I

The University of Idaho in statewide cooperation with
Boise State University — Idaho State University — Lewis-Clark State College

# Course Guide

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## English 2257
## Survey of World Literature I
## (Beginnings through 16th Century)

Idaho State University
3 Semester-Hour Credits

Prepared by:
Kelly Meyer, Ph.D.
Idaho State University
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4-Engl I2257

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# Engl 2257: Survey of World Literature 3 credits: ISU

## Welcome

Hello, and welcome to English 2257: Survey of World Literature I! This course guide will take you through the course from start to finish, detailing each lesson and assignment as well as preparing you for the proctored exams. If this is your first Independent Study in Idaho (ISI) course, I think you will find this student-directed approach to the study of literature exciting. The course is designed to challenge students who are new to the study of literature at the college level as well as those who have taken other literature courses in the past. You have the opportunity to get as much out of this course as you want, and your instructor is available to assist and encourage you every step of the way.

## Policies and Procedures

Refer to the ISI website at **www.uidaho.edu/isi** and select *About ISI Policies* for the most current policies, procedures, and course information, including information on setting up your accounts, exams and proctors, grades and transcripts, course exchanges and the refund schedule, library resources and other services, academic integrity, and disability support services. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISI office for clarification before beginning your course.

## Course Description

Examination of major works and authors in historical perspective, with emphasis upon literary and cultural backgrounds. ISU students: Partially satisfies Objective 4 of the General Education Requirements.

*12 graded assignments, 3 proctored exams*

**Students may submit up to 1 assignment per week. Before taking exams, students MUST wait for grades and feedback on assignments, which may take up to three weeks after date of receipt by the instructor.**

ALL assignments and exams must be submitted to receive a final grade for the course.

## Course Materials

**Required Course Materials**

- Puchner, Martin, et. al. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, shorter 3rd edition. Vol. 1: Beginnings to 1650. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013. Print. ISBN: 978-0-393-91960-8

**Recommended Course Materials**

- Gardner, Janet E. *Writing about Literature: A Portable Guide*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Print. ISBN: 978-0-312-60757-9

## Course Delivery

All ISI courses are delivered through BbLearn, an online management system that hosts the course lessons and assignments and other items that are essential to the course.

## Course Introduction

Designing a course that will provide students a survey of the literature of the entire ***world*** from the earliest preserved texts through the sixteenth century, as this course aims to do, is quite the task. Many supposed world literature courses primarily focus on reading selections from the Western world, that is, Europe and the Americas, particularly literature written in English or translated from other European languages. You will encounter or have already encountered many of these works of the traditional English literary canon in other courses. Who decides what texts are true classics, worthy of studying centuries later, when the world is our only boundary?

In this course, our focus will be on texts that give you a better sense of what has been written around the world—from a variety of cultural perspectives—from as early as the twentieth century B.C.E. to the year 1650 C.E. We will consider some of those text considered "classics," either in part or by way of comparison to new texts, but we will largely be working to extend and expand our sense of what literature is, who writes it, what its concerns and themes are, and why we should value it—across time and culture.

In these lessons, we simply won't see clear lines between definitive literary periods with exact dates. This isn't a history course though, so the literary works themselves take the spotlight, not the time period. What's more, I encourage you to find links and connections across periods and cultures, even across languages, as we will consider many of our readings in translation. I like to imagine that many of these authors would prefer to simply be called *artists* and *writers*—or even *world citizens*—rather than to be known only for one moment in history or literature.

If you do find we are considering a literary work you have read before, I encourage you to encounter it from the unique perspective of this course and the lessons I have shaped for our readings.

## Course Objectives

In this course, students will…

- Consider the diverse cultures and stories that contribute to world literature from its beginnings to the seventeenth century.
- Understand what it means to read well and think critically about literature.
- Write thoughtfully and effectively about literary texts.
- Understand the importance of literature to a greater understanding of history and human experience.

## Course Structure

**Assignments**

You will submit your assignments as .doc or .docx files through BbLearn. Each lesson has a link for submitting the assignment for that lesson. Each of the twelve self-guided lessons for this course culminate with a written assignment that you will submit for a grade via our course BbLearn site. Look ahead to the questions I pose in these prompts, ***annotate*** (take notes and mark your text) while you read, and have a dictionary handy to quickly look up unfamiliar words. Think about the questions I pose within the lectures, as they will prepare you to write thoughtfully in your assignments and on your exams. Pay close attention to the ***introductions*** to each of these readings. (For convenience, I will refer to our world literature anthology as simply "Norton" and provide the page number for my citations from it.) They provide valuable contextual information on the author and the reading itself, and they give very

helpful clues that will guide you through the readings. I will not always assign the introductions to the larger sections in our text, but I will reference them, and you may find additional insights that foster ideas for your writing and help you place what you read within the context of familiar historical events by reading the introductions on your own. (There are also some extensive timelines in the back of our Norton text that you may find helpful.) Please cite any quotes or specific ideas taken from these introductions just as you do for the literature itself.

The assignments ask you to think critically about one or more of the texts you have read for that lesson, showing ***your close reading skills, your analytical thinking, and your ability to articulate your insights in writing***. While these are not lengthy, formal essays that require research, you are expected to present ***carefully written, polished work***. To that aim, I recommend that you buy or borrow a copy of Janet Gardner's *Writing about Literature* (listed above), widely available for under $10, to consult as you work through this course, particularly if you have never taken a college literature course before. For one example, many students find it challenging to effectively work quotes from literary texts into their own writing. This is a key skill for any literature course, and being able to look at the samples provided in Gardner's book will prove helpful.

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments should be ***written essays of 550-650 words*** (about 2 pages). You do not need a formal heading, title, or works cited page, but you should use simple parenthetical citations with the corresponding page number from our textbook after quoted material. For examples, see how I employ quotes and use citations in our lectures in this course guide.

The instructor puts careful time and thought into the specific ***feedback*** provided on each of your written assignments. You are expected to review this feedback carefully and put the comments you receive into practice on future assignments. Even on an A essay, the grader will often suggest a few helpful pointers that will make you a more effective writer as you continue to study and engage with literature. Assignments are graded with an eye to ***1)*** *how effectively you answer the question posed by the specific prompt*, and ***2)*** *how you show you have considered prior feedback on your literary writing—that is, showing improvement and development from lesson to lesson*.

It is best to contact the instructor ***before*** submitting an assignment if you aren't sure you fully understand the prompt or have other concerns about your approach to the assignment. You will typically not have the opportunity to revise these assignments; however, you are encouraged to contact the instructor if you have questions on a graded assignment. On rare occasions, a revision may be permitted.

**Exams**

The exams are designed to primarily focus on the work you do for the lessons in each respective section. However, the exams are worth a bit more each time (see Grading below), so they are also designed with the aim to see your skills in critical thinking and writing about literature improve, as well as giving you the opportunity to make connections across works that span different time periods and cultures. While I won't ask you for specifics on a work studied for Exam 1 on a later exam, you will see how certain themes resonate throughout the lessons, from beginning to end, and you are expected to be able to speak to these ideas on later exams. All three exams are proctored, and no notes or books should be used.

I provide a list of important terms at the beginning of each lesson. Being familiar with these will help you prepare for the exams. While I may not always explicitly define these terms right in the lecture, your assigned readings will help you construct a full definition of the terms and how they play out in the literary texts. Jot down your own working definitions of these terms as you work your way through the

lessons. Understanding them in your own words will help you think critically and write thoughtfully on the exams.

As it is the policy of the program that actual exams are not returned to ISI students, your instructor will contact you electronically (via BbLearn) with your grade and specific feedback on your exam.

## Grading

Your total course grade is calculated as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Lessons 1-12** | 40% (a little over 3% each) |
| **Exam 1** | 15% |
| **Exam 2** | 20% |
| **Exam 3** | 25% |

**A** = 90% and above **B** = 80 to 89.9% **C** = 70 to 79.9% **D** = 60 to 69.9% **F** = below 60%

Assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale, with numerical percent grades entered for each assignment. Exams will be graded on the same scale, with the value for each section of the exam clearly marked to help you budget your time.

Acts of academic dishonesty, including cheating or plagiarism are considered a very serious transgression and may result in a grade of F for the course.

## About the Course Developer

My name is Kelly Meyer, and I am very pleased for you to be joining this course. I completed my Ph.D. in English and the Teaching of English from Idaho State University in 2014. The specific areas of focus for my study of literature are multi-ethnic literatures, postcolonial literature, and the representations of women in world literature, so I am excited to apply my interests to designing this course for ISI's world literature students.

As I read for pleasure and for study, I find myself consistently seeking out the stories of authors and characters who haven't typically been included in the anthologies for traditional literature courses. These narratives—from and about the marginalized, the disenfranchised, and the often-silenced—are incredibly valuable to the study of literature at any level. They show minority students the voices of people they know, and they show other students the voices of people they want to know, who can illuminate for them a world bigger than their own. Such stories indeed portray diverse cultures and experiences, but they also expand our sense of the human experience. We encounter difference, but we also encounter themes and emotions that feel so close to home, so close to ourselves.

I believe the most important work we can accomplish in courses like this comes through a joint venture, as a classroom community, to become more responsible, insightful, empathetic world citizens by our reading, writing, and discussion. Whatever your personal stake is in this course, I hope you find a unique place for yourself—beyond simply passing the course and earning the credits—as you encounter the readings I have selected for English 2258.

## Instructor Contact Information

Instructor contact information is posted in the ***Course Rules*** document on your BbLearn site.

# Lesson 1
# *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

## Objectives

With our reading and study in this lesson, we will answer the following questions:

- ✓ *How did early written languages evolve and spread?*
- ✓ *What is the significance of* The Epic of Gilgamesh *to the history of ancient Mesopotamia as well as to world literature?*
- ✓ *What motifs are evident in the story of Gilgamesh that are common to other ancient epics?*

## Readings

- ☐ Introductory sections of "Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Literature" (pages 3-8)
- ☐ Introductory material and *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (pages 33-88)

## Important Terms

Epic, motif

## Lecture

When we think of the most important relics and remnants of history, we often think of Greek culture as the pinnacle of the ancient world. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, classic Greek theater, the philosophy of Plato and Socrates—indeed, this legacy is almost unmatched. However, we turn first in this course to *The Epic of Gilgamesh* from ancient Mesopotamia. Our textbook tells us, "As far as we know, no other literary work of the ancient world spread so widely across cultures and languages" (33). *Gilgamesh* not only challenges our view of Greece as the progenitor of the most important works of literature from the ancient world, it also challenges our sense of great texts as being authored by one specific person.

As one of the world's earliest preserved texts, *Gilgamesh* has a grand history of its own. Based on the life of a historical Mesopotamian king, the stories and myths that grew from his rule eventually yielded the translated text we consider for this lesson. With its origin in stories as old as 2100 B.C.E., it seems almost impossible that *The Epic of Gilgamesh* has survived after being written, rewritten, translated, lost, and rediscovered over the span of almost four thousand years.

As an ***epic*** like the better known *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, *Gilgamesh* is a long poem using "elevated language to describe a panoramic sweep of action, spanning the divine and human worlds" (Norton 36). As *A Handbook to Literature* further defines the term, an *epic* portrays "characters of high position in adventures forming an organic whole through their relation to a central heroic figure and through their development of episodes important to the history of a nation or race" (Harmon and Holman 201). Indeed, we see a number of important events unfold and interesting characters circulate this text, all centered around King Gilgamesh as he undertakes his epic journey.

And for surviving against all odds, there is no doubt of the significance that Gilgamesh's story holds for ancient Mesopotamian culture. But this is likely a culture with which we have virtually no familiarity prior to encountering the text. Without that context, it may be difficult to invest yourself in this story of an unknown king from an ancient, unfamiliar culture. Our textbook points us to a few links that allow us

to place *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in a tradition of epic poetry shared by later Greek texts. These ***motifs*** show patterns, ideas, or features that are common among a number of those early epics: the hero's journey home, the influence and interference of the gods, and the devastating loss of friendship (Norton 36). *Motif* is also defined as "a conventional situation, device, interest, or incident" in a literary work (Harmon and Holman 355). Think, for example, of the damsel-in-distress motif so common in literature of medieval chivalry. An important motif to ponder in our reading here is the flood story, as related by the character of Utanapishtim, which is very similar to the later flood story long thought to be unique to the Genesis account of Noah. We will continue to develop such links in our next lesson, where we will specifically consider different creation narratives.

Since we don't know much from the outset about the world from which this ancient Mesopotamian epic springs, the reading itself will illuminate its culture and history. We will start to see how such ancient cultures were distinct and unique but also how they influenced and were influenced by one another.

## Assignment: Making Epic Epic

Harmon and Holman provide a list of certain characteristics that are often evident in the *epic*:

(1) The hero is of imposing stature, of national or international importance, and of great historical or legendary significance.

(2) The setting is vast, covering great nations, the world, or the universe.

(3) The action consists of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage.

(4) Supernatural forces—gods, angels, and demons—interest themselves in the action.

(5) A style of sustained elevation is used.

(6) The poet retains a measure of objectivity.

What makes *The Epic of Gilgamesh* an **epic**? Specifically consider one or more of these six characteristics in your answer, writing an essay (see guidelines regarding assignments above) in response to this question. Think of the literary definition of epic we considered in this lesson, but you may also infuse your discussion with the way we use the word today as an adjective meaning *legendary*, *impressive*, *monumental*, etc. Is that epic quality retained for readers of today?