

HL1006 / Thursdays, 14:30-16:20 / HSS Auditorium  
**Introduction to American Literature**  
Professor Christopher Trigg / [cptrigg@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:cptrigg@ntu.edu.sg)



### **Description**

In the second volume of his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin describes his attempt to achieve “moral perfection.” Having achieved a degree of temperance, frugality, and sincerity, Franklin attempts to acquire a sense of humility. Here he admits failure as regards “the *reality* of this virtue,” but adds that he managed to cultivate the “*appearance*” of it.

In this course, we’ll examine the way in which American literary works represent and facilitate personal transformation. Reading a broad range of texts, dating from the colonial era to the present day, we’ll examine different conceptions of self-construction and self-performance. Many of our chosen works will describe moments of conversion or decisive change, from Thoreau’s resolution to resist peacefully his government’s support of slavery to the narrator’s decision, in James Weldon Johnson’s novel, to forgo his black identity and live as an “Ex-Colored Man.”

### **Required Texts**

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*  
Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*  
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*  
(available for purchase at NTU Booklink)

All other texts (marked with a \*) are in the Course Reader (available for purchase at the HSS print room, and for download on NTU learn)

### **Assessment**

Participation and Preparation **10%**  
Short paper **10%**  
Term paper **30%**  
Final exam **50%**

### **Late Penalties**

Late work submitted without an approved extension will be penalized one half-mark per day late – an A paper submitted one day late would drop to an A-, etc.

### **Academic Integrity**

Please see the School of Humanities’ statement on academic integrity [here](#).

### **Generative AI**

Please be advised that the use of AI tools is prohibited in this course. This includes (but is not limited to) Chat GPT, Google Bard, and editing software such as Grammarly and Quillbot. The use of any AI tools will result in a significant grade deduction (including a potential fail grade or zero for the assignment).

## Lecture Schedule

1. 18<sup>th</sup> January

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography* I-II\*

Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative*\*

2. 25<sup>th</sup> January

Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle,”\* “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,”\* “The Devil and Tom Walker”\*

3. 1<sup>st</sup> February

Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”\*

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”\*

4. 8<sup>th</sup> February

Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,”\* “Come up from the Fields Father,”\* “When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom’d”\*

5. 15<sup>th</sup> February

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (**lecture held online**)

6. 22<sup>nd</sup> February

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

7. 29<sup>th</sup> February——— **short paper due**

Emily Dickinson, Poems 199,\* 303,\* 656,\* 1072,\* 764,\* 670\*

Margaret Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit”\*

Recess -----

8. 14<sup>th</sup> March

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*

9. 21<sup>st</sup> March

Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*

10. 28<sup>th</sup> March

Meredith Wilson, *The Music Man* (film screening in class)

11. 4<sup>th</sup> April

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

12. 11<sup>th</sup> April

Sui Sin Far, “Mrs. Spring Fragrance”\*; Philip Roth, “Defender of the Faith”\*

13. 18<sup>th</sup> April——— **term paper due**

Joy Harjo, Selected Poems\*; Tommy Orange, “The State”\*