ENG 417: The Monstrous Epic
Westminster College

Dr. Trisha Cowen, Assistant Professor
Office Location: Patterson 303

English Department
Office Hours: Tu & Th 9-10:30am, & by appointment

WESTMINSTER COURSE CATALOG DESCRIPTION
These seminars study literary texts from several critical and theoretical stances. The courses help students develop strategies for assessing the ways that meaning becomes evident in texts, in readers, and in writers. In addition to reading and interpreting texts within contexts, the 400s seminars regard works through or in the light of perspectives offered by critical theories. Not only do students in these seminars complete a higher degree of correlative and critical thinking, but they also participate more fully in leading the courses. The inquiry into theory, and when appropriate, its application, stresses independent assessment, peer evaluation, and assertion of ethical choices as they pertain to meaning and contexts. Prerequisite: successful completion of ENG 240, ENG 250, and one ENG 300.

ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO THIS SECTION
This course will trace the evolution of monster symbolism in classic and modern epics, in the forms of poetry and prose, as well as their film or TV adaptations. Students will analyze epics for their narrative techniques, historical and cultural significance, themes, and symbols through the lens of multiple critical theories. Course texts will include Homer’s *The Odyssey*, *Beowulf*, Haley’s *Roots*, a selection of epic excerpts, film adaptations of the epics studied, as well as scholarly critique of the epics. Students will be required to write a literary analysis paper, take quizzes on course content, perform an oral presentation, and create their own epic in the style of Haley’s *Roots*. In preparation for the writing of their own epic, students will practice their use of craft elements and refine their implementation of story structure through creative writing prompts. Students must demonstrate the ability to write and speak analytically, creatively, and coherently, in ways appropriate to the discipline, and they must display the ability to revise and improve their writing in both form and content.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES
At the end of the course, students should be able to:
- Examine and interpret classical epic poems, epic novels, and epic films/TV.
- Articulate critical responses regarding epic and literary conventions in written and verbal forms.
- Analyze the significance of monster symbolism in both written and visual texts.
- Construct analytical essays using textual evidence from both primary and secondary sources.
- Critically examine ways in which epics operate in various literary, cultural, and critical contexts.
- Produce creative writing of strong quality, demonstrating technical confidence of the epic form, and a well-developed individual voice and aesthetic.
- Implement revisions in essay and creative writing form to clarify and/or improve features central to a text’s success such as its purpose, thesis, organization, use of supporting details, use of source material, use of citation, and/or audience awareness.

The Monstrous Epic! 1
REQUIRED TEXTS

- Other supplemental readings you will access on D2L.

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GRADING SYSTEM AND COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Grade Breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Quizzes (6)</td>
<td>30% (5% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation on a Monster from <em>The Odyssey</em></td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literary Analysis Research Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Roots</em> Creative Assignment</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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GRADING SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100% - 94%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>93% - 90%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>89% - 88%</td>
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<td>87% - 84%</td>
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<td>83% - 80%</td>
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<td>73% - 70%</td>
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<td>69% - 60%</td>
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<td>59% - 0%</td>
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PARTICIPATION

[15%] This is a discussion-based course; therefore, it is only fully productive when everyone is present, when everyone honors their commitment to read and **when everyone is willing to share their insights**. To help you participate actively, I suggest that you annotate your readings. Do your part to make this class successful! You should make an effort to add your voice to discussions during every class: failing to do so will negatively impact your course grade. In a nutshell, if you never speak in class, you should not expect a strong grade.

Since this is a course on epic texts, it will take diligence and strong time management skills to keep up with the pace of the course. Please plan to spend about 1-2 hours of reading time during the week and 2-3 hours over the weekend, especially when we get to *Roots*. I’ve separated each text with a film to give you time to start the next text early if you’d like. In addition, if you are a strong listener, you might think about listening to *Roots* on Audible to help you get through the full text; it’s around 900 pages. Audible offers a free month trial. Either way, you must buy the hard copy of the text.

READING QUIZZES

[30%] The course quizzes will cover course readings, key terms, lecture material, films, important discussion points, and your analysis and application (to scholarly articles or critical theory) skills. They will consist of multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and sometimes mini-essay
questions. Please note the dates of the quizzes on the course schedule. Quizzes cannot be made up if you miss class! Make-up quizzes will only be given for documented medical reasons, scheduled school-sponsored athletic events, or a documented family emergency (funeral/severe illness.) You must send the documentation via email 24 hours from the time the quiz is given. If you know you will miss a quiz due to a sporting event, please let me know about the event as soon as it is scheduled and we will schedule another testing time. You will take a different quiz than the rest of the class.

**POSTER PRESENTATION ON A MONSTER FROM THE ODYSSEY**

[5%] In groups of 2, students will research and present on one of the monsters from Homer’s *The Odyssey*. The monster choices, loosely defined, are: Calypso, the Cyclops, Circe, the Laestrygonians, the Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis, the Lotus Eaters, or the Cattle of the Sun. The presentations should be 10-15 minutes long (each person should speak for at least five minutes) for the presentation portion. You will get an additional 2-3 minutes to answer questions from the audience.

**Groups should follow these steps:**

1.) You should first do a close-reading of the section(s) where the monster appears in *The Odyssey*.  
2.) You will make a poster depicting what you believe the monster looks like. Students will get some class time to work on this but will need to plan some time outside of class. Some work supplies such as markers, construction paper, and scissors will be provided; however, students should plan a few dollars for any additional supplies. The monster’s name should be at the top of the poster.  
3.) The monster’s key characteristics should be presented. Feel free to write some of the key characteristics on the front of the poster.  
4.) Research the monster. Find out all you can about your monster, using credible or scholarly sources.  
5.) Discuss how the monster is depicted in *The Odyssey*. Use key quotations from the epic poem in your presentation and analyze the quotations. It would be helpful if you had a handout that included some of the descriptions.  
6.) Make a connection to the article “Monster Culture” by Jeffrey Cohen.

**LITERARY ANALYSIS RESEARCH PAPER**

[25%] (4-5 full pages) Write an extended literary analysis of either *Beowulf* or *The Odyssey*. The paper must have a cohesive argument. A thesis must drive the paper. The paper must include at least two reputable scholarly sources written on the text, and be formatted in MLA style. You must argue a specific, original thesis throughout the paper, providing strong evidence from the text. Push beyond the obvious arguments, but rather dig deep. Examples will be shown in class. At least one paragraph of the essay must address monster symbolism. (Make sure to transition into the monstrous discussion—find a way to link your main topic with a “monstrous” aspect of the text.)

**PEER REVIEW DUE: OCTOBER 15th**

**REVISED PAPERS DUE: OCTOBER 22nd**

**ROOTS CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT**

[25%] Write your own genealogical epic, in the style of Haley’s *Roots*, in the form of an epic poem or epic novel. Your epic should be fictionalized autobiography, covering 3-4 generations of your family (you get to define “family” yourself—“family” does not have to be biological.) This assignment should aim to be between 8-20 pages long, double-spaced. You will also write a 2 page assessment, analyzing how your epic follows (or doesn’t follow) the classical
expectations/conventions of an epic, comparing and contrasting your epic with two of the texts studied throughout the semester.

1.) You must research all you can about one family member per generation. Ask multiple family members what they were/are like. Go to the source if they are living. Ask them when they’ve fought literal or metaphorical monsters. What do they believe is most monstrous in life and have they done anything to fight the “monster.”

2.) Try to find thematic threads to connect the generational narratives together. What symbols, themes, monsters, conflicts, etc. connect the generations?

3.) Use your research (truth) and then assemble their stories together with some fictional threads to dramatize their experience—and to fill in gaps that are lost to time. Feel free to use real or created images of your family members in the narrative.

4.) As you structure your epic, make sure that each generational tale goes through its own narrative arc. The entire narrative should also go through its own overarching arc. The final climax will be the most difficult to assemble, as it needs to tie all the generational threads together.

5.) Write an analysis of your epic, analyzing how your epic follows (or doesn’t follow) the classical expectations of an epic, comparing and contrasting your epic with two of the texts studied throughout the semester. Please use at least two quotes from each text, including your own epic.

DUE DURING FINALS WEEK: Wednesday, Dec. 12th at 11:30am.

*Quick Note on the Grading of this Assignment: it is especially difficult to grade creative writing. Grading involves an assessment of talent, quality, imagination, ambition, engagement, effort, and attention to revision. Creative assignments in this class will be graded on your use of craft elements (imagery, setting, narrative arc, characterization, diction, symbolism, etc.), your attention to the assignment criteria, your depth of research, your ability to revise, and your understanding of the concepts we discussed regarding the epic. Please feel free to visit my office hours to discuss your assignment.
COURSE POLICIES

Attendance Requirements
Students are expected to attend all class meetings. It matters that you come to class on time, every day. If you are repeatedly late, it will negatively influence your grade. Excessive tardiness, early departure, or lack of preparation will result in an absence.

- After you miss three classes, your final grade will be reduced 1/3 of a letter grade for each additional class missed. For example, if you miss 4 classes and you end the course with a B+, it will be converted to a B, and so forth. All absences count towards this total, with the exception of school-sanctioned activities that I am aware of in advance via email, illness that requires confinement to bed on a physician’s orders (documented), death/severe illness in the family (documented), or court appearances. “Self-reported sick in room” notices from the Student Health Center will not count as an excused absence. You must keep a tally of your absences.
- Students who arrive to class late will be counted as absent. Late arrivals disrupt our class; therefore, excessive lateness will affect your participation grade and, potentially, your final grade.
- If you are involved in Westminster athletics or other extracurricular activities and will miss class meetings because of games, performances, etc., please notify me in advance via email of any class sessions you will miss. All work is to be submitted prior to the excused absence. You cannot miss class to go to a sporting practice. If you are involved in an extracurricular or co-curricular activity at Westminster College, you must make it known to me before the end of add period of each semester via email. In the email, please include the dates you know you will miss.
- If you do miss class for any reason, you are still responsible for the missed material. Connect with a classmate to get the class notes and then come to office hours if you have questions about the notes. Please do not come up to me at the beginning of the next class to ask what happened and waste your classmates’ time!
- That said, if you experience a crisis that prevents you from completing your work speak to me about it privately during office hours, or ask an appropriate campus official to document your situation.

Late Work
In order to be fair to everyone in the course, I do not accept late work without consequence. Homework will not be accepted late; however, papers can be submitted up to 24 hours late with a letter grade reduction. If you are absent on a day when an assignment is due, I expect you to submit your work to me via email or my department mailbox by your scheduled class time. I also expect you to come prepared the following class session. Verifiable emergencies may receive exceptions, but you must communicate with me before the project or assignment is due. A printer or alarm error is not an acceptable excuse—plan ahead! If you anticipate needing a deadline extension for an assignment, you may request one four days in advance of the due date.

Essay Policies
- All sources must be cited using MLA guidelines. Please see OWL PURDUE WRITING LAB online for assistance with citation, if needed.
- Essays must be double-spaced, in Times New Roman, Sized 12 with 1 inch margins, and a Works Cited page. (Per MLA Guidelines.)
- All essays must be submitted to D2L on the day/time they are due in class. This means that you must submit your paper before going to class.
All essays must be turned in prior to or by the date and time specified for full credit. Your essays will be accepted up to 24 hours after the original due date and time, but they will be penalized by one letter grade. After 24 hours, no essay will be accepted unless a documented emergency occurs. If you are not in class and you haven’t submitted the paper by the beginning of class time, your paper is late. Make prior arrangements to get me your work in advance. If you decide to hand in your paper late, you must upload the paper to D2L and send me an email alerting me of the late submission.

You should not expect a passing score if your paper is incomplete/doesn’t meet the page, source, or assignment requirements.

Office Hours
I encourage you to meet with me at least once during the semester to discuss papers, class topics, comments on readings, etc. I want you to succeed in the course and, therefore, I am happy to discuss your progress at any time. Easily answered questions can be asked over email; however, please do not send me any paper drafts via email. If you’d like to discuss paper drafts, come into the office and we will discuss the parts you are having trouble with or would like another opinion on. Bring a printed hardcopy of the paper and come with questions. Do not wait until the day before an essay is due to meet with me about it. Office hours will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays 9-10:30am or by appointment. Lastly, because I have a toddler at home, please avoid coming to Office Hours if you are sick. Send me an email instead at cowentm@westminster.edu.

Supplemental Readings
If I’ve assigned a supplemental reading from D2L, it is your responsibility to print it, read it and annotate it carefully, and bring a copy of it to class. You should keep a folder of all the course readings, syllabus, and handouts for reference daily.

Plagiarism & Academic Integrity Code Specific to this Section
Students are responsible for the academic work they submit (including papers, examinations, reflections, PowerPoints, reports, etc.), and that work should be completed honestly and according to the requirements and restrictions for academic work based upon the Westminster College Academic Integrity Policy. Please see the current Undergraduate Catalog for official definitions of cheating, misconduct, plagiarism, and providing false information. The following is a list of some representative examples of academic misconduct specific to this section, though it is not comprehensive:

- **Plagiarism**: the representation of someone else’s words, ideas, or work as one’s own. This includes quoting, paraphrasing, or condensing another’s work within one’s own without giving proper attribution, or purchasing or receiving another’s work and submitting it as one’s own. When quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing, students must identify the extent to which a source has been used and must cite with precision. This applies not only to written work, but also designs, photography, video, art, and other media.
- **Misconduct**: submitting the same work, including oral presentations, for different courses without the explicit consent of the teacher, sabotaging the work of others, unethically obtaining answers or other information about a quiz, test, or examination before it has been administered to all students, even if not a member of the class, etc.
- **Dishonesty in Examinations**: unauthorized use of notes, study aids, electronic or other equipment during an examination; unauthorized possession of examinations; copying or
looking at another individual’s examination; taking or passing information to another student during an examination; taking an exam for another student; allowing another student to take one's examination.

- **Fabrication of Data**: unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation during an academic exercise.
- **Cheating or Inappropriate Assistance**: unauthorized use of any study aids, equipment, tutoring, or another’s work during an academic exercise; unauthorized collaboration on projects, homework, take-home examinations, or other work. Students are responsible for clarifying with instructors what forms of collaboration or assistance are acceptable for each assignment.

**Consequences for Breaking Academic Policy in this Section**

If a student has violated Westminster’s Academic Integrity Policy, the student will be reported to the college and receive the appropriate sanctions determined by the VPAA. Please see the Undergraduate Handbook for further information about the respective consequences.

In regards to the course, if a student breaks the college’s Academic Integrity Policy or the policies listed above, the student will receive an F on the assignment that broke policy for a first offense. If the student violates the policy a second time, they will fail the course.

**Disruptive Technology**

Electronic devices are prohibited in the classroom unless specific permission is given. Electronic devices include: cell phones, digital media players, recording devices (video and audio), iPods, electronic readers, headphones, and laptops. If a student needs to use technology due to a disability, please let me know.

**Course Accessibility**

Westminster College actively strives for the full inclusion of all our students. Students with disabilities who require access solutions for environmental or curricular barriers should contact Faith Craig, Director of Disability Resources at 724-946-7192 or via e-mail at craigfa@westminster.edu. Please do not hesitate to discuss your situation with me.

**Honor Code**

Lastly, as we frequently deal with sensitive topics and personal reflections in this class, professionalism and maturity will be expected from you during class discussion and in your written responses. Sensitivity is especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, ableness, gender identity, and nationalities. In addition, I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun than your legal paperwork if you wish. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.
**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

Below you will find the tentative schedule for our semester. Please be aware that these due dates may be subject to change if we move too slowly or quickly through a section, or due to inclement weather. Be sure to check the online module and/or your email before class each day for any modifications to the schedule, or class cancellations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td>Course Introduction &amp;</td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> Introductions and Syllabus Overview.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 27th-31st</td>
<td>Overview of Epics</td>
<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> Overview of Epics and Introductions Continue. Read the article “Monster Culture” by Jeffrey Cohen from the online module. Take notes on the article.</td>
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<td><strong>Friday:</strong> Overview of Epics and Monster Symbolism. Students are assigned a monster from <em>The Odyssey</em> to research for upcoming poster presentations.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td><em>The Odyssey</em></td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> <em>The Odyssey</em>, Books 1-2</td>
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<td>Sept. 3rd-7th</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> <em>The Odyssey</em>, Books 3-5</td>
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<td><strong>Friday:</strong> <em>The Odyssey</em>, Books 6-9</td>
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<td><em>Presentation Groups (Calypso) today!</em></td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td><em>The Odyssey</em></td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> <em>The Odyssey</em>, Books 10-13</td>
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<td>Sept. 10th-14th</td>
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<td>*Presentation Groups (Cyclops, Circe, Laestrygonians) today!</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> <em>The Odyssey</em>, Books 14-16 <strong>Quiz #1</strong></td>
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<td>*Presentation Groups (Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis) today!</td>
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<td><strong>Friday:</strong> <em>The Odyssey</em>, Books 17-20</td>
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<td>*Presentation Groups (The Lotus Eaters, Cattle of the Sun) today!</td>
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| Week 4 | Sept. 17<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> | **The Odyssey** | **Monday:** *The Odyssey*, Books 21-22 & Article #1 in Supplemental *Odyssey* Readings  
**Wednesday:** *The Odyssey*, Books 23-24 and Article #2 in Supplemental *Odyssey* Readings  
**Friday:** *The Odyssey* Comprehensive Discussion & Introduce Research Paper. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week 5** | Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> | Paper Topic Discussion  
& Screen *The Odyssey* (Dir. Konchalovsky) | **Monday:** Quiz #2  
**Wednesday:** In-Class screening of *The Odyssey*. Work on your Literary Analysis Research Paper.  
**Friday:** In-Class screening of *The Odyssey*. Work on your Literary Analysis Research Paper. |
| **Week 6** | Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> | *Beowulf* | **Monday:** Finish *The Odyssey* screening and discussion.  
**Wednesday:** *Beowulf*, pages 1-47  
**Friday:** *Beowulf*, pages 48-87 & Article #1 in Supplemental *Beowulf* Readings. |
| **Week 7** | Oct. 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> | *Beowulf* | **Monday:** *Beowulf*, 88-149  
**Quiz #3**  
**Wednesday:** *Beowulf*, 150-213  
**Friday:** Read an excerpt of Gardner’s *Grendel* and Article #2 in Supplemental *Beowulf* Readings. |
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<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 12</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 15th - 19th</td>
<td>Beowulf &amp; Finish Paper</td>
<td>Roots &amp; Roots TV Series Comparison</td>
<td>Roots &amp; Roots TV Series Comparison</td>
<td>Roots</td>
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<td><strong>Monday:</strong> Beowulf Screening (Dir. Gunnarsson). Exchange papers in the Peer Review Activity. (Bring 2 copies of your paper draft to class to exchange.)</td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> Introduction to Roots &amp; Revised Literary Analysis Research Paper Due Today on D2L.</td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> No Classes!</td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 41-48</td>
<td><strong>Monday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 66-74</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> Beowulf Screening</td>
<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 1-13</td>
<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 24-30 &amp; Article #1 in Supplemental Roots Readings.</td>
<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 49-56</td>
<td><strong>Wednesday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 75-83 and Article #2 in Supplemental Roots Readings.</td>
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<td><strong>Friday:</strong> Peer Review Activity Due. Quiz #4. Paper due on Monday.</td>
<td><strong>Friday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 14-23 &amp; Assign Creative Assignment.</td>
<td><strong>Friday:</strong> Roots Chapters 31-40</td>
<td><strong>Friday:</strong> Roots Chapters 57-65, Quiz # 5</td>
<td><strong>Friday:</strong> Roots, Chapters 84-89</td>
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<td>Week 13</td>
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| Nov. 19\(^{th}\)-23\(^{rd}\) |  Root(s) | **Monday:** *Roots*, Chapters 90-96  
**Wednesday:** Thanksgiving Break!  
**Friday:** Thanksgiving Break! |

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<th>Week 14</th>
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| Nov. 26\(^{th}\)-30\(^{th}\) |  Root(s) | **Monday:** *Roots*, Chapters 97-112 & Article #3 in Supplemental *Roots* Readings.  
**Wednesday:** *Roots*, 113-120  
**Friday:** *Roots* Quiz #6 |

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| Dec. 3\(^{rd}\)-7\(^{th}\) |  Revision | **Monday:** Final Discussion and Screening of a section of the new *Roots* adaptation.  
**Wednesday:** Revision Activities.  
**Friday:** Course Evaluations and Revision Activities. |

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<th>Week 16</th>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam Week: Our FINAL MEETING</td>
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<td><strong>Wednesday, Dec. 12(^{th}) 11:30-2pm:</strong> Hand in your Epic and take part in a reading of a section of your epic.</td>
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