

# American Transcendentalism

An Online Course

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W 1-2



John Cage. "17 Drawings by Thoreau." 1978. National Gallery of Art

## Texts

*The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*. Ed. Lawrence Buell. Modern Library Classics, 2006. ISBN: 978-0812975093

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*. Ed. Joel Porte and Sandra Morris. Norton Critical Edition, 2001. ISBN: 9780393969720

Fuller, Margaret. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Larry Reynolds. Norton Critical Edition, 1997. ISBN: 9780393971576

Thoreau, Henry. *The Portable Thoreau*. Ed. Jeffrey Cramer. Penguin Random House, 2012. ISBN: 9780143106500

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *A Blithedale Romance*. Oxford UP, 2009. ISBN: 9780199554867

## Course Description

The American transcendentalists articulated a distinctly American ideology between the two American revolutions, the War of Independence and the Civil War. Their philosophy was scientific, even while they differentiated themselves from empiricism. They were influenced by charismatic trends in revivalism, oriental mysticism, and evangelical rhetoric; while they embraced a radical skepticism founded in their Unitarian traditions at Harvard and New England. Their style was Romantic. They extolled the emotions, change, reform, irony, egalitarianism, education, and nature. They saw the mind as a reflection of Nature and Nature as the embodiment of God. They believed that writers were prophets and, through reason, reflection and insight, they could envision the ideal society. Their philosophy could be understood as an aesthetics. It was influenced by the arts—painting, music, poetry, botany, architecture—and its purpose was to influence the arts. It was inspired by German philosophy, especially Kant, who claimed we were born with innate concepts, which make perception possible, but that knowing things in themselves was impossible. Their ambitions, though, paralleled those of German philosophers of their own time, like Hegel, who thought that it was the nature of humanity to resolve

perceptual gaps and to truly “know.” The period of transcendentalism is said to have concluded with the Civil War. But its influences have continued in musicians like John Cage, artists like Donald Judd, architects like Sullivan and Wright, intellectuals like Noam Chomsky, environmentalists like Edward Abbey, and activists like Martin Luther King (and Malcom X). Our principle goals are to read a lot, inspire each other’s thoughts, and to write well about our reading. The best way to know a text well is to write about it.

### **Student Learning Objectives for 5307**

Students will be able to

1. Develop an awareness of the literary tradition of American Transcendentalism.
2. Apply the transcendentalist thought to solve problems related to education, race, class, sexism, and the environment.
3. Use literature as a means of critically understanding our society.
4. Apply techniques of literary research and criticism to write about writing.
5. Use theoretical concepts in early American literature as a lens for interpretation.

### **Graduate Program in English Student Learning Outcomes**

ENGLISH (GRADUATE)

Graduate students will be able to

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the significance of major authors, literary works in different genres, and definitive literary movements in British and American literature
2. Explicate literary works representative of two periods or genres in British literature and two periods or genres in American literature
3. Employ methodology and terminology used in creative writing or linguistics
4. Conduct substantial research to support original interpretations of literary works, provide original applications of literary or linguistic theories, or present literature reviews of authors or genres that have inspired creative writing projects

### **DISTANCE EDUCATION STATEMENT**

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university’s academic support services, such as Smarthinking, library resources, such as online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires secure login information to verify students’ identities and to protect students’ information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

## Class Participation

The following is an excerpt from the Sul Ross State University Distance Learning Handbook:

### STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT & RESPONSIBILITIES

Students are expected to respect their classmates' and instructors' privacy and the work or comments they produce. All assignments you submit or tests you take must be your own work unless your instructor has requested that you work in groups. You may not submit work that is plagiarized or violates copyright laws. It is also your responsibility to respect copyright protection of licensed computer software. If you are taking a distance education course from a remote site, please remember that you are guests on the remote site campus. The facilities, equipment, staff, and materials at that site are neither the property nor employees of Sul Ross State University. Please treat the site respectfully and be responsible in caring for the site that we have been allowed to use. Absence policies in effect for on-campus, traditional classroom instruction courses also apply to students enrolled in distance education courses, including Web-based and ITV courses.

The University allows a maximum of 20% absences in a course before an instructor may drop a student for excessive absences. In Web courses, this policy is interpreted as not participating for more than 3 weeks in a long semester, 1 week in a summer session, or 3 days in the midwinter session. Any student dropped for non-participation will receive an F in the course dropped. Inactivity may include the following:

- Not logging on to the course
- Not submitting assignments
- Not participating in scheduled activities
- Not communicating with the instructor by phone or email, and/or
- Not following the instructor's participation guidelines stated in the syllabus

## Projects

### I. Discussion Posts on Blackboard (300 points) (SLOs 1-5)

I will expect a total of 10 posts through the semester. The due dates for each blog post is on the calendar on the syllabus. The length of each post should be from 300-500 words, which could be one to three paragraphs. Although summarizing is one step in analysis, focus on raising questions, interpreting, and responding critically. To develop your ideas use quotes. Another good strategy is to consider the reading through reference to other literature you know: inter-textual reading. I would like our posts to function like a conversation in which we respond to each other's ideas as well. When other projects are due, no blog post will be due.

### II. Short 6-page Interpretation through "Close Reading." (200 points) (SLOs 1-5)

Close reading means that one concentrates on the formal aspects of a piece of literature as a work of art and avoids the influence of scholarly criticism. I think doing "reader response" criticism, and asking yourself how you subjectively respond to the text will also work for this paper. If close reading from New Criticism focuses on form, reader response theory focuses on the meaning of a text. This paper can be a first draft of your final term paper, which will have to cite scholarly criticism. You can also write about a completely different subject for your term paper. Since you are interpreting a text "closely," it's very important that you use quotes and inquire deeply into their form and underlying arguments.

**III. Précis on One Piece of Criticism (100 points) (SLOs 1-5)**

A précis is a summary and outline of a text. Please read one scholarly recent article, which you find yourself through the library databases (MLA), and write a critical abstract followed by an outline of the main ideas in the article with quotes from the author. This should help inform the class about current scholarship in transcendentalism and provide background for your own term paper. Post your précis as a discussion board post.

**IV. Term Paper (400 points) (SLOs 1-5)**

The term paper can focus on one aspect of one work of literature or compare two works of literature. Send a brief statement of purpose to me a month before the paper is due. The paper must use MLA citation style and be 15 pages in length.

**Peer Feedback and Editing.**

I will give up to 25 points extra-credit to any student who carefully responds to and proofreads another student's "close reading" and term paper (up to 50 points total). The best way means of proofreading is by using the review functions in Word. This allows you to "track changes" and make marginal "comments," then accept or reject the changes when you receive your paper from the proofreader. Email the proofread copy to the classmate, and cc the instructor in order to receive extra-credit.

Projects	Due Date	%	Points
Posts to the Class Reading Blog (10 in number)	About once a week	30	300
Short 6-page "Close Reading" of a primary literary text. A literary analysis without reference to secondary sources.	10.21	20	200
Proposal for Term Paper	11.1	0	0
Précis on One Piece of Criticism	11.11	10	100
Term Paper 15 pages in length	12.6	40	400
Total Points Available		100	1000

**DEADLINES**

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments will be turned in at the beginning of class on their due dates. All alternative arrangements must be approved before the relevant deadline. Late work without previous arrangement with me will only be accepted upon demonstration of extenuating circumstances.

**Blackboard**

If you confront technical issues which interfere with your ability to use Blackboard, contact the LTAC (Lobo Technology Assistance Center) at 432-837-8888 or <https://techassist.sulross.edu>

**Accommodating Students with Disabilities**

Any student who because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make necessary arrangements. If an accommodation is needed, students must present their accommodation letter, obtained from Accessibility

Services, as soon as possible. Please note that instructors are not permitted to provide classroom accommodations to a student until the appropriate verification has been received. Accessibility Services is in Ferguson Hall room 112. You can make an appointment by calling Mary Schwartze Grisham at 432 837-8203.

## Tutoring

The English Department provides tutoring through Blackboard Collaborate. I will assign extra credit for major assignments receiving feedback from the tutors in the English Department's Online Writing Center.

## Plagiarism and Academic Integrity


Dishonest acts, such as plagiarism (using words or a specific author's ideas from another source without acknowledging the source) or collusion (having other people write parts of your paper for you), may result in an "F" on the assignment and may lead to a disciplinary hearing conducted through the office of the Dean of Students, which could result in suspension or expulsion from SRSU. If you have questions about whether your use of other sources (such as books, websites, friends, or Writing Center tutors) is fair or not, please ask before turning in the work that you have a question about.

## Course Calendar

Dates	Text	Readings to Discuss	Objectives, Resources and Due Dates
Week One			
8.26 - 30	<i>The American Transcendentalists</i> Lawrence Buell	I. Anticipations All authors 3-37	Influences, Origins, Inspirations
Week Two			
9.2 - 6	<i>The American Transcendentalists</i> Lawrence Buell	II. Manifestos 7. Emerson. "American Scholar" 2. Alcott. "Human Culture" 3. Brownson. "Reconciliation" 5. Cranch. "Transcendentalism" 8. Dickens. "On Boston Transcendentalism."	Understanding Transcendentalism Discussion Post 1 Due

Week Three			
9.9 - 13	<b><i>The American Transcendentalists</i></b> Lawrence Buell	III. Religious Reform 4. Andrews Norton. "Infidelity." 5. Ripley. "Infidelity Examined." 7. Parker. "Transient and Permanent Religion." 10. Higginson. "The sympathy of Religions."	<b>Returning to origins, Innovation, and Heresy</b>  Discussion Post 2 Due
Week Four			
9.16 - 20	<b><i>The American Transcendentalists</i></b> Lawrence Buell	IV. Secular Reform 1. Brownson. "The Laboring Classes." 5. Ripley, et. Al. "Brookfarm's Constitution" 7. Fuller. "On the Italian Revolution."  Peabody and Alcott on Education	<b>Improvement and Reform</b>  Discussion Post 3 Due
Week Five			
9.23 - 27	<b><i>Emerson's Prose and Poetry.</i></b> Eds. Porte and Morris.	<i>Nature.</i> 29-55  "Divinity School Address." 69-86	The Picturesque and modern religion  Discussion Post 4 Due
Week Six			
9.30 - 10.4	<b><i>Emerson's Prose and Poetry.</i></b> Eds. Porte and Morris.	"Self-Reliance" 120-136 "Circles" 174-82 "The Poet" 183-97	Philosophy and Art  Discussion Post 5 Due
Week Seven			

10.7 - 11	<b>Emerson's Prose and Poetry.</b> Eds. Porte and Morris.	Emerson's Poetry 429-63	Feminism Discussion Post 6 Due
Week Eight			
10.14 -18	<b>Fuller, Margaret. Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century</b>	1-70	Feminism
Week Nine			
10.21 - 25	<b>Fuller, Margaret. Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century</b>	70-136	Literary Analysis – a close reading without secondary sources. Due October 21 Feminism
Week Ten			
10.28 – 11.1	<b>Fuller, Margaret. Woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century</b>	Early Reviews and Recent Essays	Feminism Statement of Purpose for term paper due November 1 Discussion Post 7 Due
Week Eleven			
11.4 - 8	<b>The Portable Thoreau</b> Ed. Jeffrey Cramer	Ktaadn. 45-72 Civil Disobedience 73-99	Discussion Post 8 Due
Week Twelve			
11.11 - 15	<b>The Portable Thoreau</b> Ed. Jeffrey Cramer	Walden I-IV, Economy to Sounds 197-303	Precis Due: November 11
Week Thirteen			
11.18 - 22	<b>The Portable Thoreau</b> Ed. Jeffrey Cramer	XIV-XVIII Former Inhabitants to Conclusion 406-68 "Walking" 555-590	Discussion Post 9 Due

Week Fourteen			
11.25	Nathaniel Hawthorne		
11.27-29	<i>The Blithedale Romance</i>		
Thanksgiving			
Week Fifteen			
12.2 - 4 Last Day	Nathaniel Hawthorne		<b>Term Paper Due 12.6</b> Discussion Post 10 Due, Reflective response or response to Hawthorne
12.5 Dead Day	<i>The Blithedale Romance</i>		
12.6 First Day of Exams			
Week Sixteen			
12.7 to 11 Exams	12.12 Grades for graduating seniors submitted to registrar		
Week Seventeen			
	12.16 Grades submitted to registrar		