

Global Film, Literature, and Cultures

ENGL 117B

Spring 2026 Section 01 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/23/2026

Contact Information

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Course Information

How would you respond to a cartoon or story that depicts Donald Trump as a pig, Joe Biden as an ass, Barack Obama as an ape, the Prophet Mohammed as a dog, or the Pope as a goat? Would you think it's brilliant, hilarious, witty, provocative, outrageous, insulting, or blasphemous? Would you laugh or would you go to war? From Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal," George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* to "The Daily Show," "South Park," and "Monty Python films," comedy and satire have historically served as sharp instruments for challenging power and exposing hypocrisy. But can comedy and satire survive genocidal war, political polarization, instant outrage, and cancel culture? Who or what can we legitimately laugh at? What is the relationship of satire to free speech, hate speech, blasphemy, religious faith, national identity, race, culture, and politics? Does humor travel across language and culture? Are there limits to satire? What factors determine the success or failure of humor? What can comedy and satire reveal about globalization, imperialism, liberalism, nationalism, terrorism, racism, sexism and other "isms" shaping our world? We will explore these and other questions by studying some of the best modern comedy and satire in world literature and cinema. Literary texts will include Fran Ross's *Oreo*, Emile Habibi's *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, Gogol's *The Nose*, and *The Overcoat*; films will include *American Fiction*, *The Great Dictator*, *Life is Beautiful*, and *Happy Times*. Our goal will be to understand how comedy and satire, with roots in different classical traditions, developed into powerful instruments of cultural expression, social critique, and political protest. Class will include a combination of lecture, presentations, and discussions, and workshops.

Lecture/Discussion

Friday 10-2:45

Course Description and Requisites

Using films and literary works, students will appreciate and understand the narratives (myths and other stories) that create and define cultural identity, explore cultural interaction, and illustrate cultural preservation and cultural difference over time.

Satisfies UD Area: 3. Cultures and Global Understanding (Formerly Area V).

Prerequisite(s): Completion of Core General Education and upper division standing are prerequisites to all UD GE courses. Completion of, or co-registration in, 100W is strongly recommended.

Grading: Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Classroom Protocol & Policy

Attendance & Participation: Although attendance cannot be graded, regular attendance and active participation in class discussions are extremely important for your success in the class.

Please arrive on time and stay for the entire class. You are responsible for all materials assigned, presented and discussed. You are encouraged to take notes in class, but you should have studied the materials before class begins.

Poor attendance/participation will have negative effects on your final grade. Since most classes will be based on presentations and discussions, it is crucial for you to keep up with the readings/screenings and take an active as well as thoughtful role in all classroom activities. Your questions, comments, insights, and interpretations are valuable no matter how outlandish they may seem. So do speak up!

All readings are listed against dates they will be discussed in class; so when you come to class you should have already read the materials and be prepared to discuss them

Devices: You may use your laptops/tablets in class for class-related activities but please refrain from using your phone and other devices to engage in activities that may distract the class.

Conferencing: I encourage you to schedule a meeting whenever you need to discuss something, whether it is an assignment or any other difficulty you may be having with the structure and format of the class. I am completely open to criticism and suggestions because the only way I can fix things is if I know what is wrong..

Submitting work: All out of class written work will be submitted on canvas; please do not email assignments to me unless I ask you to do so. Unless you have received prior permission from me, assignments will be graded one letter grade lower for each late day. No work will be accepted beyond one week late. In-class work including presentations cannot be made up.

AI: Please do not rely on AI to do your research, thinking, reading or writing; learning depends on your personal engagement with the course materials.

University Policies

Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html). Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html) . [Information about late drop is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/](http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/). Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Recording of Class and Public Sharing of Instructor Material

Common courtesy and professional behavior dictate that you notify someone when you are recording him/her. You must obtain the instructor's permission to make audio or video recordings in this class. Such permission allows the recordings to be used for your private, study purposes only. The recordings are the intellectual property of the instructor; you have not been given any rights to reproduce or distribute the material. Where active participation of students or guests may be on the recording, permission of those

students or guests should be obtained as well. Course material developed by the instructor is the intellectual property of the instructor and cannot be shared publicly without his/her approval. You may not publicly share or upload instructor generated material for this course such as exam questions, lecture notes, or homework solutions without instructor consent.

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the DRC (Disability Resource Center) to establish a record of their disability.

Student Technology Resources

Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center located on the 1st floor of Clark Hall and on the 2nd floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library. A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from Media Services located in IRC 112. These items include digital and VHS camcorders, VHS and Beta video players, 16 mm, slide, overhead, DVD, CD, and audiotape players, sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Room 126 in Clark Hall. It is staffed by professional instructors and upper-division or graduate-level writing specialists from each of the seven SJSU colleges. Our writing specialists have met a rigorous GPA requirement, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. [The Writing Center website is located at http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/about/staff/.](http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/about/staff/)

Peer Mentor Center

The Peer Connections Center is located on the 1st floor of Clark Hall in the Academic Success Center. The Peer Mentor Center is staffed with Peer Mentors who excel in helping students manage university life, tackling problems that range from academic challenges to interpersonal struggles. On the road to graduation, Peer Mentors are navigators, offering "roadside assistance" to peers who feel a bit lost or simply need help mapping out the locations of campus resources. Peer Mentor services are free and available on a drop –in basis, no reservation required. The Peer Mentor Center website is located at http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu/about_us/

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

English Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Goals

After successfully completing the course, students shall be able to:

1. Analyze historical, social, and/or cultural significance of creative works of human expression (examples include, but are not limited to, written works, images, media, music, dance, technologies, designs), from at least one cultural tradition outside the United States;
2. Examine how creative works of human expression [as defined in #1] outside the United States have influenced the United States' cultures;
3. Explain how a culture outside the U.S. has changed in response to internal and external influences; and
4. Appraise how the study of creative works of human expression from outside the United States shapes one's own understanding of cultural experiences and practices

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE UD Area 3: Cultures and Global Understanding

SJSU Studies courses -- GE UD Areas 2/5, 4, and 3 -- help students integrate knowledge between and among disciplines. SJSU Studies courses develop abilities that enable students to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in multicultural societies and to develop abilities to address complex issues and problems using analytical skills and creative techniques.

Courses in **UD Area 3: Cultures and Global Understanding** examine multiple aspects of human expression in cultures and societies outside the United States. By reflecting on how traditions of cultures outside the United States have influenced the United States' cultures and societies, students deepen their understanding of various cultures.

GE UD Area 3 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an UD Area 3 course, students should be able to:

1. analyze the historical, social, and/or cultural significance of creative works of human expression (examples include, but are not limited to, written works, images, media, music, dance, technologies, and designs) , from at least one cultural tradition outside the United States;
2. examine how creative works of human expression [as defined in #1] outside the United States have influenced United States' cultures;
3. explain how a culture outside the U.S. has changed in response to internal and external influences; and
4. appraise how the study of creative works of human expression from outside the United States shapes one's own understanding of cultural experiences and practices.

Content

1. Courses shall focus on issues or present perspectives from different academic disciplines and include an integrative assignment appropriate to the course content.
2. Courses shall require students to apply basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, research, and mathematics/quantitative reasoning) gained in Core General Education courses.
3. Assignments must utilize library research and oral and written communication skills.
4. Courses shall promote reflective processes and critical analysis of the civic relevance and ethical dimensions of course topics.
5. Materials must include primary sources appropriate to the disciplinary approaches used in the course (Examples include, but are not limited to, original creative works, scholarly journal articles, interviews, oral histories, historical documents).

Writing requirement

The minimum writing requirement is 3,000 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

Materials to Buy or Borrow

- Fran Ross: *Oreo* (any edition; print or ebook is fine; buy or borrow)

Materials Available in Canvas

- All other readings are available in Canvas (pdf uploads or links to external sites)
- Films will be screened in class (all available on YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime and other popular streaming platforms)

Course Requirements and Assignments

All written assignments must be submitted on Canvas on the date/time specified in the schedule. Unless you have received prior permission, late submissions will be graded one letter grade lower for each late day and will not be accepted beyond one week.

Assignments: More information will be provided in Canvas Assignments and in class.

1. **Reader Response:** Each week you will post a 250–300-word response to the week’s material. You may focus on any text/film assigned for the week or write about a specific aspect of the text/film such as character, theme etc. In addition to commenting, raise at least one question for further discussion. The purpose of this assignment is to engage with the course materials regularly, share your impressions or thoughts, and start a conversation. You will post your responses in Canvas under the Discussions tab. Note: Responses on all Readings/Tests are due the Thursday before class so that I can review them before our class discussion on Friday. Responses on Films are due the Saturday after the in-class screening and panel discussion; you may treat these like mini film reviews. **You must submit 10/12 responses to earn the full score.** Scoring Criteria: evidence of regular and thoughtful engagement with assigned materials, and number of RRs completed. [GELO 1]
2. **Oral Presentation:** You will lead class discussion on an assigned story/novel on the scheduled day by making an oral presentation. Consult with others who are assigned the same story/novel to avoid overlap and repetition. Focus on analyzing a significant character/theme/symbol/image using examples/quotes from the text. Design a simple PPT highlighting the main points you wish to share in class. Feel free to draw on your RR for the week. Be prepared to answer questions. Scoring Criteria: relevance of cultural commentary and quality of literary analysis (70 points); PPT (10 points); delivery and engagement of audience (20 points). [GELO 2]
3. **Panel Discussion:** You will sign up to take part in a “Socratic Seminar” or panel discussion on a film following the in-class screening. You don’t have to pre-watch the film, but you must be present in class and take notes during the screening so that you can participate thoughtfully in the discussion, including Q&A with the audience. Scoring Criteria: relevance of cultural commentary and quality of analysis (75 points); delivery and interaction with audience (25 points). [GELO 3]
4. **Midterm Test:** Questions will ask for factual information as well as analytical and interpretive responses based on close reading analysis of short passages or scenes from the texts/films discussed in class. Scoring Criteria: accuracy of information, relevance and clarity of analysis, relevance and strength of supporting evidence or examples. [GELO 4]
5. **Critical Analysis Essay** (750-1000 words): the essay must focus on the material discussed after the midterm and spring break. The essay must present a clear thesis or argument about how humor/satire is used in a film/text; your argument must be supported through critical analysis of relevant examples from the film/text. The essay will be written in stages (outline, draft, editing, revision) Scoring Criteria: accuracy of information, relevance and clarity of analysis, relevance and strength of supporting evidence or examples. [GELO 4]

Grading Information

Grading:	Points
Oral Presentation	150
Panel Discussion	100
Reader Responses	150
Midterm Test.	250
Critical Analysis essay	350
Total	1000

Grading Policy:

In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas conveyed. In other words, your grade will depend not only on what you say but also on how (well) you say it. All student writing should therefore be distinguished by logical and critical thinking, rigorous textual analysis, correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

The “**A**” essay will be well organized and well developed, demonstrating a clear understanding and fulfillment of the assignment. It will show the student’s ability to use language effectively and construct sentences distinguished by syntactic complexity and variety. Such essays will be essentially free of grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors.

The “**B**” essay will demonstrate competence in the same categories as the “**A**” essay. The chief difference is that the “**B**” essay will show some descriptably slight weaknesses in one of those categories. It may slight one of the assigned tasks, show less facility of expression, or contain some minor grammatical, mechanical, or usage flaws.

The “**C**” essay will complete all tasks set by the assignment, but show weakness in fundamentals (usually development), with barely enough specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. The sentence construction may be less mature, and the use of language less effective and correct than the “**B**” essay.

The “**D**” essay will neglect one of the assigned tasks and be noticeably superficial in its treatment of the assignment—that is, too simplistic or short. The essay may reveal some problems in development, with insufficient specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. It will contain grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The “**F**” essay will demonstrate a striking underdevelopment of ideas and insufficient or unfocused organization. It will contain serious grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A= excellent; B= above average; C= average; D= below average; F= failure. Courses graded according to the A, B, C, No Credit system shall follow the same pattern.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

Tentative Schedule (subject to change with fair advance notice)

All Changes will be made in the Modules

Additional resources are also in the Modules

Week 1: Jan 23

- Intro to course/syllabus
- Intro to Comedy & Satire
- Two war poems by Dunya Mikhail
- The War in Color: <https://poets.org/poem/war-colors>
- "The War Works Hard": <https://poets.org/poem/war-works-hard>
- Religious jokes: <https://www.cnn.com/2015/01/09/opinions/obeidallah-comedians-religious-jokes/index.html>

Homework

- Sign up for panel discussion on film
- RR1 (Swift, Orwell) – Due Jan 29

Week 2: Jan 30

- Jonathan Swift: "[A Modest Proposal](#)"; George Orwell: "[Shooting an Elephant](#)"
- Oral presentation & discussion
- Additional Resources:
 - <https://archive.org/details/flickr-ows-AModestProposalbyPeterKuper-6420184649>

Week 3: Feb 6

- American Fiction (2023) in class screening
- Panel discussion
- Additional Resources:
 - <https://www.kalw.org/show/crosscurrents/2020-12-04/danielle-fuentes-morgan-on-the-revolutionary-power-of-black-satire>
 - Key & Peele's Obama anger translator skit

Homework

- RR 2 (American Fiction) – due Feb 7
- RR3 (Oreo) – due Feb 12

Week 4: Feb 13

- Fran Ross: Oreo
- Oral presentation & discussion

Homework

- RR4 (Oreo) – due Feb 19

Week 5: Feb 20

- Fran Ross: Oreo continued
- Oral presentation & discussion

Week 6: Feb 27

- Happy Times (2000) in class screening
- Panel discussion
- Additional Resources
 - <https://forsomethingmore.com/comedy-across-cultures-humor-worldwide/>

- <https://adamah.media/humour-across-cultures-no-laughing-matter/>

Homework

- RR5 (Happy Times) – due Feb 28
- RR6 (Shifu) – due Mar 5

Week 7: Mar 6

- Mo Yan: Shifu, you'll do anything for a laugh
- Oral presentation & discussion

Homework

- RR 7 (Gogol) – due Mar 12

Week 8: Mar 13

- Gogol: The Nose; The Overcoat
- Oral presentation & discussion

Week 9: Mar 20

- Midterm test (in class, on canvas)

Homework

- RR 8 (Saki) due Mar 26

Week 10: Mar 27

- Saki: "Hermann the Irascible"

<https://americanliterature.com/author/hh-munro-saki/short-story/hermann-the-irascible>

Week 11: March 30-April 3 Spring break

Week 12: April 10

- Life is Beautiful (1997) in class screening
- Panel discussion
- Additional Resources: <https://www.meaning.ca/article/humor-and-laughter-in-wartime/>
- Workshop: draft of essay

Homework

- RR8 (Great Dictator) – due April 11
- RR 9 (Secret Life) – due April 16

Week 13: April 17

- Habibi: Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist
- Oral presentation & discussion
- Additional Resources:
 - <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/an-overlooked-classic-about-the-comedy-of-race>
 -

Homework

- RR 10 (Secret Life) – due April 16

Week 14: April 24

- Habibi: Secret Life continued
- Oral presentation & discussion
- Workshop: Essay outline + thesis statement

Week 15: May 1

- The Great Dictator (1940) in class screening
- Panel discussion

Homework

- RR 11 (Life is Beautiful) – due May 2

Week 16: May 8

- Overview
- Workshop: peer editing essay

Homework

- Essay Due May 10