

English 101.09

First-Year Writing Seminar Monstrous Bodies

Meeting time: Mondays & Wednesdays 12.00pm – 1.15pm
Location: Sanders Classroom, Room 111

Instructor: Dr. Talia Vestri (she/her)
Email: tvestri@vassar.edu
Office: Sanders Classroom, Room 103
Office hours: Mondays 2.30pm – 3.30pm
Tuesdays 4.30pm – 6.00pm
Wednesdays 9.00am – 10.00am



Course Description

“The First-Year Writing Seminar introduces students to **critical reading and persuasive writing** at Vassar, and helps them make the transition to college-level writing. These courses challenge students to enter sophisticated conversations by asserting compelling claims and supporting those claims through an organized presentation of evidence.”

~First-Year Student Handbook

As a first-year writing seminar, this course aims to help us learn to **express unique analyses** in both written and spoken form. Through frequent writing exercises, drafts, and revisions, we will practice articulating ideas in persuasive essays characterized by strong arguments that are supported by textual evidence. We will also strive for efficient, thoughtful verbal communication of those ideas, in and out of the classroom.

Designed as a first-year seminar in literature, this course will emphasize the practice of **close reading**: we will examine creative texts to understand how parts relate to wholes, how words generate meaning, how ideas manifest in sentences and paragraphs. Do not be surprised, in other words, when we tease import out of punctuation marks!

In this specific section of English 101, “Monstrous Bodies,” we’ll explore depictions of **monsters and monstrosity** in British and American fiction. Our chronological span takes us from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) to Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex* (2002). Our varied readings will urge us to engage with both the bodies of literal monsters—pieced-together creatures, goblins, parasitic insects, etc.—as well as bodies (and minds) that have become monstrous, physically or psychologically. We’ll consider how such bodies, whether real or imagined, reveal social and personal anxieties about otherness, how they reflect concerns about scientific or technological change, how they resonate with cultural ideologies and norms. We’ll think about how material bodies encapsulate values, ideals, and lived realities, and query how monsters and monstrosity signify what it is that scares us most.

Course Texts

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| Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> , ed. J. Paul Hunter | Norton, 9780393927931 (2 nd edition) |
| Robert Louis Stevenson, <i>Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> , ed. Katherine B. Linehan | Norton, 9780393974652 |
| Oscar Wilde, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i> , ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie | Norton, 9780393927542 (2 nd edition) |
| Jeffrey Eugenides, <i>Middlesex</i> | Picador, 9780312427733 |

Other course readings will be posted on our Moodle website (log in at moodle.vassar.edu) and, when possible, provided to you in hard copy. Please plan to print required readings that are not supplied. The Moodle site also contains electronic versions of key documents such as the syllabus.

Teaching Philosophy

My goal is that we will all leave this course having attained greater **confidence** in ourselves as writers, thinkers, analyzers, and speakers. I see these elements as interrelated **skills** that can be honed over time, not simply innate talents that one merely taps into (like magic!).

As such, I believe that dedicated **efforts** can result in **progress and development**—yet we must keep in mind that “progress” may be neither linear nor always externally visible, and that perfection cannot be attained in one semester (or ever, really). Our work in this class constitutes just one facet of your entire Vassar career; thus you may find something you learn here does not “click” until later on, or that a connection between this class and another one teaches you something unexpected.

Office Hours & Email

Office hours are dedicated times when my door is open for students. You may stop by to discuss concerns or questions you may have, share ideas, talk about work in the course, or just chat. No appointment is necessary. Any temporary changes to regular hours will be posted on Moodle.

To help each of you succeed, my expectation is that all students will act as **engaged participants** in our seminar. Engagement may look different for each of you, however. Some people are most comfortable expressing their ideas in one-on-one chats during office hours, while others might be more at ease initiating class discussion based on their personal insights. Some students might readily jump into group conversations on an impromptu basis, while others solidify their thoughts after a few days of contemplative reflection. I encourage you to value your own natural process(es), but I will also coax you to **push yourself** out of your comfort zone. We learn best by trying something new. Speak up and let your voice be heard—I assure you that someone else will learn from, and appreciate, what you have to say.

In general, I make every effort to respond to email inquiries within 36 hours, though I refrain from checking my inbox between 8pm and 8am or over the weekend. While email can be useful for brief exchanges, keep in mind that office hours will be our best platform for detailed communications.

Course Requirements

Components:

- Active, thoughtful, and intelligent participation in class conversations
- Respectful engagement with peers in writing workshops and small-group discussions
- Completion of five (5) formal written papers including drafts, as assigned
- Informal response pieces (3)

Participation

During most class meetings, we will discuss assigned readings in a seminar format, and lectures from the instructor will be minimal. Accordingly, **active input** constitutes an essential component of each student's grade. Of course, I do not expect that you'll say something brilliant *every* day, but you *are* expected to be an active member of class on most days. To prepare for each session, please print (if required) and read

all assigned materials in advance, ideally more than once. Take adequate notes and **annotate** your readings by underlining, highlighting, writing in the margins, etc. The more we **interact** physically with each text, the more likely it is that we will remember what we have read—and will have something thoughtful to say about it. Allow ample time to digest and reflect upon what we are reading each week.

Essays, with Drafts (5)

Each major writing assignment will be accompanied by a detailed assignment sheet. In total, we will work on **five (5) essays** ranging in length from 2 to 7 pages.

brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing, and writing stages into each paper. We will try at all costs to avoid single-sitting composition (i.e., writing it all in one go).

In this class, we will treat writing as a continuous **process** rather than a final *product*. Several essays will entail a formal drafting stage, during which you will receive feedback from your peers and/or from me, and you should plan to incorporate various

Workshops, exercises, and activities in class will help promote incremental progression. Beyond our in-class work, I invite you to attend office hours to discuss your work with me at any time, as long as it is more than 48 hours in advance of a deadline.

Response Pieces (3)

As preparation for the more formally structured argument essays discussed above, you will also write three (3) **informal response pieces**. For each of these, you'll compose a personal reflection, 250-300 words in length, that expresses your **reaction** to the content and/or form of a reading assignment.

These responses are intended to be less tailored, more personal, and more exploratory than the major essays. However, provocative critical thinking and detailed textual analysis should still be your primary objectives. Each response should be submitted via email by **8am** on the date assigned. Late submissions receive no credit.

Reading and Writing Schedule*

*Schedule subject to change as needed; updates will be provided on Moodle

Week One

Sept. 4 W Introductions to course and classmates

Week Two

Sept. 9 M Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Volume I, Letters (Norton pages 7-18)
DUE: Response Piece #1 (due at 8am; see prompt sheet on Moodle)

Sept. 11 W *Frankenstein*, Volume I, Chapters [all] (Norton pgs. 18-60)

Week Three

Sept. 16 M *Frankenstein*, volume II (Norton pgs. 61-105)
Ellen Moers, "Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother" (Norton pgs. 317-327)

Sept. 18 W *Frankenstein*, volume III (Norton pgs. 107-161)
Read **either** Mary Poovey, "My Hideous Progeny": The Lady and the Monster" (Norton pgs. 344-355) or Anne Mellor, "Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*" (Norton pgs. 355-368)

Sept. 20 F **DUE:** Essay #1 (submitted via email by midnight)

Week Four

Sept. 23 M Robert Louis Stevenson, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Norton pgs. 7-41)

Sept. 25 W *Jekyll and Hyde*, Lanyon's Narrative & Jekyll's Statement (Norton pgs. 41-62)

Week Five

Sept. 30 M Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Preface and Chs. I-IV (Norton pgs. 3-53)

Oct. 2 W *Dorian Gray*, Chs. V-VIII (Norton pgs. 53-89)

Oct. 4 F **DUE:** Essay #2 (submitted via email by midnight)

Week Six

Oct. 7 M *Dorian Gray*, Chs. IX-XIV (Norton pgs. 90-145)

Oct. 9 W *Dorian Gray*, Chs. XV-XX (Norton pgs. 145-184)

Week Seven

Oct. 14 M **DUE:** Draft of Essay #3 (bring 3 hard copies to class) ~ Writing Workshops

Oct. 16 W No Class Meeting ~ Professor at Conference

Week Eight

Oct. 21 M No Class Meeting ~ Fall Break [start reading *Middlesex* now]

Oct. 23 W No Class Meeting ~ Fall Break

Oct. 27 Su **DUE:** Final Version of Essay #3

Week Nine

- Oct. 28 M Angela Carter, "The Bloody Chamber" (Moodle)
Oct. 30 W Christina Rossetti, "Goblin Market" (Moodle)
Option A: Response Piece #2 (due at 8am; see prompt sheet on Moodle)

Week Ten

- Nov. 4 M Octavia Butler, "Bloodchild" (Moodle)
Option B: Response Piece #2 (due at 8am; see prompt sheet on Moodle)
Nov. 6 W Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" (Moodle)

Week Eleven

- Nov. 11 M **DUE:** Draft of Essay #4 ~ Writing Workshops
Nov. 13 W Writing Workshops
Nov. 17 **Su** **DUE:** Final Version of Essay #4

Week Twelve

- Nov. 18 M Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*, Book One (pages 3-76)
Nov. 20 W *Middlesex*, Book Two (pages 79-211)

Week Thirteen

- Nov. 25 M *Middlesex*, Book Three (pages 215-306)
Option A: Response Piece #3 (due at 8am; see prompt sheet on Moodle)
Nov. 27 W *Middlesex*, Book Three (pages 307-397)
Option B: Response Piece #3 (due at 8am; see prompt sheet on Moodle)

Week Fourteen

- Dec. 2 M *Middlesex*, Book Four (pages 401-458)
Dec. 4 W *Middlesex*, Book Four (pages 459-529)
Dec. 6 **F** **DUE:** Draft of Essay #5 (submit via email by midnight)

Week Fifteen

- Dec. 9 M [Last Class Meeting] Read peer papers in advance for Group Writing Workshops
Dec. 11 W No Class Meeting ~ Friday Teaching Schedule
Dec. 13 **F** **DUE:** Final Version of Essay #5

Policies

Attendance

Everyone's presence in class is expected at all times, unless foreseen or unforeseen circumstances justify an absence. If possible, please let me know in advance if you will be missing class—a brief email is adequate; I do not need to know the details of your health. If you have a special obligation that you know in

advance will require you to miss a class (religious holiday observance, varsity athletics travel, etc.), please notify me as soon as possible. In general, **more than 3 absences**, either excused or unexcused, **will lower your final grade** by one full letter. Five absences will result in failure of the course.

Late Work & Time Banks

Each student is granted **three (3) grace days** as a "time bank" that allows you to **extend an essay deadline** by one, two, or three days. While you may choose when and how many days to use each time, you can only take three total for the semester. No further extensions will be permitted. Please email me prior to the deadline to let me know you are taking a grace-day option, and how many days you've selected to take. Since we will be working with drafts in class, you may not opt for extra time on these.

If you submit a paper after an assigned deadline without (a) acknowledged use of the time bank or (b) beyond your remaining allotted time, the grade for that assignment will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade for every 12 hours it is late.

It is the policy of the English Department that papers submitted a week or more late will receive a failing grade. All written work, however, must still be completed in order to pass the course.

Computers & Digital Devices

I adhere to the notion that critical thought and attention require us to **disconnect from devices**. The internet, email, facebook, and other digital media unnecessarily distract us, regardless of how diligent we believe ourselves to be. Research has also demonstrated that we learn better when taking notes by hand.

My policy is thus to ban laptops, tablets, smartphones, e-readers, and the like from our classroom, and to ask that you bring a printed copy of course readings and texts, as well as paper/notebook and writing utensils. Should you have an especial need for computer access, please speak with me early in the semester so we can find a solution.

Access & Inclusivity

As an instructor, it is my intention to foster a classroom based in mutual respect and inclusiveness. Each of you will, I hope, share that goal, and help me to cultivate an environment where everyone feels welcome. That being said, an individual's or group's comments and/or conduct can sometimes lead to unintentional consequences, perhaps

presenting as harmful or offensive to others even when no malice is meant. If you are ever disturbed by something that occurs within our classroom setting, whether related to a classmate or to me, I urge you to speak with me. Please give us the opportunity to learn from one another and to reflect upon our thinking and/or behavior.

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism

In this course, students will be held to the standards of academic integrity outlined by the Dean of the College. When you submit a paper with your name on it, you claim to be its sole author, meaning that all words and ideas have been produced from your own mind without the assistance or input of others. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of material from another writer, whether the source be written (online or in print) or

from the “helping hand” of another person (friend, parent, sibling, roommate). Please familiarize yourself with the details of the [document](#) linked below. Should an issue of plagiarism arise, we will address the situation through the procedures outlined there. Remember that plagiarism is still plagiarism even when it is unintentional, so I urge you to speak with me if you ever have questions about your work or citations.

<https://deanofthecollege.vassar.edu/documents/sources/VassarGoingToTheSource.pdf>

On-Campus Resources

The Writing Center

<http://ltrc.vassar.edu/writing-center/>

Sun. to Thurs., 3.00pm – 11.00pm

Library, Room 122

Consultants at the Writing Center offer **free one-on-one and small-group sessions** that focus on any aspect of writing, from initial brainstorming and outlining to developing strong thesis claims and polishing effective, concise prose.

Academic Support

<http://ltrc.vassar.edu/academic-support/>

The Academic Support Specialist, Karen Getter, works with students to develop their academic skills, both in general and in the context of specific courses or assignments.

Thompson Memorial Library

<http://library.vassar.edu>

Vassar College Libraries provide services that help undergraduates learn how to locate and use resources, both print and electronic. Research librarians are available for appointments Monday through Friday, 8.30am to 5.00pm, during the semester.

Accessibility and Educational Opportunity Office

aeo@vassar.edu

Old Laundry Building, Room 125

This office provides support and resources for students diagnosed with learning differences (including ADHD), psychological disorders, chronic health conditions, mobility or orthopedic impairments, sensory loss, and substance abuse/recovery needs. If you feel you have a physical or mental impairment, whether visible or not, for which you would like additional support, **you have a right to accommodations**. Please speak with someone at the AEO as early in the semester as possible to obtain adequate resources.

Counseling Services

<https://counselingservice.vassar.edu>

counseling@vassar.edu

Counseling Services offers a range of free, **confidential services** including counseling, crisis intervention, and mental health. They work with students who have concerns about roommates, transitioning to college, procrastination, relationship difficulties, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, eating concerns/disorders, and more.

