

Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

Full Name: A Faithful Anatomy of Her Times: Shirley Jackson and Post-War America

Short Name: Shirley Jackson

Lecturer Name(s) and Email Address(es): Dr. Janice Deitner, deitnejl@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT

Year JS

Module Content:

Course Description:

After Shirley Jackson's untimely death in 1965, her husband, critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, wrote that Jackson's writing constituted a "faithful anatomy of our times," also referring to "our distressing world of the concentration camp and the Bomb." This Sophister option explores Jackson's varied oeuvre as "a faithful anatomy" of the decades after World War Two, especially how her work reflects and responds to major cultural and historical issues.

Students will be introduced to Jackson's work through a variety of themes and topics of significance for an America recovering from World War Two. They will explore the impact of the national preoccupation with domesticity and strictly defined gender roles on the work of a woman writer. They will engage with historical elements of the era, such as consumerism, conformity, and the Cold War, as well as with more constant American realities, such as race and class, and how they manifested in this time period. They will also be asked to reflect upon the variety of Jackson's writing, her literary choices, and how her works speak to conceptions of genre, especially regarding financial and editorial concerns common to women writers of the era. Students will also be able to trace how Jackson's diversity of work comments on these global and national but also personal concerns such as finding the right cooking utensils. Students will also become familiar with critical responses to Jackson's work that reflect or embrace such historical and cultural issues.

Learning Outcomes:

- Engage with and compare a wide variety of texts from a single author
- Engage with and critique critical and historical ideas and apply them to an author's work
- Develop skills in historical analysis of literature

Learning Aims:

On successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Identify how Jackson's work reflects the concerns of mid-twentieth-century America and America overall, such as domesticity, masculinity, class, race, and national trauma.

- Demonstrate familiarity with the historical and cultural factors that shaped mid-twentieth-century America, particularly those that had an immediate impact upon Jackson as a writer and a mother.
- Evaluate the position of Shirley Jackson in relation to Twentieth Century American literature and culture, specifically regarding such concerns as genre, editorial constraints, and critical response.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 2
- Name/Type of Component(s): Mid-Term Written Assessment / Final Exam
- Word Count of Component(s): 2,000 / n/a
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 30% / 70%

Preliminary Reading List:

Please note: Aside from the first three items, this is a PROVISIONAL outline. The list below contains most of the texts and topics that will be discussed on the module. Some topics may be combined or expanded. Students will also be encouraged to read Jackson's other work not listed below, and student choices may be incorporated into the reading list. Some of Jackson's more popular texts, such as *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), are recommended and will be referenced but will not be required reading (especially those that appear in other modules).

Definite Texts

- Post-war Trauma: "The Lottery" and "Biography of a Story"
- Post-war Writing: "Garlic in Fiction," "Notes on an Unfashionable Novelist," "How I Write"
- Apocalypse and the Cold War: *The Sundial*

Provisional Texts

- Community and Belonging: "Come to the Fair," "The Renegade," "The Very Strange House Next Door"
- Masculinity: "Paranoia," "The Mouse," "Seven Types of Ambiguity"
- The Status of Women: "Nightmare," "The Missing Girl," "The Good Wife," "What a Thought"
- Youth Culture: "The Intoxicated," "On Girls of Thirteen," "All She Said Was 'Yes,'" "Family Treasures"
- Class: "The Summer People," "The Lie," "Mrs. Spencer and the Oberons," "The Possibility of Evil"
- Race: "The Flower Garden," "After You, My Dear Alphonse"
- The Suburbs: *The Road Through the Wall*
- Madness and Psychology: "Pillar of Salt," "The Tooth," "The Beautiful Stranger"
- Afterlives: Discussion of biographies, Jackson's letters, film TBD

Primary Texts:

Novels: *The Road Through the Wall*, *The Sundial*

Short Stories: Most of the stories listed above are in the collections *Come Along With Me*, *Just an Ordinary Day*, *Let Me Tell You*, and *The Lottery and Other Stories*, all of which are widely available. Any that aren't in these collections will be put on Blackboard.

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.