

Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

Full Name: Early American Writing: Exploration, Settlement, Encounter

Short Name: Early American Writing

Lecturer Name(s) and Email Address(es): Dara Downey (downeyda@tcd.ie)

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught MT/HT: MT

Year JF/SF/JS/SS: JS

Module Content:

Week 1: Introduction

TEXTS: background reading material provided on Blackboard

Week 2: Settlement

TEXTS: selections from John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity" and William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*

Week 3: The Self

TEXTS: Puritan poetry – Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and Michael Wigglesworth

Week 4: Conflict

TEXTS: Mary Rowlandson, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson* and Indigenous Folktales

Week 5: Troubles Within 1

TEXTS: Shirley Jackson, *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* and Cotton Mather, selections from *Wonders of the Invisible World* and trial transcripts from the 1692 Salem Witch Trials

Week 6: Troubles Within 2

TEXT: Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland, or, The Transformation*

Week 7: READING WEEK – NO CLASSES

Week 8: The Triangular Trade

TEXTS: Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave*

Week 9: Troubles Within 3

TEXT: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*

Week 10: Gothicising Salem

TEXTS: Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," and H.P. Lovecraft, "Dreams in the Witch House" and "The Picture in the House"

Week 11: Tarnished Edens

TEXT: Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (2008)

Week 12: Conclusions and essay preparation

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe critically the primary characteristics of early American writing.
- Employ a range of interpretive strategies to analyse these texts using appropriate critical vocabulary and theoretical frameworks.

- Describe the role played by US culture and history, as well as by related authors and literary movements, as key contexts for the texts discussed on the module.
- Generate original research questions through the identification of an engagement with relevant critical and primary sources.
- Evaluate early American writing via written work and oral contributions to class discussions.

Learning Aims:

This module examines some of the writing which reflects “American” experiences before the establishment of the United States as it is currently understood. We will read and discuss a wide range of texts, including fiction, historical accounts, poetry, and drama, and covering explorers’ journals, Indigenous storytelling, Puritan writing, and accounts of experiences of enslavement, together with more recent fictional depictions of the colonial period and the period immediately following the Revolutionary War. In particular, this module examines a range of views and literary forms in order to explore the complexities evident in pre-USA America. In addition to highlighting the range of texts and viewpoints represented by writing from and about the colonial era in North America and the Early Republic, the module therefore also explores the various meanings of the word “America” and how it has evolved since colonial times and beyond.

Assessment Details:

- **Number of Components:** 2
- **Name/Type of Component 1:** Sample annotated bibliography
- **Word Count of Component 1:** c.800 words
- **Percentage Value of Component 1:** 25%
- **Name/Type of Component 2:** Final essay
- **Word Count of Component 2:** 4000-5000 words
- **Percentage Value of Component 2:** 75%

Preliminary Reading List:

Armstrong, Nancy and Leonard Tennenhouse. *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins of Personal Life*. Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992.

Bergland, Renée L. *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2000.

Caldwell, Patricia. *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and its Tradition*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Elliott, Emory. Ed. *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Elliott, Emory. *The Cambridge Introduction to Early American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

- Emerson, Everett. Ed. *Major Writers of Early American Literature*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972.
- Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. London: Paladin, 1970.
- Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
- Madsen, Deborah L. *Allegory in America: From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996.
- Miller, Perry, *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975.
- , *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*. Cambridge, Mass. And London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Stannard, David E. *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

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.