



## English 258 Pop Culture

Pop Culture. It is ideas—rubix cubes, Gangnam Style, jelly shoes; it is attitudes—the MTV generation, McCarthysim, the Beat Movement; it is perspectives; it is memes—“Hey girl...”; it is movies--“These aren’t the droids you are looking for...”, “Damn it man, I’m a doctor, not a physicist!”, “Fly, you fools!”, “How am I suppose to strike fear in the hearts of the wicked with this?”, “Ah, yes the four elements: fire, water, earth and air; and together they create the strong fifth element...boron”; it is music, art, literature, clothing—ultimately, it is the way we transfer culture.

This course is about American culture. The stories we tell about who we are, what we care about, our lifestyle, our customs, and our dreams. We will begin the course by considering how others define the term “pop culture” and move through clustered “readings.” This section of Pop Culture will not take a historical approach, but we will explore older and newer versions of culture, particularly as we discuss the way in which pop culture becomes self-referential—both in

terms of its production and its consumption. We will use common literary and film studies terms to understand narrative structures, to highlight themes, motifs, and metaphors, and to make connections. We will discuss and define genre conventions, keeping an eye on narrative patterns. Though we will explore a variety of critical perspectives for understanding cultural texts, this course will be specifically interested in dynamics of class. For example, many would consider *The Simpsons* “low class” (its certainly not *Downton Abbey*); however, satire is traditionally a high art form of entertainment. Our work will lie in examining cultural texts to understand their narrative, interrogate the efficacy of this narrative, and discuss how this narrative may or may not address American society.

This course demands higher-level questions, critical analysis, and college level writing skills. To be clear—NOTHING—we encounter in this course should be taken at face value. A cigar is not just a cigar, despite what Freud claimed (at least in this class).

## What to Expect...

**1. Attendance & Tardiness:** I can tell you that attendance is a crucial component to college success; this is your job and if you don't show up for a job you get fired. You decide how badly you want this job. I will be giving some type of graded assignment every day. If you miss class you miss points—both figuratively and metaphorically. I can assure you that it will not take long for multiple absences to impact you negatively—you are in control of your grade. If you are absent you are responsible for turning in your materials and completing your homework assignments; I strongly recommend that you ask your classmates for supplementary information.

Make every effort to be on-time—the quizzes won't wait on you.

**2. Cell Phones & Electronics:** I understand that our phones are one of the funniest pieces of electronics we own. I love mine too; but I am old school in terms of manners and respect, and I believe that in class good manners dictate that you don't use your cell or other electronics in class. The first time I will simply point out the issue, the second time I will ask you to leave, which will impact your participation grade for the day. Please don't push a third time.

**3. Homework & Plagiarism:** I am aware that college can be stressful. You all have many commitments. I encourage you to allow yourself to discover the texts and work through their ideas as individuals and as part of the class community. I take any form of plagiarism very seriously, that includes (but is not limited to) purchasing papers, copying others' work, missing citations and/or bibliographies, and "recycling" work from previous courses. If you have any questions about what might be considered plagiarism or cheating, please do not hesitate to talk to me before or after class during my office hours. Students are expected to be familiar with the sections on Academic Honesty in the University Student Conduct Code, Policy Bulletin 31, which is online at:

<http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html>. If you feel unprepared to properly document your sources please come to my office hours. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offences. Clear cases will result in an "F" for the assignment and appropriate academic discipline.



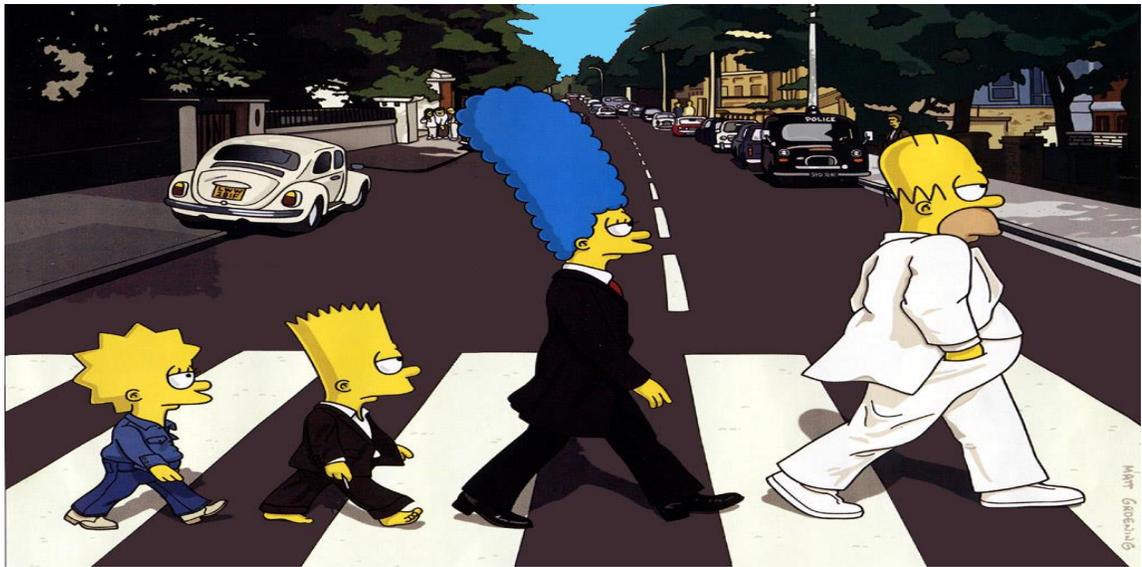
This course meets the standards set by the WVU English Department as well as the requirements for GEC 6:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
  - a. Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects.
  - b. Identify and analyze the effects of complexity or ambiguousness.
  - c. Locate the text in specific social, economic, political and literary history.
  - d. Connect the text to other literary or cultural text(s).
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

**PARTICIPATION (30%)**: Attendance is not enough. To earn your participation grade you should: come to class prepared and on time, bringing all necessary materials (**this includes: the reading assignment OR VIEWING NOTES, discussion questions (2-3 well-developed questions, paper, pen, etc.)**), actively take part in class discussions, ask critical and engaging questions, and contribute appropriate insights. Or as my high school students used to say: “Just try.” Most of your participation grade is based on daily quizzes, but at the end of the semester I look at your classroom effort in general to assign a grade (especially if you on the border).

**HOMEWORK (30%)**: All homework assignments are labeled on the syllabus. You will receive a specific homework assignment at least a week before the assignment is due. All writing assignments should following MLA guidelines (those that do not will not receive full credit).

**TESTS (40%)**: Tests are mandatory; there are no make-up exams if you are absent. All test days are labeled on the syllabus.



This is a POP CULTURE course—that means that you should be prepared to access a variety of media in a variety of formats. I have tried to limit the material you will need to works you can view on Netflix, Hulu and/or Amazon Prime; however, you may have to rent dvds or rent movies from the library or other media source. You are **COMPLETELY** responsible for all the required materials. If cost is an issue, see me and we can discuss options (sharing accounts or viewing materials in groups for example). The following books are **REQUIRED** for the course:

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolute True Diary of A Part-Time Indian*. New York: Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009. Print.

Anderson, M.T. *Feed*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2002. Print.

Blank, Jessica and Eric Jenson. *The Exonerated*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2003. Print.

Brooks, Max. *World War Z*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006. Print.

## GRADING POLICY

My philosophy about grades is simple: I am very pleased to assign the grade that you *earn*. I do not “give grades;” I assign a grade based on careful consideration of evidence provided from a variety of sources. Grades are, in part, a measure of the amount of work completed in the course, but ultimately an ‘A’ should reflect a higher level of commitment and mastery of the course material. I would like you to consider the guidelines below throughout the semester as a measure for what you ultimately want to achieve.



Lisa’s perfection drives Bart nuts, but for our purposes her personality provides a great example of an engaged, eager student. Lisa asks questions, reads, looks for opportunities to study outside of class—in other words she works for a deeper engagement. She thinks critically about her world and focuses on her work. She asks questions that engage others and challenge our common perceptions and terms. She makes connections. She knows why “it” matters and can explain it to others.



Marge has a handle on the basics—she is a great homemaker even if she isn’t quite perfect. She is willing to experiment within certain boundaries. She would be willing to look at the texts as a way to open her eyes and to see new worlds. Marge stays safe—she would use the course materials as a solid structure for her participation in class and she would actively work to understand how her perceptions match others. Marge asks questions; but she’s not ready for a major challenge.



Homer is loveable, but not always on-track. He is still gathering information, looking at what type of person he might be in any situation. He is more of a surface guy, not taking as many risks. He would use the course materials loosely, at times interested in being a part of the group and others times losing focus. He can be more quiet, perhaps more reflective, listening to others but not necessarily engaging with the material beyond the surface. He understands the basics, but isn’t ready to make broader connections.



Maggie is bright, but still developing—obviously! She is not ready to join the rest of her family just yet. While she is a member of the family, she is definitely separated from what her siblings are doing. She isn’t ready to go exploring, but she is usually found strolling along and occasionally listening to what is happening in her family. She is still learning the tools of the trade and needs more practice before joining the group.



Bart is Bart—He’s the guy that says: “Eat my shorts!” and “Aye Carumba!” I am pretty sure he has been in fourth grade for over 20 years. School isn’t Bart’s first priority. Maybe it will be someday, but for now it’s just something he has to do. This class may be something you have to do—but that’s not enough to pass the course.

## Semester Schedule

**PLEASE NOTE:** This schedule is subject to change based on class progress and performance. Homework may be added or deleted based on assessment throughout the semester. **All class material—which includes classroom discussions, handouts, and the material listed in the syllabus—is test material.**

<b>DUE DATE:</b>	<b>DISCUSSION TOPIC:</b>	<b>READING &amp; VIEWING ASSIGNMENT:</b>	<b>HOMEWORK DUE:</b>
January 8 <sup>th</sup>	Introduction to Class	Syllabus	
January 10 <sup>th</sup>	Defining Pop Culture Terms & Analysis		Research “common” definitions for pop culture, bring notes to class
<b>Unit One: Telling Stories</b>			
January 13 <sup>th</sup>	Folklore & The Trickster Figure	<i>Bugs Bunny, Road Runner Movie</i> (Amazon) Brer Rabbit clips (Ecampus links) Disney Animation Collection, Vol. 1: “Mickey and the Beanstalk” (Netflix)	Begin working on Project One
January 15 <sup>th</sup>	Contemporary Fairy Tales	<i>Once Upon a Time</i> (S1. E1, S1. E4) (Netflix) <i>Grimm</i> (S1. E1, S1. E5) (Netflix)	Read “anti” Disney articles (Ecampus links)
January 17 <sup>th</sup>	Heroes	<i>The Avengers</i> (Netflix)	Start reading Alexie
January 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>NO CLASS- Martin Luther King Day</b>		
January 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Anti-heroes	<i>Dexter</i> (S1. E1, S1. E5) (Netflix) <i>Brooklyn Nine-Nine</i> (S1.E, S1.E6) (Hulu) Watch TED Talk (link via ecampus)	Continue reading Alexie
January 24 <sup>th</sup>	Anti-heroes	Read Sherman Alexie’s <i>Absolute...</i> (pages 1-140)	

January 27th	Anti-heroes, continued	Read Sherman Alexie's <i>Absolute...</i> (finish book)	Should have rough draft of Project One completed
January 29th	The Bro-mance	<i>Star Trek: Into Darkness</i> <i>Family Guy</i> ( S12. E6, S12. E8) (Hulu)	Read "Bromance" (Link on ecampus)
January 31st	The Anti-Rom-Com	<i>Bridesmaids</i>	
<b>Unit Two: High Art/Low Art</b>			
February 3rd	Introduction to High Art v. Low Art	"High" Art Culture Examples (see examples via ecampus) "Low" Art Culture (see examples via ecampus)	Read "Class" (link via ecampus) <b>Project One Due</b>
February 5th	The Musical	<i>Grease</i> (Netflix) <i>Dr. Horrible's Sing Along</i> (Netflix)	Begin Project Two
February 7th	Epic v. Dramatic	<i>Lord of the Rings</i>	
February 10th	Epic v. Dramatic	<i>The Dark Knight</i>	
February 12th	Skit Humor—Referring to Culture & Society	<i>SNL</i> (S36.E22, S37.E2, S38.E7, S39.E10) <i>Key &amp; Peele</i> (see links via ecampus) <i>Whites Kids You Know</i> (see links via ecampus)	
February 14th	Satire—Referring to Culture & Society	<i>Simpsons</i> (S20.E1, S20.E7, S25.E2) (iTunes) <i>American Dad</i> (S1.E6, S5.E13, S9.E7) (Netflix) <i>South Park</i> (S6.E13, S6.E14, S8.E2) (Hulu)	Read "Satire" (link via ecampus)
February 17th	Classic Literature in Contemporary Film	<i>D'jango Unchained</i>	Read "Race" (link via ecampus) Start reading <i>Feed</i>
February 19th	<b>Test #1</b>		
<b>Unit Three: Sponsoring Culture</b>			

February 21st	The Rulemakers	<i>This Film Is Not Yet Rated</i> (Netflix)	Continue reading <i>Feed</i> Should have rough draft of Project Two completed
February 24th	Independent Films—Kevin Smith	<i>Clerks</i> (Netflix)	
February 26th	Advertising & Adolescents	Read M. T. Anderson's <i>Feed</i> (pages 1-160)	
February 28 <sup>th</sup> <b>Midterm Week</b>	The Internet	<i>Feed</i> (finish book)	<b>Project Two Due</b>
March 3rd	MTV Generation—the 80s	Music Videos (Video Links via Ecampus)	Read "MTV" (link via ecampus) Begin Project Three
March 5th	MTV—80s & Beyond	<i>Jackass: The Movie</i> (Netflix) <i>Beavis &amp; Butthead</i> (S1.E1, S2.E1, S2.E3) (Hulu)	
March 7th	No class—Prep for March 17 <sup>th</sup> Class Homework: <i>That 70s Show</i> (S1.E5, S4.E24) (Netflix) <i>Freaks &amp; Geeks</i> (S1.E3, S1.E18) (Netflix) **Extra Credit—See me for the accompanying assignment—Watch <i>The Breakfast Club</i> or <i>Sixteen Candles</i>		
March 10th-March 14th	<b>NO CLASS-Spring Break</b>		
March 17th	The American Teen	<i>Dawson's Creek</i> (S1.E1, S1.E7) (Netflix) <i>Glee</i> (S2. E5, S2.E11) (Netflix)	
March 19th	The American Family	<i>The Cosby Show</i> (TBA) <i>Rosanne</i> (TBA) <i>Modern Family</i> (S5.E6, S5.E9) (Hulu)	Read "Family" (link via ecampus)
<b>Unit Four: Documenting the Real</b>			
March 21st	Scenes about War	<i>M.A.S.H.</i> (TBA)	Should have rough draft of Project Three completed
March 24th	Documentary Theatre	Read <i>The Exonerated</i>	Read "Reality" (see

			link via ecampus)
March 26th	<b>Online Class- Topic: YouTube See Ecampus Assignment</b>		
March 28th	Documentaries— Michael Moore	<i>The Big One</i> (Netflix)	
March 31st	Mockumentaries	<i>Parks &amp; Recreation</i> (S4.E4, S5.E2, S5.E18) (Netflix) <i>Arrested Development</i> (S1.E2, S2.E13, S2.E17, S3.E2) (Netflix)	<b>Project Three Due</b>
April 2nd	“Reality” TV & The Carnavalesque	<i>Hoarders: Buried Alive</i> (S2.E2) (Netflix) <i>Toddlers &amp; Tiaras</i> (S6.E5) <i>30 Days</i> (S2.E2) <i>Precious Plum</i> (Episodes 1-6) (YouTube)	Written Proposal for Pop Culture Paper Due
April 4th	<b>Test #2</b>		
<b>Unit Five: Coming to Terms with Fear</b>			
April 7th	War Stories	<i>Full Metal Jacket</i>	
April 9th	War Stories, continued	<i>Jarhead</i>	
April 11th	Reading & Writing Day--Start Reading <i>World War Z</i> , selections TBA Begin work on Pop Culture Paper		
April 14th	The Apocalypse	Selections from <i>World War Z</i>	
April 16th	The Apocalypse, continued	Selections from <i>World War Z</i>	Rough Draft Due Peer Review Letter Assignment-DUE APRIL 23rd BY 5PM
April 18th	<b>NO CLASS-Easter Break</b>		
April 21st	Fear of Loosing Control	<i>American Horror Story: Asylum</i> (S2.E1,2,3) (Netflix)	

April 23rd	Vampires	<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> (S4.E9, S5.E1, S6.E7) (Netflix) <i>Vampire Diaries</i> (S2.E22, S3.E14) (Netflix)	
April 25th	<b>Test #3</b>		
April 28th-May 3rd	<b>FINALS WEEK—Final Copy of Pop Culture Paper Due by Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup> 4pm</b>		

## Homework Assignments

Project One:

Live Theater or Music

Project Two:

Video Game, Table top RPGs The Guild

Project Three:

Cult Classics, need for audience, fandom

Online Project: