

COURSE THEMES

ENGLISH 106



INDIVIDUAL & SOCIETY

- How does one live as an individual **and** belong to a community or society?
- Individualism—personal desire, choice, freedom—free will. Not conforming—determine one's own identity. Take a stance & guard against social pressure/expectations. Development of empathy—valuing different classes. Isolation of individual (gender?). Fight against societal conformity. Individual can affect change of societal perspectives (social class, race). If excessive, can lead to disorder, lack of common standards, and even anarchy. What responsibility does the individual have in society? The significance of individuals valuing and passing down legacies, which provide order, stability, and meaning on personal and societal levels.
- Society—Order and stability—accepted rules of behavior, standard values and attitudes. We follow rules and conventions to make society turn/run. If excessive, can be restrictive and confining, loss of individuality: societal power, control, and authority (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity). Society can reinforce division/separation and shape individuals. Different forms society (government) might take?
- Do the demands of belonging to a society (e.g., giving up some freedoms or personal desires) allow individuals to be free and secure? Do we need to be “watched” in order to act morally and ethically? Does individuality make a society better, more productive and more innovative/progressive, even if there are occasional risks that individuals will violate the rights of others?

EXTRAORDINARY & FANTASTIC

- What does it mean to be extraordinary? Fantastic?
 - To deviate from normal or expected patterns, to be out of regular order. Not according to rule.
 - Exceptional, remarkable, exaggerated, fanciful
- Mysterious: reader tries to “figure out”/builds suspense
- The extraordinary and fantastic can arise out of everyday life and/or be conceived of in the imagination/in the mind (psychological). Can be that which is familiar and unfamiliar, possible and seemingly impossible. Blends reality (realism) and supernatural (surrealism). Science can reveal the fantastic to us? Scientific romance? Science fiction?
- How do we react to the fantastic? Wonder, fear, confusion, disinterest, morality/ethics? What does the nature of extraordinary and our reaction to it reveal about us? Our society? Certain individuals? Their actions and thoughts?

NATURE

- Literary Naturalism—human beings exist in the order of nature—higher level organisms. They are driven/shaped by heredity and environment. What are the implications of this? (See your class notes for full definition.)
- Nature is indifferent to the concern of humans, to human trials and suffering. Goes against a romanticized view of nature and the notion that nature is an opponent (which implies nature “cares”). There can be beauty and danger in natural world.
- Nature is a living entity; individuals can form a reciprocal relationship with nature. What does nature mean to you? What is your relationship to/with nature?
Environmentalism: be good stewards of nature
- Nature is eternal; human are mortal.

TERROR & VIOLENCE

- How is violence an instrument of terror? How does terror lead to violence?
- Genocide as a State means of inflicting terror and violence. Repressive violence leads to a culture of violence
- In the stories under this theme: Bleak, dark (e.g., use of light), somber, confined settings. Gothic: use of setting and environment to create a mood/tone of terror.
- Is violence an inseparable part of human nature? How so? What human response do extreme, violent situations evoke? Force us to be good, adapt moral/ethical values? Accept God/profess religious faith? Genuine adoption/acceptance of religious faith?
- Is it possible that pain and suffering can make us feel alive, remind us of our human limits, test our ability to challenge and exceed those limits? Give us dignity? Lead us to consider something beyond ourselves, e.g., religious faith?