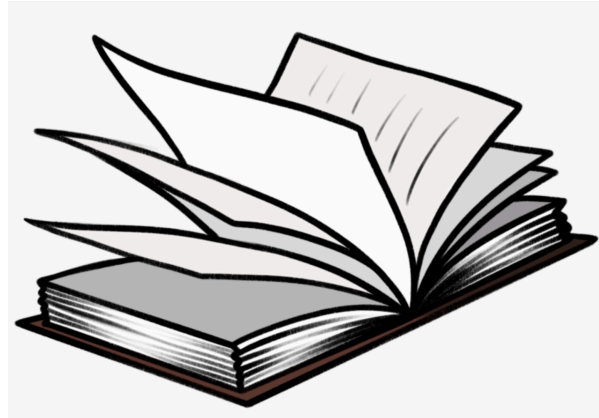


Literature Core Sections

Spring 2026



There are many classes offered that fulfill Boston College's Literature Core requirement, including the sections of ENGL 1080 described below. Each section has a unique theme, but all Lit Core sections are structured to fulfill the program's shared learning goals. These goals are focused on creating intellectual community in order to teach close-reading skills and ways of thinking about big questions. Whichever section of Lit Core you choose, you will learn how literature can be a part of life, a tool for living and thinking.

ENGL 1080.01

Other Worlds

MWF, 9

Desire to escape the limitations of the "real" world is an important motive for reading fiction. Thinking about how, or whether, a piece of writing works for you as escapism can help you better understand yourself and the world outside the text. In this course we'll read works of science fiction and fantasy by H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, Ursula Le Guin, William Gibson, Octavia Butler, and Jennifer Egan. We will consider such questions as: How do these other worlds both diverge from and illuminate our own? How do the texts work to bring them to life on the page? What challenges and satisfactions do they offer us as readers? As we discuss such questions, we will practice a repertoire of strategies for analyzing literary texts, and for planning and developing those analyses in writing.

Zimmerman

ENGL 1080.02**Literary Monstrosities****TTh, 10:30**

From fiendish mothers to grotesque horrors, monsters have long populated pop culture. Literature often depicts the wicked, the profane, the deadly and death-defying. Encountering literary monsters rattles boundaries between the human and other-than-human, the desirable and undesirable, self and other, pleasure and panic. Together, we'll ask: what do narratives of monstrosity suggest about ourselves and our social world? How does the interplay of race, class, dis/ability, gender, and sexuality influence what gets read as monstrous? What delights and horrifies us as readers? In answer, we'll read a variety of speculative fiction, giving pride of place to the short story with works by Ted Chiang, Nalo Hopkinson, Samuel Delany, Joyce Carol Oates, D. H. Lawrence, Ursula Le Guin, Carmen Maria Machado, and others. Be forewarned: in meeting monsters, you might wind up more fully meeting yourself.

Brown**ENGL 1080.03****Monster Culture****MWF, 10**

What makes a monster? What can monstrous individuals and monstrous bodies symbolize and signify in different literary cultures? And where does monstrosity end, and humanity or animality begin? These are among the questions this class will explore when engaging with different monsters in a wide range of texts and films, including modern fiction, 19th century novels, different films, and short medieval narratives. Through discussions in class about the symbolic power of monsters and the monstrous, we'll explore the ways that the fantastical and mythical can be deeply tied to very real social issues and fears. Texts featured in the course include Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Stephen Graham Jones' *The Only Good Indians*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the 1982 film *The Thing*, and the 2022 film *NOPE*.

Alden**ENGL 1080.04****Other Worlds****MWF, 10**

Desire to escape the limitations of the "real" world is an important motive for reading fiction. Thinking about how, or whether, a piece of writing works for you as escapism can help you better understand yourself and the world outside the text. In this course we'll read works of science fiction and fantasy by H.G. Wells, Ray Bradbury, Ursula Le Guin, William Gibson, Octavia Butler, and Jennifer Egan. We will consider such questions as: How do these other worlds both diverge from and illuminate our own? How do the texts work to bring them to life on the page? What challenges and satisfactions do they offer us as readers? As we discuss such questions, we will practice a repertoire of strategies for analyzing literary texts, and for planning and developing those analyses in writing.

Zimmerman

ENGL 1080.05**Pleasure Reading****MWF, 9**

Attitudes toward reading are full of contradictions. Reading can be considered edifying and tawdry, an essential skill and a leisure pursuit, an individual experience and a way to participate in culture and develop empathy. This section of Literature Core will explore the concept of “pleasure reading” by thinking critically about what makes reading enjoyable from historical, theoretical, and personal perspectives. In addition to using class readings to examine literary form, we will consider questions of intersectionality, history, and culture. Texts may include works by Wilkie Collins, Zadie Smith, and Lydia Millet, films, and essays.

Wilwerding**ENGL 1080.06****Monsters and Mayhem****TTh, 10:30**

Why are monstrous animals such a compelling subject in literature, art, and film? What might these creatures—mythical, mutant, alien, fantastic—tell us about how we imagine and consume them as cultural and artistic inventions? What kinds of emotions or reactions do these creatures inspire in us when we encounter them—fear, pleasure, or a mix of both? In this class, we will engage with a variety of monsters in work ranging from gothic fiction to creature features. Not only will we study the origins of infamous creatures, we will also see how modern adaptations reproduce them for new audiences and contexts. We will work with novels, poetry, film, art, and more from around the world to develop close-reading and visual analysis skills. Assignments for this class will consist of analytical and creative work.

Vachali**ENGL 1080.07****Pleasure Reading****MWF, 10**

Attitudes toward reading are full of contradictions. Reading can be considered edifying and tawdry, an essential skill and a leisure pursuit, an individual experience and a way to participate in culture and develop empathy. This section of Literature Core will explore the concept of “pleasure reading” by thinking critically about what makes reading enjoyable from historical, theoretical, and personal perspectives. In addition to using class readings to examine literary form, we will consider questions of intersectionality, history, and culture. Texts may include works by Wilkie Collins, Zadie Smith, and Lydia Millet, films, and essays.

Wilwerding**ENGL 1080.08 Literary Explorations of Self and Other****TTh, 3**

Drawing from a variety of forms and traditions, this course investigates the self as a construction of culture; that is, of history, biology, language, and cosmos. Beginning with Daniel Defoe’s 1719 *Robinson Crusoe* and two 20th century novels that deconstruct it (Coetzee’s *Foe* and Tournier’s *Friday, or the Other Island*) as well as three poems (two

from Derek Walcott, one from Elizabeth Bishop), we will then explore self-representation in Dostoevsky's groundbreaking modernist anti-novel *Notes from Underground* (1864), its 'continuation' in Camus's *The Stranger* (1942) and its unmaking in Kamal Daoud's 2013 *The Meursault Investigation*. We will thus traverse a variety of cultures and eras in conscious dialogue with itself and its others. The course will end with a small but major work from the 21st century, the Croat Daša Drndić's *War Songs*.

Epstein

ENGL 1080.09 Alienation and Belonging

TTh, 4:30

Do you ever feel lonely in crowds full of people? You're not alone! In this class, we'll explore alienation, belonging, and what it means to be alone, together. Beginning with Edgar Allen Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" and Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," this course will follow alienation as a thematic thread throughout history as well as consider questions of identity, modernity, desire, and fantasy. We will consider a wide range of authors working across genres and mediums, such as James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room*, Adrienne Rich's poetry collection *Dream of a Common Language*, and the film *American Beauty*, among others. We will conclude the class in the contemporary moment by reading Ling Ma's *Severance*, Ayşegül Savaş' *The Anthropologists*, and selections from Tony Tulathimutte's *Rejection*.

Gray

ENGL 1080.10 You Must Change Your Life:

Transformation in/by Literature

TTh, 3

"*You must change your life*"—this line from poet Rainer Maria Rilke captures something many of us feel: the sense that we need to transform ourselves or our way of living. This course explores how writers have grappled with transformation through close readings of literary texts spanning from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to contemporary works like Jen Bervin's *Nets* and Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas*. A central premise of the course is that reading itself—and especially the close reading of novels, poems, essays—can be transformative, particularly in our speed and screen-oriented culture. We will use our relationship to reading as a test-case for our ideas about individual and collective change: how can we use reading to reorient ourselves to different ways of being in the world? To this end, we will keep and share field notes of our reading experience, documenting our time spent with the course texts in creative and self-reflective ways. Finally, this course will invite each student to imagine and document their own life-project, a plan for making a small or large change in themselves or their lives that can unfold across the semester and beyond.

Case

ENGL 1080.11**Haunted Houses****MWF, 11**

This course traces the formal development of one of fiction's most compelling settings: the home. Shelter and prison, dream and nightmare, the home will be our focus of inquiry as we read a range of significant novels and films closely and attentively. Along the way, we will ask how genres and forms define themselves over time, responding to literature that comes before, and mapping out possible artistic and political futures. Texts include Horace Walpole's Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*; Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"; Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"; Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Speckled Band"; Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*; Toni Morrison's *Beloved*; Yael van der Woude's *The Safekeep*; and the recent films "Knives Out," "Get Out," and "Parasite."

McAlevey**ENGL 1080.12****Modernist Art: Literature, Painting, Film****TTh, 12**

This section of Literature Core will focus on modernist art, in the form of literature, painting, and film. We will consider various definitions of "modernism," to discern what unites these genres in the twentieth century, and to distinguish it from postmodernism. We will examine philosophy that developed during this period as well as psychoanalytic theory, since it arose in the early twentieth century and took off later on. At least three formal, thesis-governed analytical essays, whose length will increase as we proceed, will be assigned. Writing itself—structure, style, and grammar—will be a primary focus.

Restuccia**ENGL 1080.13****Borderlands and Portals****MWF, 1**

Port cities and outbacks, oceans and outer space—all are places where cultures collide. In this class, we will examine the literature of cultural collision: between natives and travellers, astronauts and aliens, the world of reality and the world of dreams. How do we deal with others? What happens to the self when faced with new ways of living? How porous are our cultural borders? Cultural contact provokes some of the most awe-inspiring, terrifying, and beautiful writing in the English-language literary tradition. The class will include literature of a variety of modes and genres: novels, short stories, essays, poetry, and plays. We will read works by William Shakespeare, Saidiya Hartman, H.P. Lovecraft, Percy Shelley, and more.

Baskin

ENGL 1080.14**Gothic Literature****TTh, 3**

This is a class on Gothic literature, the literary genre that emerged like a monster from 18th century Enlightenment Rationalism, which saw life and humans as essentially rational. Gothic responded by saying effectively “it comes back”, meaning all the depraved, unconscious, destructive impulses we associate with being human—alongside all the ‘nicer’ ones, return as the “return of the repressed”. Political violence is now on the rise, and having some insight into how and why is important so that we do not make the mistake of thinking the problem is simply someone else’s fault. As Gothic is the first overtly psychological literature, this class will delve into basic psychological concepts as a lens to understand the appearance of various monsters, demons and AI in Gothic. Through a reading of Poe and Lovecraft, as well as various authors in the subgenres of Science Fiction and Crime Fiction, we’ll disturb the corpses of the dead, exhuming them to revivify our understanding of just why and how blood, monsters, death and corruption remain eternally fascinating to us.

Kaplan-Maxfield**ENGL 1080.15****American Experiments****TTh, 12**

American literature is defined by its commitment to experimentation. Walt Whitman turned his paper sideways, to capture the breadth of American experience. Henry James and Edgar Allan Poe revolutionized what we think of as “ghost stories.” James Weldon Johnson tested the line between poetry and music. And Emily Dickinson made mischief with rhymes that matched, but only on a slant. Although these authors in many ways found tradition insufficient, their work reflects intimate knowledge of and experience with older forms and with the work of their colleagues abroad. This course explores the American literary idiom as a conversation (and sometimes a debate) among passionate and informed artists, across cultures, eras, and genres. Authors include Primo Levi, Ross Gay, Nella Larsen, Brenda Peynado, Danez Smith, Cathy Park Hong, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, William Shakespeare, and more.

Adair**ENGL 1080.16****Crossing Borders****MWF, 2**

“Crossing Borders” is a college-level introductory course in literature. We will study literary texts of different genres—short stories, novels, poetry, drama, graphic narratives, and films-- that deal with experiences of border crossing. In this course, we take a wide definition of “borders”: spatial or geopolitical (e.g. between towns, states, countries, continents), as well as intrapersonal, interpersonal, social and cultural (gender, social class, race, ethnicity, etc.). We will be interested in the ways literary texts and films represent these borders and how individuals and groups of people inhabit, negotiate, contest, transcend, or shape these borders. How do literary texts and

films creatively depict borders and border crossing? How do these texts and films explore how borders and border crossing shape people's understanding of who they are, of others, and of the world? How might texts and films themselves transform borders? Since this is a literature course, we will be reading these texts primarily as literary works of art, which may be shaped by historical or sociological forces. We will pay attention to literary elements that the authors use in creating their texts and to how these elements contribute to representing the experiences of border crossing.

Puente

ENGL 1080.17

Reading in Revolt

MWF, 3

A woman eats an apple even though God tells her not to; a housewife has an affair because she is bored with her suburban middle-class life; a man is arrested one day for apparently no reason and attempts to prove himself innocent. In this class we will explore a diverse range of texts—from the Book of Genesis to Greta Gerwig's 2023 film *Barbie*—in order to think about why the theme of revolt has always been such a popular one in literature. We will think about the internal motivations of different literary figures and what forces might cause them to oppose the social norms of their time. We will also think about how writers and artists use literary *style* as a form of revolt. We will study a diverse set of literary media, including: poetry, novels, music, film, painting and sculpture. Special out-of-class projects will include: riding the Boston "T," visiting the Museum of Fine Arts, composing a nature study on campus or nearby.

Mersky

ENGL 1080.18

Scary Futures

TTh, 12

Seems like we've always been scared of the future. Or is that actually so? Certainly, some of the most weird, most frightening, most awe-inspiring writing emerges from our fascination with the unknowable around the corner. Sci-fi, space-fiction, fantasy, utopias, dystopias...and now, AI: it's scary stuff. But we'll explore it in novels, graphic novels, poetry, and film – from the awesome imagination of Fritz Lang to the shocking tales of Mieko Kawakami; from the utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin, to the dystopian horrors imagined by Kazuo Ishiguro and Margaret Atwood. Underlying and informing our fictional readings will be the startling predictions of futurologist Yuval Harari. This will be a serious course, with serious intent. And there'll be projects: your active participation is expected.

Nugent

ENGL 1080.19

TTh, 4:30

Dept.

ENGL 1080.20**SJWs: Social Justice WRITERS****MWF, 1**

Students in this course will explore the power literature has to both identify injustice in the world and engender changes that help our society to become more equitable, just, and liberatory. We will read texts by and about those persons in our society who are, in some sense, marginalized, and connect these stories to current events, situations, trends, and viewpoints in the real world. Students will be asked to challenge their own conventions and personal viewpoints on human society, and to think about equality and social justice in their own lives. We will explore several categories of marginalization, potentially including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, immigration status, and class, as well as intersectional identities, and consider how literature can contribute to social justice, humanization, and real societal change. Authors may include Toni Morrison, Roxane Gay, Alison Bechdel, John Okada, Claudia Rankine, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, Jesmyn Ward, and Daphne Andreades.

Woodward**ENGL 1080.21****The Crisis of Modernity****TTh, 3**

We often hear that the world is changing: that we live in unprecedented times. This is certainly true— but it's not the first time. Life has been in flux for centuries. Our changing economic, technological, and social landscape dates back to upheavals ushered in with the Industrial Era. This course returns to the roots of our contemporary society and works its way forward, examining how different texts encounter and address the evolving crisis of modernity. In the process, we will ask recurring questions like: What is the value of work? Where is power situated, and how should we wield it? How should we love? Potential texts include Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends*.

Mikula**ENGL 1080.22****TTh, 3****Dept.****ENGL 1080.23****Monsters and Mayhem****TTh, 1:30**

Why are monstrous animals such a compelling subject in literature, art, and film? What might these creatures—mythical, mutant, alien, fantastic—tell us about how we imagine and consume them as cultural and artistic inventions? What kinds of emotions or reactions do these creatures inspire in us when we encounter them—fear, pleasure, or a

mix of both? In this class, we will engage with a variety of monsters in work ranging from gothic fiction to creature features. Not only will we study the origins of infamous creatures, we will also see how modern adaptations reproduce them for new audiences and contexts. We will work with novels, poetry, film, art, and more from around the world to develop close-reading and visual analysis skills. Assignments for this class will consist of analytical and creative work.

Vachali

ENGL 1080.24 Literature and Resilience MW 4:30

How do we build our imaginations? What interior worlds do you carry around within you? Do we have agency over what we consume and who we listen to? In a world focused on distraction and consumption, literature and writing can be places where extended focus and creation are celebrated. This class will read works of literature that consider the power of literature to slow down time, to create and explore interior worlds, to witness tragedy, and to alchemize pain into creativity. This class will explore works by a broad range of authors which may include William Wordsworth, Mary Oliver, Ross Gay, Simone Weil, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Percival Everett, and others.

Enwright

ENGL 1080.25 Literature, Society, and the Margins TTh, 1:30

This section of Literature Core is organized around a dynamic between conceptions of collectivity or belonging and people who stand, fall, or are pushed outside them. We will ask: how do different literary works represent society, the family, the nation, or humanity? What kinds of borders are drawn around them? And how do literary works imagine the lives and thoughts of individuals with complicated relationships to these borders? As we pursue these themes, we will explore various literary genres—novels, short stories, slave narrative, poetry, drama—and techniques of literary analysis.

Howes

ENGL 1080.26 Books vs. Brainrot: Reading in the Age of Distraction

MWF, 12

How does attention shape our lives? Can distraction ever be useful? What are the ethical implications of how we pay attention? In this class, we'll explore these questions (and more!) by reading novels, short stories, and poems and observing our own attention as readers, reflecting on what pulls us into a text and what distracts us. We'll interrogate cultural narratives about attention and distraction, including contemporary anxieties about shrinking attention spans, the role of technology, and the attention economy.

Students will also be asked to reflect on their own attentive capacities in weekly hand-written journals and to practice new modes of paying attention, which may include ekphrasis, poetry memorization, and contemplative prayer/meditation exercises. Texts will include Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Izumi Suzuki's "Terminal Boredom," Jenny Odell's *How to Do Nothing*, David Foster Wallace's *Something to Do With Paying Attention*, and Ayşegül Savaş's *The Anthropologists*.

Waalkes

ENGL 1080.27

TTh, 9

Dept.

ENGL 1080.28

Genre in the Wild

TTh, 9

We all know that genre can be a useful way of categorizing a creative work--knowing the genre of the movie we're about to see, for instance, helps us know what to expect when the lights dim and the opening credits roll. This course asks us to consider the ways in which these expectations shape our understanding not only of the world on the screen or the page, but also of the world around us. What do we privilege in our depictions of the natural world? What do we exclude? How do our experiences with race, gender, nationality, or socioeconomic background inform our understanding of nature and our relationship to it? And are the ways we describe nature equal to the task of comprehending the environmental crises that the world faces today? In this course we will be investigating texts belonging to a variety of genres and time periods, from Renaissance pastoral poems to twenty-first century "cli-fi" stories, in an effort to understand the ways in which cultural and historical context as well as literary form impact the way we see nature.

Summerfield

ENGL 1080.29

Literature of Fear

MWF, 12

This class explores the experience of horror in literature: what scares us, why, and what is the role of fear in literature? We will read a combination of older and newer, classic and popular works. Attention will be paid to issues of race, gender, and social marginalization. How have marginalized groups been depicted by others in literature? How do authors from marginalized groups use the genre to respond to their marginalization? What issues do authors from marginalized groups address in their work? Authors we may encounter include Mary Shelley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, H.P. Lovecraft, and Victor LaValle. We may also explore the topics in other forms, including horror films or graphic novels.

Haley

ENGL 1080.30**Love and Madness****TTh, 4:30**

Society has always tried to silence and contain “troublesome” women. Different charges have been levied against such women in order to prevent them from disrupting the normal order of things with their unruly and wayward behavior. They have been executed as witches, hidden behind lace curtains, locked up in attics, and carted off to “insane asylums.” In this class, we will look at representations of madwomen (and some men) in literature and think about how their stories interact with the birth and evolution of the clinic (aka the asylum or madhouse) in Western society. Texts may include “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *10 Days in a Madhouse* by Nellie Bly, *The Secret Scripture* by Sebastian Barry, *Eggshells* by Caitriona Lally, and *Mexican Gothic* by Sylvia Moreno Garcia.

Crotty**ENGL 1180.01****From Slavery to Mass Incarceration****TTh, 10:30**

This section of Literature Core will focus on narratives that speak to questions of slavery, incarceration, and freedom—both literal and metaphorical. The course will start with literary, historical, and political writings about slavery from the 1700s and 1800s and the social contexts in which these writings were produced and consumed. We will then move on to historical and contemporary fiction and film that informs and challenges our historical understanding of slavery and the relationship between slavery and our current system of incarceration. We will focus some attention on how/why different genres speak to these different topics. Course authors and texts will include: Bryan Stevenson, Clint Smith, Phillis Wheatley, Thomas Jefferson, *Stamped from the Beginning* (film), *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*-Excerpts (Harriet Jacobs), *Beloved* (Toni Morrison), *Kindred* (Octavia Butler), *Homegoing* (Yaa Gyasi), *13th* (film), *The Nickel Boys* (Colson Whitehead), and *Just Mercy* (Bryan Stevenson). Also fulfills the university Cultural Diversity requirement.

DeRosa**ENGL1184.01****Literature, Testimony, and Justice (EDJ)****TTh, 1:30**

This section of Literature Core explores how literary texts bear witness to historical events and address social issues in order to engage with questions of difference and justice. Through the study of poetry, fiction, drama, and autobiography, we will examine how writers have used a variety of literary genres and forms to expose inequality and injustice; to call for justice, solidarity, and inclusion; and to transform experiences of trauma, displacement, difference, and oppression into art. Part of this course is devoted to considering how Black American writers such as Frederick Douglass and Toni

Morrison have used literature to testify to the history of slavery and its legacies in the United States. We will also read literary works that address topics such as class and gender inequality, illness and disability, and religious persecution. Also fulfills the university Cultural Diversity requirement.

Harrison-Kahan

Several Complex Problem and Enduring Questions courses also fulfill the Lit Core requirement. See the [Complex Problem & Enduring Question Courses](#) brochure for registration information, since these courses are paired with courses in another discipline and are limited to freshmen:

ENGL 1715.01	Revolutionary Media	TTh 1:30
<i>Crane</i>		

ENGL 1728.01	The Value of Work	MWF 11
<i>Hunt</i>		

ENGL 1732.01	Shifting Forms	TTh 3
<i>Ohi</i>		

ENGL 1738.01	Exchange and Values	TTh 12
<i>Seshadri</i>		

ENGL 1749.01	Creatively Re/Imagining Black Worlds	TTh 4:30
<i>Frederick</i>		

ENGL 1750.01	Plants and Power	MWF 12
<i>Goel</i>		