Welcome to the Intro to Poetry. We’ll be reading a lot of poems over the next few months. You may have read some of them before in other contexts. You may not. That doesn’t really matter. No prior experience is required. **We will not be writing any poems.** Let me repeat that statement, so that there is no confusion: **We will not be writing any poems.** But we will be learning how to read poems, learning how to read them once, read them aloud, read them again (more carefully), read them yet again, and try to figure out more precisely how they work, what they mean, and what’s going on in them, on the surface and beneath the surface. Consider, by way of illustrating one of the things we’ll be trying above all to do, the following quote from Robert Frost in a 1946 essay for the Atlantic Monthly:

> “There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiepest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority.”

In other words, there is almost always something going on under the surface of a poem, just as there is often something going on under the surface of most other forms of speech. But poetry is more particularly in that business than other discourses, and we will treat with the appropriate care and attention. We’ll try to figure out, for example, how and why poetry is different from other modes of writing and speaking. We’ll be talking about some aspects of poetry that it’s important for you to know to have a passing familiarity with the genre. We’ll learn about rhyme, meter, imagery, sound, among other things. We’ll learn about different kinds of poems – sonnets, odes, ballads, blank verse, free verse, iambic pentameter, and a whole lot of other stuff. It’s likely that a lot of this information will be new to you, because poetry isn’t read or discussed as much as it used to be. The most important things to carry with you on this journey are that you not be afraid (it’s just a bunch of words, perhaps new words, perhaps arranged in a different order from what you are used to seeing, but nothing that can hurt you), and that you keep an open mind (the worst thing that can happen to you is that nothing happens to you after you’ve read these poems – oh well; the best thing that can happen to you is that a poem or poems may change the way you see the world, or yourself, or other people – and that would be fantastic).
Class Policies:

Attendance/Tardiness

Attendance forms part of the final grade. If you come to every class, you will ace that part of the grade. It’s like free money. Of course, there are always circumstances which arise from time to time that make it impossible for you to attend. Accordingly, you may miss up to three classes without penalty. However, attendance will be taken, so records of attendance will be kept. Needless to say, you may not sign in for someone else, nor may you have someone else sign in for you. That would be bad. Absences in excess of three classes will begin the process of nibbling away at your attendance grade. For every class you miss after three, there will be an incremental reduction in your attendance grade. However (and this is very important), missing a class does not eliminate or reduce the need for you to do the reading. If you miss a class, it is still your responsibility to do the reading, and it is also your responsibility to find out what happened in the class discussion. Also, you really can’t afford to be absent on days when an exam is scheduled. As far as tardiness is concerned, please try to avoid it if at all possible. If you’re unavoidably late, please get to class as soon as you can. Above all, please do not disrupt the class if you are late. Please take your seat with as little disruption as possible. The class will start on time whether you’re there or not, and it will not stop when you arrive. If you enter as quietly as possible, the class can continue smoothly without being de-railed by your arrival.

Participation

Participation is also part of the final grade (it’s bundled with attendance). This is not to say that you have to be talking all the time and waving your hands in the air to get the instructor’s attention. Obviously, everyone is different. Some people don’t like to talk in class. You can participate by contributing comments to the discussion. You can also participate by paying attention to the discussion. Active non-participation (sleeping, zoning out, and conducting conversations outside of the discussion) will jeopardize your participation grade. I will, however, ask that you do the reading in advance of the class, and that you formulate and write down questions about the poems, and that you bring those questions to class. Those questions will form the basis of much of our conversations and discussions. Those questions will also form a part of your participation and attendance grade. The instructor will provide blue books for you to compose your questions and you should bring them to class and submit them at the end of each class. This will form a part of your participation grade.

Classroom Etiquette

The classroom should, ideally, be an oasis of civility and calm, away from all the noise in the rest of our lives. It’s where we talk about things that we don’t get the chance to talk about anywhere else, particularly in this case, where we will be considering material that you probably won’t see anywhere else in your lives. We get to talk about art, about ideas, about reading. This is a rare opportunity for us to engage in an activity that probably doesn’t happen in any other part of our day. So let’s try to give the class, and each other, the respect we all deserve. In other words, let’s be respectful to each other. That means not conducting any side conversations, whispered or otherwise. That means being on time (see attendance above). And it means conducting a conversation with as much respect for each other as possible. That doesn’t mean that all discussion has to flow through the instructor, but it does mean that we
should try to achieve an engaging and fulfilling conversation with each other as we discuss these works of literature before us. It means that we listen to each other, and that we try to respond to the comments and the thoughts of others.

**Cellphones and Other Electronic Devices** This is connected to Classroom Etiquette above. PLEASE DO NOT USE YOUR CELLPHONES IN CLASS, unless it is to read the poem assigned for that day, since most, if not all, of the poems are publicly available on poetry websites. Please do not use your phones to send text messages; to check your Facebook page; to tweet; or for any other non class-related reason. During regular class discussion periods, you are asked merely to observe the simple courtesy of not using your phones or electronic devices for anything but class-related activity. We are trying to foster an atmosphere of focused and intelligent consideration of literary history. We can’t do that properly if we’re texting our friends about how dull the instructor is. The instructor may well be very dull indeed, but we owe it to each other to suspend our urges for telecommunication for at least 75 minutes, at least twice a week. If we can’t do that, we’re probably doomed as a civilization.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is bad. Don’t do it. Plagiarism, roughly defined, involves using someone else’s words, and passing them off as your own. This usually happens in papers and take-home exams. Sometimes it happens inadvertently, by not attributing quoted materials to their proper sources. Sometimes it happens more deliberately, when someone else’s writing is lifted wholesale and inserted into a paper. It’s usually fairly easy to tell when this has happened, because the plagiarized words sound a lot better than the words around them. That’s kind of a clue to the instructor. The penalty for plagiarism is severe. You’ll fail the assignment, which will probably mean that you’ll fail the class, since it’s hard to recover from losing a significant portion of your grade. It’s just not worth it. Plus, karma.

**Study Methods:**
**Reading**
We read all the time, even when we’re not quite aware of it. We read signs, instructions, advertisements, pamphlets, cereal boxes. But in this class we will be reading deliberately, and intensively. Reading can be hard, because it requires that we turn on as many of our sensors as possible. We won’t just be reading across the top of these texts; we’ll be reading **into** them, trying to understand what is happening on as many levels as possible. Some of those levels of reading include the following:

**Sense**
This might be the most basic reading level. What do the words mean, individually, and in the order in which we see them on the page. Who is speaking? What are they speaking about? To whom are they speaking? Are there things we don’t understand? How might be clarify that gap in our understanding? Is it merely that there are words we don’t recognize, or are there things happening that make no sense to us? All of this might seem relatively straightforward, but it is also a potentially deceptive activity – in other words, we might think we understand what is going on, but perhaps there is more going on than we realize initially. By the same token, we might think that we have no idea what is happening in a text, but perhaps we know more than
we give ourselves credit for. We just have to remain patient, and keep working on our reading.

**Context**

There is always context for a piece of literature. Poems and stories never exist in a vacuum. Authors have histories; authors exist in history; they are social beings, produced and influenced by their circumstances. Those circumstances can be more or less important in informing our reading of a given text. We can add what we know about the author, and the historical circumstances of the literary work’s production, to our sense of the text, to our analysis of it.

**Analysis**

With analysis we move to the next level, after reading for a basic sense of “what is happening,” to try to determine what is going on behind the basic meaning. We do this by analyzing the way the language is organized; the way words live next to each other, what is left out, in addition to what is included.

**Meaning**

By analysis, we come closer to understanding the meaning(s) of a text. Notice the parenthetical (s) in that last sentence. This suggests that there may be more than one meaning in a given text. Does a poem only ever mean one thing? Is there a single answer to a poem or a story that puzzles us? Probably not. There are almost always at least two meanings to any document we might read, particularly a literary document. Some meanings are more plausible than others. Some meanings are fairly unlikely. We have to talk about which meanings make more or less sense.

**Interpretation**

That’s where interpretation comes in. Having satisfied ourselves that we understand all of the words in a text; having analyzed the way the poem or story is organized; having arrived at meanings that make at least some sense, we are then in a position to come up with some kind of interpretation. This is our version, an intellectualized take, with justifications, close analysis, argument and examples, of what the text is really doing.

**A Reading**

If we can perform all of the tasks above, and come up with our own cogent articulation of as much as possible of what we think is going on in a given text, we have then performed **A Reading**, as distinct from “reading.” This is no mean feat, and something to be rather proud of. We will learn together how to do this. And, who knows, you may find that cereal boxes, pamphlets, advertisements and other stray pieces of text become more interesting once you really know how to read them closely.

**Assignments, Exams, and Grades:**

Baseline Response Exercise: (5%)
Exam I: (25%)
Exam II: (25%)
Exam III: Summative Response, Close Reading & Analysis (25%)
Participation (10%) & Attendance (10%) (See above)
Class Schedule

Class 1 (8/26): INTRODUCTION & STARS
Taylor, Jane – “The Star”
https://poets.org/poem/star
Sandburg, Carl – “Summer Stars”
https://poets.org/poem/summer-stars
Keats, John – “Bright Star”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44468/bright-star-would-i-were-stedfast-as-thou-art

Class 2 (8/31): STARS (Continued)

Class 3 (9/2): RESPONSE TEST/AUBADES I
Vong, Ocean – “Aubade with Burning City”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56769/aubade-with-burning-city
Bogan, Louise – “Leave-Taking”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/15668/leave-taking
Fountain, Carrie – “Aubade at Bosque Redondo”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/151846/aubade-at-bosque-redondo
De la Paz – Oliver – “Aubade with Bread for the Sparrows”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57670/aubade-with-bread-for-the-sparrows

Class 4 (9/7): AUBADES II (cont.)

Class 5 (9/9): SONNETS I – PETRARCHAN, SHAKESPEARIAN, SPENSERIAN
Wyatt, Sir Thomas – “I Find No Peace”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45579/i-find-no-peace
Spenser, Edmund – from Amoretti LXXV , “One day I wrote her name upon the strand”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45189/amoretti-lxxv-one-day-i-wrot-her-name

Class 6 (9/14): AMERICA
Lazarus, Emma – “The New Colossus”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus
Whitman, Walt – “I Hear America Singing”
https://poets.org/poem/i-hear-america-singing
Whitman, Walt – “America”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53091/americ-56d23215696b8
Hughes, Langston – “I, Too, Sing America”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too
McKay, Claude – “America”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44691/americ-56d223e1ac025
Class 7 (9/16): SONNETS II - PETRARCHAN, SHAKESPEARIAN, SPENSERIAN
Shakespeare, William – XVIII, “Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45087/sonnet-18-shall-i-compare-thee-to-a-summers-day
Shakespeare, William – CXXX, “My Mistress’ Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45108/sonnet-130-my-mistress-eyes-are-nothing-like-the-sun

Class 8 (9/21):
SONNETS II – ROMANTIC AND VICTORIAN
Wordsworth, William – “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45514/composed-upon-westminster-bridge-september-3-1802
Shelley, Percy Bysshe – “Ozymandias”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias
Millay, Edna St Vincent – “I Will Put Chaos into Fourteen Lines”
https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/i-will-put-chaos-into-fourteen-lines-2/

Class 9 (9/23): SONNETS III - MODERN
Frost, Robert
http://www.sonnets.org/frost.htm

Class 10 (9/28): SONNETS III – MODERN (cont.)
Hand out Midterm 1
Frost, Robert (see above)

Class 11 (9/30): MIDTERM 1 – AUBADES, SONNETS & POETIC FORM

Class 12 (10/5): NATURE & IMAGERY
Heaney, Seamus – “Digging”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47555/digging
Heaney, Seamus – “Blackberry-Picking”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50981/blackberry-picking

Class 13 (10/7): NATURE (cont.)
Penn Warren, Robert – “Bearded Oaks”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=21819
Creeley, Robert - “The Rain”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54524/the-rain-56d234f78f810

Class 14 (10/12): ROBERT FROST
Frost, Robert – “Mending Wall”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44266/mending-wall

Class 15 (10/14): FALL/AUTUMN
Frost, Robert – “After Apple-Picking”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44259/after-apple-picking

Class 16 (10/19): FALL/AUTUMN (cont.)
Keats, John – “Ode to Autumn”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44484/to-autumn

Class 17 (10/21): NIGHTINGALES
Keats, John, “Ode to a Nightingale”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale

Class 18 (10/26): NIGHTINGALES (cont.)
Hand out Midterm 2

Hardy, Thomas, “The Darkling Thrush”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44325/the-darkling-thrush
Smith, Charlotte Turner – “To a Nightingale”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale

Class 19 (10/28): MIDTERM 2 – NATURE & IMAGERY

Class 20 (11/2): IMAGISM
Pound, Ezra – “In a Station of the Metro”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/12675/in-a-station-of-the-metro
Williams, William Carlos – “The Red Wheelbarrow”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45502/the-red-wheelbarrow

Class 21 (11/4): EKPHRASIS
O’Hara, Frank – “Why I Am Not A Painter”
https://poets.org/poem/why-i-am-not-painter
Ashbery, John – “The Painter”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/26810/the-painter

Class 22 (11/9): BROOKS & CLIFTON
Brooks, Gwendolyn – “kitchenette building”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43308/kitchenette-building
Brooks, Gwendolyn – “a song in the front yard”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43310/a-song-in-the-front-yard
Clifton, Lucille – “blessing the boats”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58816/blessing-the-boats
Clifton, Lucille – “cutting greens”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54590/cutting-greens

Class 23 (11/11): Elegies, Envois and Farewells I
Bolina, Jaswinder – “Elegy”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/141769/elegy-58f778b36afc1
Glück, Louise – “Vespers [In your extended absence, you permit me]”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49759/vespers-in-your-extended-absence-you-permit-me
Glück – “Vespers [Once I believed in you...]”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49758/vespers-once-i-believed-in-you

Class 24 (11/16): Elegies, Envois and Farewells II
Levin, Dana – “Watching the Sea Go”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/91495/watching-the-sea-go
Harjo, Joy – “Perhaps the World Ends Here”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49622/perhaps-the-world-ends-here
Harjo Joy – “When the World as We Knew It Ended”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49619/when-the-world-as-we-knew-it-ended
Harjo, Joy – “A Map to the Next World”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49621/a-map-to-the-next-world

Class 25 (11/18):
MARIANNE MOORE, POEMS ABOUT POEMS, & THE CREATIVE PROCESS
Moore, Marianne – “Poetry”
https://poets.org/poem/poetry

No class week of Thanksgiving

Class 26 (11/30): STARS II – AND THEN WE CAME BACK TO THE BEGINNING
Sexton, Anne – “The Starry Night”
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42565/the-starry-night

Class 27 (12/2): REVIEW & EVALUATION; DISTRIBUTION OF FINAL EXAM

Class 28 (12/7): FINAL EXAM