

Week 1: Class Intro

Hope Jennings : What is literature? Why do we study it?

Jonathan: literature is a written record of humans attempt to work through complex ideas, whether by talking about true life events or through the interpretative lens of fiction

Sadie: Literature is any written or orally passed down story that has meaning. we study it because some stories have history behind them or traditions that future generations can learn from

Cassie: My definition of literature would be the overall concept of art. More precisely in the form of writing/ stories/ poetry/ plays

Bethany Groeschen: I think literature is any piece of writing that can be interpreted in different ways. We study it because we want to understand those different interpretations.

Kat Lee: A piece of writing that has a narrative or tells a story. We study it to learn how the author sees the world or how words can be used to create emotions and ideas

Felix Ybarbo: Literature in my opinion is studied is to further understand both ourselves and others. From fiction to more historically based literature all the way to poetry it is about understanding people outside of ourselves and as well feel the connection towards others and ourselves through the feelings and themes they present to us.

Evalynn: To me, literature is art and a form of expression. We study it because it's important and tells different stories and aspects of the human experience.

Oberon: literature is a piece of writing from anyone who has something to say. Any form of writing is considered literature. Literature is studied because it is almost an artifact of how the author thought of the world and how they individually experienced it.

Bree Smart: literature is a readable body of work which includes views of worlds and or circumstances that are either real/imaginary

Jody Montgomery: I would describe literature pretty simply as writing by people. We study it because it is integral to who we are as humans.

Taylor Mullins: When I think of literature, I think of writings that have a long lasting and powerful impact on those in society. This could include almost any genre, as it is the message and the meaning behind the writers plot line and story that really matters. I think we study it to really understand why these works have such a strong impact on those who read them.

Kayla Hamby: Literature is a written narrative. It can be creative or factual. Its purpose is to tell a story, inform, or spark creative discussion. We study literature to better understand the perspective of others and our own personal feelings.

Haylee: Literature is any piece of writing. I believe that we study it because it can give us insight on certain time periods, cultures, or human interactions.

Brayden: Literature is any written work with some kind of lasting potential. Basically, something that offers artistic value to society. We study literature to learn about the inner workings of writers minds, or to reveal information about history.

Eliza Jackson: literature is different types of creativity. I think we study it too see other's pov & how other's think

David: I've always thought of literature as more of a form of art rather than a specific style of writing: written story-telling/prose in book format. When I come up with a story idea, I see it either as a piece of prose, a movie, a game, etc. The specific reason for us, or at least me, to study it is to learn from others in order to improve my own craft, but the reason most people study it is the same as all forms of art: it's the expression of people telling a story or expressing a feeling/thought/morality

Week 2: Emily Skaja, Brute (Parts I & II)

Kayla: She uses a lot of enjambment in her poetry, similar to Emily Dickinson!

David : When discussing the different feelings of strength and trepidation, I was also thinking of the difference in perspective we see in the poems, it seems like it shifts between the Emily that's in the relationship and the Emily looking back in defiance, and it's sort of shown at random, like a natural thinking process.

Jonathan: [letter poems as] an internal dialogue

Felix: When it comes to patterns within the repeating titles such as "Dear__" for Ruth, Emily, and Katie I think it's interesting to think about if there are common themes between them and if they reflect anything about her own thoughts about girlhood. I also think it's really interesting that they appear in the part titled "Girl Saints" as in certain poems she is seeking guidance or comfort much like people would these saints.

Bethany: The section is also called girl saints so they probably fall under that category for her

Brayden: Forgive me if you already covered this, but do each of these poems build off of each other? To me, it seemed like they are forming a narrative. I also found it getting progressively more depressing and graphic the deeper you go.

David: My question involved the theme of death that fills the collection, of course, it represents the death of the relationship, but there are a few mentions of the hospital, broken glass, pills, and going off on her own. I was trying to figure out if it's she's discussing whether or not she attempted suicide, if he tried to kill her, or what have you.

Cassandra: In her poem 'In March When You Tell Me You Don't', Emily uses the spelled out word "and" on the fourth line, but from then on she uses the symbol for and, '&'. I was wondering how this was significant or even if this was significant?

Kat: Many of the poems in Brute reference a man who is described as emotionally abusive but someone the narrator still loves and cares about very much. My question is, is she talking about the same man throughout the book or could it be about multiple people/relationships?

Kayla: What do you think the significance of the themes of the natural world in Skaja's poetry are? I feel as if there is some context to her life or upbringing that is significant to understanding these references.

Evalynn: My question had to do with the prose poems and how their structures affect the pace of reading. I read the poems aloud and when I read the prose poems I tended to read through them more quickly because of all the shorter phrases and periods. It makes me think about how the speaker's emotions and thoughts are structured.

Bethany: I noticed that Emily seems to talk about nature a lot in regards to her relationship. Why do you think this is and what do you think her relationship with nature is?

Oberon: The question I have is: Do you think the letters in the poems are actual letters she reconstructed as poems or just poems that she's written.

Taylor: She refers to reaching the end of a bottle several times, being sick along with her S.O., and in one poem even a needle. Is this supposed to be a reference to drug use or is it just metaphors?

Haylee: How would you describe the speaker's attitude about death? She mentions water and drowning often throughout the poems. Do you think that she wants to die or is she using drowning as a metaphor for her abusive relationship?

Eliza: I was mainly wondering do any of these poems have a significance to each other. Like are they in some way connected to each other?

Felix: How would we describe the repeated imagery of birds that are mentioned throughout her poems meaning. Both on an individual poem level such as the mention of carrion birds, crows. As well on an overarching theme level.

Jonathan: Emily talks about running away from, striking back at her abuser. She seems to be working through her options, even up unto suicide or substance abuse. Are these ways she was thinking of escape the trauma in her life or was she trying to sum up the experience of others who share similar stories

Katelyn: She gives a lot of imagery and metaphors towards natures. Her imagery and metaphors are darker. Is her way of describing the life she was in help readers to understand more and connect better with her life, including other who may have gone through this?

Sadie: what is the significance of water? it pops up so many times in her poems. It could symbolize a cleansing of her past. For example, in In March When You Tell Me You Don't, she says " I have the problem of needing to say my history teeth-first to a body of water" Simply a way to get tough situations off your chest if you don't have someone else to talk to.

Kayla: indictment has a reference to drowning as well, page 32

David: Water can also be used to reference life and freedom.

Brayden: [*Answered] My question (added while speaking): Emily tends to describe herself in a demeaning way in a number of these poems. One example is likening herself to a tin girl with rusted hands. Emily opts to not use an organic term, such as rotting or decaying, but instead uses rusting, which I would associate more with non-organic objects. I read this as Emily projecting the thoughts/actions of her abuser(s) onto herself. In a sense, Emily is objectifying herself. Is this train of thought correct?

Jonathan: or self harm in "with feathers"

Evalynn: [Bird imagery] Predators vs prey

David: I find it interesting because it suggests a predatory relationship, but in the form of a scavenger and the dead rather than just straight predator vs prey. I don't really know what it means, though haha

David: [Birds as symbols of] Freedom

Bethany: The first thing I think of is freedom

Taylor: I also see it as a sense of weightlessness, able to go about life without worry

Taylor: I believe you are speaking of the brute/brute heart [poem where she returns home]

David: Perhaps that she can never go back to the place she was before this all happened, but life goes on

Hope Jennings: For next week, look up the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Skaja makes frequent reference to this myth in Part IV, and so think about the use of myth in the poems. Also, in Part III, she uses a lot of insect imagery. Think about significance of this.

Week 3: Emily Skaja, Brute (Parts III & IV)

Brayden: The second half of Skaja's book of poems had a large focus on tree imagery/symbolism. I interpreted this as Skaja looking at the qualities of trees and likening them to her character as she withstood abuse. However, one of the poems threw me for a loop and I was unsure if my original interpretation was correct. The poem was "Elegy for R" on pages 48-49. What are your thoughts on the symbolism of trees and how did you interpret "Elegy for R"?

David: In the second half there's a mention of a suicide again but also a mention of two bad men. Is the second bad man her father, and is he the one that committed suicide? She mentioned that she was 10 years old at the time.

Evalynn: What does Emily Skaja mean by "the brute force method" in the poem "Brute Force"? What did she lie about and how was she too powerful?

Haylee: In "March is March," the speaker mentions specific references to pop culture. How do you think these references function within the piece/what do these references suggest about the speaker?

Kat: In the second half the author uses the metaphor of fire more often, whereas in the first half she used water. I wonder what the significance of this is?

Taylor: Throughout the book of poems, she writes about Philadelphia and Indiana quite a bit, is there a significance in these locations?

Oberon: In "Aubade with Boundaries", who is the we? What is the story they share? Abusive relationships?

Kayla: The month of March is referenced a few times in the second half of this book. What exactly is the significance of March to Skaja?

Katelyn: Was her way of using the description of dirt her way to show readers that when he is around that's all she finds around her, this constant chore?

Cassandra: This is more or less a statement about what I found interesting in the reading. In "Abade With Attention to Pathos" part V, Emily refers to the term "divorcing" when describing how she is separating herself from different items and activities. I found it interesting how she chose the term "divorce" as opposed to "separate".

Bethany: Part 3 of Brute is titled "Circle" and Emily seems to allude back to this word in several poems. Why do you think she decided to title this specific set of poems this way and what significance does the word "circle" hold to her?

Taylor: She also speaks about loss, and trees burning, roots suspended under water, being unable to speak; can this be seen as her going through the several stages of grief?

Eliza: She talks a lot about herself as if she's been planted. Is this her trying to explain how she's been growing? It's hard to tell because sometimes it seems negative but then in other parts of her poems they seem more positive. I can't tell which one she's going for.

Jonathan: the third section is circle, to show how life has circled around to another bad relationship? in litter of birds does the bees mean? words that hurt?

Bree: this is more of a generalized question...when she speaks of a eulogy could she be speaking of her past self... she often speaks of how she's changed or how she views her life... she could very well be mourning who she was before she met these men that made her question everything?

Jonathan: I took the first part of brute force was very feminist, Plato was very patriarchal, her being a strong woman was what intimidated him she was too powerful as a self strong woman

Bethany: That's one of the things I wrote about on our discussion board

[Symbolic use of fire]

David: light and warmth

Evalynn: Energy

Bethany: Warmth and protection

Kayla: rebirth through fire, ex/ phoenix

Bree: this woman needs a hug or something fr 😊 😊

Jonathan: I agree she needs a hug

Bree: she needs to delete tinder...

[Referring to the lines: "It's only in another life that I could be damned / back to hell for your half-look" p. 59]

Eliza: I still wanted to answer the question. I'm pretty sure she's saying that the only way that she'll ever be in his life again or in hell again is if she was in another life

Kayla: I think she's indicating that she has realized his errors and faults and can not be tricked into falling for his half-baked excuses again. This also falls into that concept of rebirth through fire. She has a new life now.

Eliza: I think she's assuring him in a way that she has taken over her life again

Week 4: Jericho Brown, *The Tradition* (Part I)

David: I personally found this a lot easier to read.

Evalynn: I did too.

Jonathan: So the Duplex structure is something he has made himself by combining multiple forms? [Yes]

Cassandra: Is it used by other poets that you know of? [Not that I know]

Jonathan: Police brutality [as major theme]

Jonathan: And a connection to dirt which is mentioned many times. connection to slavery

Jonathan: as a human being when he fought his father

Bree: which is probably why he mentioned how his son is not yet incarcerated

Bree: I think in some of these poems he makes a gesture towards his sexuality In the poem “duplex” he says “my first love drove a burgundy car. He was fast and awful, tall as my father.” (Lines 5-6) i’m trying to figure out whether fast and awful are adjectives for the car or his significant other?

Evalynn: What is the significance of the color yellow in the poem “Flower”?

Brayden: I really enjoyed the message behind "The Water Lilies". I found the final line to be especially powerful, "Their eyes raised to the sun, without going blind" (13). It had a tinge of irony behind it. By this I mean, it's easy to criticize events, placing yourself within them, and stating how you wouldn't let something bad occur given the chance. However, I'm left wondering if I am not looking deep enough and was curious if there were any other interpretations of this poem?

Haylee: I found the poem “Hero” very interesting. Throughout his piece, Brown conveys a level of respect and love for his mother and black women. However, in the poem “Hero,” I detect a some resentment. Why do you think Brown included this?

Taylor: Throughout Part 1 he brings up a love hate relationship with God several times. Is this his way of showing how the same entity that we turn to for support and help throughout our lives is the same entity that we somewhat blame for our struggles?

Kayla: What is Brown’s relationship with religion and God? At times he talks about religion in a positive way, and at times in a very negative or violent way.

Oberon: In “After Another Country” who/what is “The George Washington”?

Kat: What does the 'little black string' symbolize in Second Language?

Jonathan: In the last poem, about his son and daughter, what does he mean his "Black anger turned red"? Black anger as in his anger as a black man against the whiteness of the world? What significance is turning "red"?

Bethany: Brown seems to switch between stories of his ancestors and stories of his own life and the modern struggles of black people. What point do you think he's trying to get across by doing this?

David: In the first poem, he mentions his father being injured and sent to the hospital and he seems to take credit for it. Is this a literal instance of him finally standing up to his abuser and fighting back, or more of a metaphor?

Katelyn: In After Another Country is he talking about committing suicide because of the color of his skin? I know it says the ones like me, walk around looking for a building or a bridge...

Felix: I have a few questions regarding the poem "Foreday in the Morning", One of which being what is the implication of the flowers both on the level of the type of powers having a particular meaning and their abundance within the yard. As well as a question regarding the overall generational differences we could garner from the poem between Brown and his mother's views.

Eliza: With "A Human Being" I was really confused on the connection with the happiness part and the actual poem itself. Was exactly is he comparing the happiness too and how do they compare, what is the connection in this poem?

Sadie: after reading As a Human Being, it really made me think about the relationship he had with his father and I wondered what might have happened with his father because, as of this first part, we haven't seen his father mentioned again, or at least I didn't notice it.

Felix: **type of flowers

Jonathan: Cowardice. Yellow as in chicken

Kayla: Other than the use of yellow in flower, I felt Brown placed emphasis on colors often. For example red in The Microscopes as well.

Bree: a child craves the impossible from an abusive parent... the adult sees the impossible nature

Bree: do you think any of his feelings towards his father are in relation to his sexuality?

Sadie: i was spanked once as a kid; i feel like the people that appreciate it are those that only got spanked a few times, whereas the ones that resent it may have got it all the time, as Brown says "daily"

David : Is he saying that she had considered aborting him before giving birth to him with that line?

Cassandra: Does Brown ever mention if his father beat his mother also, hence why maybe she was abusive towards her children?

Cassandra: All the abortions ever?

David: slaves having their children taken from them?

Haylee: I think he's trying to say he should be grateful he was even able to be born

Bree: we do that light heartedly while watching horror movies... "she's so stupid, why would you go in the basement ?"

Week 5: Jericho Brown, *The Tradition* (Parts II & III)

Jonathan: What impact does the author himself have on the reading? For instance, would a poem like *Of My Fury* have less power if Brown were white and straight?

Evalynn: What do the peaches represent in the poem "The Peaches"? I had a hard time understanding this poem in general.

Haylee: In the last poem, Brown once again brings up the burgundy car his father drove. What do you think is the significance of this? Why do you think he includes this twice?

Katelyn: What was the meaning of "the opposite of rape is understanding a field of flowers called paintbrushes"? What do the paintbrushes represent?

Taylor: Do flowers represent life throughout this series of poems? Like in "The Virus", are the pansies representing new life being made with other women?

Bethany: In the poem "Shovel", Brown writes about the process of getting rid of a dead body. What does the body represent in this context.

Felix: In the poem *Stakes*, what is the importance of the implication of the lack of singularity and the use of "we". Is it spoken the poem supposed to be applied to a more personal level or is it speaking on a broader topic?

Eliza: There was a lot of death in this part and a lot of talking of death, dying, etc. I was just confused on if he actually lost someone or something especially because of *A.D.*, *Turn You Over*, and *The Virus*. All three of those give me the feeling that he lost a partner but then he talks in the other poems as if he could never find or have love.

Brayden: I noticed a strong theme of sexuality in the second and third parts of this collection. I originally thought that Brown was only making social commentary, however, after looking through notes from last class I started leaning more toward Brown discussing his personal experiences with sexuality. How did you interpret this theme throughout the collection?

Kat: Why does the author use much shorter lines in *Layover* than he had previously?

Kayla: In "The Long Way," who is he speaking to? What is the significance of the themes of cleanliness in this poem (ex. oral hygiene and innocence)? Brown seems to both desire and resent cleanliness in this poem.

Sadie: In the poem "Riddle," there is a the lines "We see a moon/ So land there. We love land so/ Long as we can take it." What does this say about Americans, or just the human race in general?

Kayla: I think white writers should write about issues they are passionate about, but be aware that they are unable to totally understand and relate to problems they haven't experienced. We are responsible for doing thorough research to accurately represent the issues others face.

Sadie: writing about marginalized groups should be just like writing about something historical, you gotta check the facts in order to be accurate

Felix: I think it is a very complex balancing act when it comes to writing about groups that you are not within. Not only are the facts important, but it is also important to understand the implications and the reflections of how writing these groups may effect them.

Bree: young black women and men, especially gay kids being able to look at him and see themselves... they see "their voices being praised" that's huge ... because representation, although in 2021 it's growing.... it's still not prominent... so we need authentic real people sharing their stories in order to feel heard

Jonathan: Emmett Till was a 14 yo boy who was lynched for offending a white women

Oberon: do you think the grandmother in "good white people" is biased because she herself was a part of the domestic help on whether there really are good white people?

Jonathan: I took good white people to be a sarcastic euphemism meaning the opposite like how "bless your heart" really means "go to hell" in the south

Week 7: Quiara Alegria Hudes, *Water by the Spoonful*

Oberon: Why do you think that more modern plays such as this are paced like this? I found the pacing off and it's evident in many other "modern" plays that they do it as well.

Brayden: Can you clarify the deeper meaning of the "water wings"? I read this as sort of a symbolic gesture from Odessa trying to be a mother to someone else. Odessa clearly had her own demons about her parenting specifically the issue around her late daughter. I'm curious if there was more to the object though. [Notable scenes 2,9, & 15]

Cassie: What pushed Odessa over the edge and made her decide to use again? Was she trying to commit suicide?

David: Why was Odessa so dismissive of her sister? She didn't seem particularly bothered by her death, but I also didn't get a sense that they hated each other.

Taylor: Does Odessa (haikumom) participate in other threads, or just the one? Is she admin for the entire website or just the thread that we see?

Haylee: How do you think Elliot's experience with his mother (Odessa) makes his own addiction harder for him to deal with?

Bethany: Why are Orangutan and Chutes&Ladders so cold to Fountainhead when he first logs on and shares his story?

Evalynn: Why did Ginny scream in Elliot's dream? Is it because she saw that he wanted Odessa to relapse?

Jonathan: So many themes and storylines are crammed into this play. Drug abuse, child loss, veteran PTSD, Loss, Loneliness, seeking help and healing and backsliding. There is so much it is hard to choose one thing to focus on. And it is such a short play. How does this fit into the larger narrative of the three play cycle? Is this part of a longer narrative or is this a self contained piece?

Bree: I was really interested in the way they bullied John so hard in one of the earliest scenes, and genuinely shouldn't they be hoping all addicts reach out for help ?

Kat: Does Elliot maybe partially blame Odessa for his own addiction?

Kayla: What role does chronology play in this piece? Many scenes begin to overlap in terms of chronological order of events. How is this significant? Thinking of this piece as a play, would what would this be like to view? Would this be confusing?

Bree: doesn't the book say that it's like the second play in a trilogy?

Felix: I am really interested to everyone's thoughts on the complex relationships of the family throughout the entire play as well as the ending overall and where we left off with all the characters!!

David: This is the second of a three part trilogy, and I assume each is similar. I want to check out the full thing, but each is full-price, so it seems more just a way to get more money from one piece of work cut into three

Bethany: Yeah I think it was just way too much for her to confront at one time

Kayla: I also think that everyone's idea of rock bottom is much different. Fountainhead was well-off, and likely not in line with their idea of this.

Cassie: The family seems to need some sort of "glue" to hold them together, it seems they were always uncertain where they would be as far as a family since the death of Ginny.

Bree: bye 😊