

2017-18 Fall and Winter

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|------------------------------|-----------|-----|--------|------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| Academic Writing: Humanities | RHET-1101 | 001 | U2017F | MW | 14:30 | 15:45 | Byrnes | 2M74 |
| Revol in Communicatn | RHET-2246 | 050 | U2017F | Th | 18:00 | 21:00 | Byrnes | 3M63 |
| Academic Writing: Humanities | RHET-1101 | 004 | U2017W | MW | 14:30 | 15:45 | Byrnes | 3M59 |
| Orality & Literacy | RHET-3236 | 001 | U2017W | TuTh | 16:00 | 17:15 | Byrnes | 3M63 |

AW: Humanities

You'll read three good books in this course, and write three substantial essays. The first essay will be argumentative, based on philosophical definitions of Ethical Relativism, Absolutism, and Objectivism. We'll use them as we discuss the analysis in Neil Bissoondath's *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*. The second essay will be a book review, in which you'll evaluate John Taylor Gatto's *Weapons of Mass Instruction*. Gatto is a former high school teacher, and public schools are the "weapons of mass instruction." Gatto pretty much thinks public schools should be abolished in favour of "open-source learning," and you're probably in a good position to assess his arguments. In the third essay you'll create a degree plan for your university education after reading Fareed Zakaria's *In Defense of a Liberal Education*. You don't have to agree with Zakaria at all, but his book will highlight current arguments for and against the Liberal Arts, and you'll take it from there.

Revolutions in Communication

We're living in the midst of an epoch-making media revolution today, as screens and images displace the printed text from whence came the culture of the book. Will book culture disintegrate, or become dangerously enfeebled? Will an image-based culture advance the civilizational project or drastically curtail it? Will entertainment overwhelm education? Will learning and individuality and democracy thrive in the new electronic culture, or will they suffer catastrophic regressions? We'll try to answer these questions after we've surveyed the major media of human history: oral performance, alphabetic writing, manuscript literacy, print literacy and the explosion of general literacy in the 19th century (at least in the West), and the steady erosion of high literacy that we've seen, some argue, with the advent of photography, cinema, television, the personal computer and the internet—all largely visual media.

Required Texts:

Proust and the Squid, Maryanne Wolf

The Bacchae, Euripides

Life: The Movie, Neal Gabler

The Dumbest Generation, Mark Bauerlein

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, Hunter Thompson

Recommended text: "Two Cultures—Television versus Print," Camille Paglia and Neil Postman

Orality and Literacy

About 2700 years ago, Greeks invented, and then began internalizing, the first real alphabet. Did human consciousness change when they and other previously “oral” peoples became literate? Did a new sense of independent selfhood emerge because of writing? Did the invention of literacy provoke a great transformation in human thought? Did literacy make abstract cognition far more convenient, and far more common? Did Western culture evolve in a tension between oral and literate styles of personality, and did Western literature evolve in a creative tension between oral and literate modes? Are movies and electronic media renewing orality in Western cultures, and can we blame much of our literacy crisis on movies, television, the personal computer and the internet? These are tantalizing questions suggested by the study of orality, and we will take them up intermittently throughout the course, but more systematically near the end of it.

We’ll begin with Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and consider the larger theoretical questions mentioned above. We’ll continue with Homer’s *Odyssey*, the greatest oral artefact in the Western tradition, and essentially a piece of Greek popular culture. Then we’ll look at *Guardians of the Galaxy* as an example of modern popular culture, before going on to read F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, to illustrate the psychological complexity of a great print novel. The class will include brief readings from a slender course pack.

Required Texts and a Movie:

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Homer, *The Odyssey*

Guardians of the Galaxy (self-acquired)

The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald

Course Pack for Orality and Literacy