

**FYS****American History Through Poetry**

Dickinson College / Fall 2025

Mon / Wed 1130am

Classroom: Denny 112

URL: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/fys-pinsker>

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Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

--Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself: #51" (1855, 1867)

**Required Books**

- Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, *A Pocket Manual of Style, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2025)
- Edward Hirsch, *The Heart of American Poetry* (New York: Library of America, 2022)

**Featured Texts**

- Abigail and John Adams, Letters (1776)
- Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise" (1978)
- Anne Bradstreet, "The Author to Her Book" (1666)
- Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool" (1960)
- Emily Dickinson, "Because I could not stop for Death" (1862)
- John Dickinson, "The Liberty Song" (1768)
- Bob Dylan, "The Times, They Are A-Changin'" (1964)
- Robert Frost, "The Gift Outright" (1942)
- Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb" (2021)
- Woody Guthrie, "This Land Is Your Land" (1940)
- Joy Harjo, "Rabbit Is Up to Tricks" (2008)
- Robert Hayden, "Middle Passage" (1945, 1962)
- Langston Hughes, "I, Too" (1926) and "Harlem" (1951)
- Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (1776)
- Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus" (1883)
- Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural (1861) and Gettysburg Address (1863)
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Paul Revere's Ride" (1861)
- Herman Melville, "Shiloh: A Requiem" (1866)
- Marianne Moore, "The Student" (1932)
- Esther Popel, "Flag Salute" (1934) and *Personal Adventures in Race Relations* (1946)
- Tracy K. Smith, "Declaration" (2018)
- Sojourner Truth, "I am a Woman's Rights" (1851)
- Frances Ellen Watkins, "Bury Me in a Free Land" (1858)
- Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773)
- E.B. White, *On Freedom and Democracy* (1940, 1943)
- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself: #51, #52" (1855, 1867), "I Hear America Singing" (1860), "O, Captain! My Captain!" (1865)

**Additional Readings and Resources**

- Kate Larson, "Women on the Underground Railroad," NPS UGRR Handbook [WEB]
- Jill Lepore, "Paul Revere's Ride," *American Educator* (2011) [WEB]
- "Lincoln's Gettysburg Addresses," House Divided Project / Google Arts (2013) [WEB]
- Joseph Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *American Yawp*, Stanford University Press, [WEB]
- Nell Irvin Painter, "Sojourner Truth in Life and Memory," *Gender & History* (1990) [PDF]
- Siobhan Phillips, "The Students of Marianne Moore," Poetry Foundation (2017) [WEB]
- Matthew Pinsker, *Dickinson & Slavery: Report*, (2019) [PDF]
- Poets.org, American Academy of Poets [WEB]

## Course Policies

Attendance is expected and participation will be evaluated. There is one required outside event: the Arts Award at the Trout Gallery on the evening of 11/7. Those who miss class for any reason must submit a short reflection (about a paragraph or two) analyzing the missed reading assignment within a week of the absence. These reflections will be evaluated but not graded. Students may also choose to submit voluntary reflections before or after class discussions to help supplement their participation effort and to practice writing. All students must submit ONE such reading reflection by September 17. For further details on course policies, including those regarding electronics, accommodations for disabilities, plagiarism, AI, and general learning objectives, please consult the course website: <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/fys-pinsker/course-policies/>

## Close Reading Essays

Students will submit two close reading essays (3-4 pages each or about 750 to 1,000 words) with short companion videos (about 1 minute in length), posted PRIVATE at the course website. These critical essays will focus on a poem or short piece of writing from one of the featured authors and must include at least one relevant quotation from Edward Hirsch's book on American poetry. Students must interpret a different author each time. Essays must analyze text, context, and subtext, relying on at least three sources and incorporating Chicago-style footnotes. The essay posts must also include 2 to 3 images, properly captioned and credited with embedded companion videos that use a clear voice-over reading from the document paired with a music track, relevant images, and a credit slide. Students MUST submit at least one full or partial DRAFT of their essays to Prof. Pinsker before EACH due date, and they MUST visit the Writing Center before at least ONE of the close reading assignments. Additional information and models will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Essays will be graded on research effort, depth of analysis and quality of prose. The first close reading is due **by 5pm on Monday, September 29**. The second is due **by 5pm on Monday, October 27**. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points per day.

## Research Journal posts

Students will submit two research journal entries (2-4 pages each or about 500 to 1,000 words per entry), posted PRIVATE at the course website by **Monday, November 17 at 5pm**. These narrative posts will detail research efforts for the final essays, with one entry focusing on the search for relevant primary sources and the other focusing on the search for relevant secondary sources. Journal entries do not require footnotes, but they should include Chicago-style bibliographies of at least six (6) sources for each entry. Submitting drafts is optional in this case. Additional information and models will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Entries will be graded on research effort, depth of analysis and quality of prose. Late entries will be penalized up to 5 points each day.

## Final Critical Essay

By **Monday, December 8 at 5pm**, students will submit by email attachment an 8 to 10-page critical essay that at least THREE poems or writings from authors on the syllabus or featured in Edward Hirsch, *The Heart of American Poetry* (2022). Good essays will develop a strong thesis statement that analyzes the respective strategies of the authors in connection with how they attempted to reach either similar audiences or to develop similar themes. Essays should be typed and double-spaced as Word or PDF documents with title page and Chicago-style footnotes (no bibliography required). Essays must include at least THREE quotations from the Hirsch book and use a variety of other sources developed from the research journal posts. Students MUST submit at least one DRAFT (full or partial) to Prof. Pinsker BEFORE the deadline. Additional information will be available on the assignment guidelines at the course site. Essays will be graded on research effort, depth of analysis, and quality of prose. Late essays will be penalized up to 5 points per day.

## Grade Distribution

Class Participation	25 percent
First Close Reading Essay	20 percent
Second Close Reading Essay	20 percent
Research journal posts	10 percent
Final Critical Essay	25 percent

Day	Date	Discussion Topic	Reading Assignment
Thursday	8/28	Methods & Expectations	
Monday	9/1	Puritanism	Bradstreet + Hirsch, pp. xiii-xxvii, 3-13
Wednesday	9/3	American Exceptionalism	Frost + Hirsch, pp. 97-105
Monday	9/8	Awakenings	Wheatley + Hirsch, pp. 15-25
Wednesday	9/10	Original Sins	Hayden + Hirsch, pp. 235-48
Monday	9/15	United We Stand	John Dickinson + Adams letters
Wednesday	9/17	Revolutionary ideals	Jefferson + Smith
Monday	9/22	Library session	Library, lower level, Classroom 2
Wednesday	9/24	NO CLASS –ROSH HASHANAH	
<b>Monday</b>	<b>9/29</b>	<b>First Close Reading</b>	<b>Due by 5pm</b>
Monday	9/29	Woman's Rights	Truth + Painter
Wednesday	10/1	Dickinson & Slavery tour	Pinsker, 2019 report
Monday	10/6	Fugitive Slaves	Watkins + Larson
Wednesday	10/8	Abolitionists	Longfellow + Lepore
Monday	10/13	Secession	Lincoln (1861)
Wednesday	10/15	Civil War Combat	Melville + Emily Dickinson + Hirsch, pp. 52-60
Monday	10/20	NO CLASS –FALL PAUSE	
Wednesday	10/22	New Birth of Freedom	Lincoln (1863) + House Divided Project
<b>Monday</b>	<b>10/27</b>	<b>Second Close Reading</b>	<b>Due by 5pm</b>
Monday	10/27	Leaves of Grass	Whitman + Hirsch, pp. 35-51
Wednesday	10/29	Industrialization	Whitman
Monday	11/3	Immigration	Lazarus + Hirsch, pp. 70-79
Wednesday	11/5	Assimilation	Harjo + Hirsch, pp. 437-46
Friday	11/7	REQUIRED: Arts Award event	5pm (exhibit) 7pm (award), Weiss Center
Monday	11/10	Dickinson's Poet Laureate	Popel –Flag Salute
Wednesday	11/12	Archives visit (LIBRARY LOWER)	Popel –Personal Adventures
<b>Monday</b>	<b>11/17</b>	<b>Research journal entries</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>
Monday	11/17	Carlisle and Modernism	Moore + Hirsch, pp. 142-153 + Phillips
Wednesday	11/19	American Ballads	Guthrie + Dylan
Monday	11/24	Modern Democracy	White
Wednesday	11/26	NO CLASS –THANKSGIVING	
Monday	12/1	Dreams Deferred	Hughes + Brooks, Hirsch, pp. 178-89, 269-283
Wednesday	12/3	Hills To Climb	Angelou + Gorman
Monday	12/8	Closing lines	
<b>Monday</b>	<b>12/8</b>	<b>Final essays</b>	<b>By 5pm</b>