

# Writing Home

WRITING 101-01

**Instructor:** Abby Seeskin



The demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, in St. Louis, MO, 1972

A low-income housing project designed by Minoru Yamasaki, 1954. Demolished in 1972.

Image from [rustwire.com/2011/02/10/the-rise-and-fall-st-louis-notorious-pruitt-igoe-housing-project/](http://rustwire.com/2011/02/10/the-rise-and-fall-st-louis-notorious-pruitt-igoe-housing-project/)



Huckleberry Finn's home, Hannibal, MO

<http://www.marktwainmuseum.org/index.php/photo-gallery>

## Course Overview

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As you pick your courses for your first semester at Duke, as you pack your bags for college, as you say goodbye to high school friends and family members, you may find yourself reflecting upon the realities of leaving home. Some of you may be excited, and ready to explore what is next; others are perhaps anxious, nervous, sentimental—sad, even. As you all arrive on campus this fall, you will find that your classmates understand their relationships to their homes differently. And yet, regardless of where you've been or where you come from, many of you, upon returning to your hometown for the first time after leaving for college, will begin to think of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina as your new home.

The objective of this course is to ask these very questions which may be at the forefront of your mind: what is home? How do we begin to identify a place as our home? Is home a literal structure of inhabitation? Is it dependent upon the connections and communities that we build with others? Or is it some combination of the above? We will explore these questions through American literary texts from the late nineteenth century to the present. The nineteenth century is a rich period of American history in which Americans have to come to terms with the end of the institution of slavery, build new infrastructure to absorb the population boom following the largest wave of immigration in the 1890s, and rethink the role of gender, race, and class as frames for daily life. In this course, we will read novels and essays, watch documentaries and television programs that explore “home” under a vast set of varied conditions.

As we explore these questions together, we will write and reflect often—not just to work through these questions, but to learn to better articulate ourselves as writers, thinkers, and scholars. In a series of short assignments through most of the semester, you will learn how to close-read a literary text, engage in conversation with scholars in literature and cultural studies, workshop the writing of your peers, and revise your own work. At the end of the semester, you will be able to draw upon these tools as you write a 10-12 page research project on a cultural text of your own choice.

## Writing 101 Course Goals and Practices

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Writing 101 introduces Duke first-year students to key goals and practices of academic writing. Students choose from among Writing 101 courses that are designed and taught by scholars trained in disciplines across the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Thus, individual sections of Writing 101 often focus on different topics and readings, but all sections share an emphasis on writing as a social process and a commitment to helping students generate effective academic arguments.

This class is disciplinarily based in literary studies, but will teach you critical thinking and writing skills applicable to any discipline. Through this course you will learn to:

- 1) Close-read a literary text
- 2) Find sources through the library and its website
- 3) Engage in conversation with scholars in literature and cultural studies

- 4) Workshop both the writing of your peers and your own writing
- 5) Welcome the art of revision (all good scholarship relies upon this!)
- 6) Consider your audience as you craft different genres of writing
- 7) Write a research paper

By the end of the semester, I expect that you will learn that literature is indeed a worthy—if not an extremely productive—site of exploration in learning to think critically about the world we live in. Your ability to read closely and to research will grow tremendously; your ability to analyze the world we live in with much more acuity. It is through the practice of writing that you will build upon these skills—skills that will not just carry you through the next four years of college, but to your life beyond.

### Course materials

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The following books are required and available at the campus bookstore. You are welcome to purchase them elsewhere if you prefer: please try your best to buy the edition that I've listed.

Chopin, Kate--*The Awakening: And Other Stories*

ISBN: 978-0199536948

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins--*The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories*

ISBN: 978-0486298573

Harris, Joseph--*Rewriting: How To Do Things With Texts*

ISBN: 978-0874216424

Morrison, Toni—*Home*

ISBN: 978-0307740915

Waldie, D.J.-- *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*

ISBN: 978-0393327281

Yeziarska, Anzia--*Salome of the Tenements*

ISBN: 978-0252064357

I've included PDFs of the following readings. You can download them from our course website:

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House*.

Beecher, Catherine E. and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home*.

Biles, Roger. "Public Housing and the Postwar Urban Resistance, 1949-1973"

Schreiber, Evelyn Jaffe. "Trauma, Memory, and Subjectivity: The Healing Power of 'Home'"

Von Hoffman, Alexander. "Why They Built Pruitt-Igoe"

This is the link to the episode of *This American Life* that we will listen to:

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/297/this-is-not-my-beautiful-house>

We will also be discussing *The Pruitt Igoe Myth* after fall break and the first episode of the television show *Weeds* on the Monday before Thanksgiving. Both are available on Netflix streaming.

## Writing Projects

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The writing goal of this class is to help you learn the skills you need to write a successful research paper in the humanities. You will do that by—you guessed it!—writing a research paper due at semester’s end. Each of your papers will focus on a literary text or film of your choice; you will make an argument based off of a close-reading of your text and supplement your argument with external research. By the completion of this project, you will have grown tremendously as a critical thinker, writer, and researcher.

If this sounds overwhelming right now, please take a deep breath and recognize that I have built this syllabus specifically to help you succeed. During the first half of the semester, you will compose a series of short, one-page assignments that will teach you how to close-read, how to compare the arguments of two different texts, and how to find secondary sources and compose bibliographies. As you work on these fundamental skills of literary analysis, I will have you “practice” these skills on a short 4-5 page paper on either *The Awakening* or “The Yellow Wallpaper.” As you write these papers, I will walk you through the mechanics of composing a solid paper. Upon completion of that paper, you will have to start to think about which literary text will be at the center of your final project. But don’t worry about that quite yet; I will be certain to offer a much more detailed guide to the final project later! I have every confidence that each and every one of you have the potential to compose an amazing project.

The two more formal assignments (the 4-5 page paper on *The Awakening* or “The Yellow Wallpaper” and the 10-12 page final project) will be graded on an A-F scale. Letter grades map approximately onto the following scale, which I will use in calculating your final grade for the course:

A+ (97–100), A (93–96), A- (90–92)

B+ (87–89), B (83–86), B- (80–82)

C+ (77–79), C (73–76), C- (70–72)

D+ (67–69), D (63–66), D- (60–62)

F (0-59)

The drafts and more informal assignments along the way will be graded on a ✓ to ✓- to 0 scale: a ✓ signifies that the assignment was completed and completed well (however, a check does not signify perfection: there is no such thing as perfect writing!); a ✓- signifies that I have some major concerns. Turned-in-late or incomplete informal assignments will received a 0.

My hope is that your final project will generate some enthusiasm about your topic; because I assume that you will all be excited to share what you've been working on for nearly half a semester, the last week of class is reserved for class presentations. Presentations must be prepared in advance (that is, I do not want you to wing it), but they will be low-key and informal, designed to showcase your impressive work as scholars of American literature! Expect to prepare a presentation of about ten minutes, but I will offer much more detailed information as the date approaches.

As assignments pop up over the course of the semester, I will make all assignments clearer.

## Grading

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The final grade will be a determined by the following:

Participation	10%
Informal Writing Assignments	20%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	30%
-Prospectus	5%
-Annotated Bibliography	5%
-Final Presentation	10%

## Schedule

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Week 1:	M, Aug. 26 W, Aug. 28	Class introduction This American Life Episode 297: “This Is Not My Beautiful House” and Music Playlist (Spotify)
Week 2:	M, Sept. 2 W, Sept. 4	<b>Diagnostic Essay</b> and Harris (Introduction and Ch. 1) <i>The Awakening</i> (pp. 3-45) and Harris (Ch. 2 & 3)
Week 3:	M, Sept. 9 W, Sept. 11	<i>The Awakening</i> (45-86) and <b>Close Reading Assignment</b> (posted to course blog) <i>The Awakening</i> (86-128) Harris (Ch. 4 & 5)
Week 4:	M, Sept. 16 W, Sept. 18	“The Yellow Wallpaper” and selections from Catherine Beecher <b>Paper Generation Assignment</b> and Library Orientation (meet in Lilly Library Room 103)
Week 5:	M, Sept. 23 W, Sept. 25	<i>Home</i> (1-69) <b>First Draft of Paper 1 Due</b>
Week 6:	M, Sept. 30 W, Oct. 2	<i>Home</i> (71-147) <b>PAPER 1 DUE</b> and Special Collections Orientation (meet in Perkins Library Room 118)
Week 7:	M, Oct. 7 W, Oct. 9	<b>Bibliography Assignment</b> and Schreiber Biles and von Hoffman
Week 8:	M, Oct. 14 W, Oct. 16	NO CLASS. FALL BREAK <i>The Pruitt-Igoe Myth</i> and <b>Blog Assignment</b>
Week 9:	M, Oct. 21 W, Oct. 23	CLASS CANCELLED. <b>Prospectus due.</b> <i>Salome of the Tenements</i> (1-64)
Week 10:	M, Oct. 28 W, Oct. 30	<b>Close reading assignment due</b> and <i>Salome of the Tenements</i> (65-116) <i>Salome of the Tenements</i> . (117-184)
Week 11:	M, Nov. 4 W, Nov. 6	<b>Annotated bibliography due</b> and Jane Addams <i>Holy Land</i> (Introduction and Section 1-Section 122, pp. 65)

Week 12:	M, Nov. 11	<b>5 pages of assignment due to me.</b> In class workshop.
	W, Nov. 13	<i>Holy Land</i> (Section 123-Section 237, pp. 129)
Week 13:	M, Nov. 18	<i>Holy Land</i> (Section 238-Section 316 and “A Conversation”, pp. 194)
	W, Nov. 20	<b>CLASS CANCELLED. First draft of final paper due at 5 pm on November 19<sup>th</sup>.</b> Small group workshops.
Week 14:	M, Nov. 25	<i>Weeds</i>
	W, Nov. 27	NO CLASS. HAPPY THANKSGIVING!
Week 15:	M, Dec. 2	Final Presentations
	W, Dec. 4	Final Presentations

**Final papers are due Friday, Dec. 6 at 5 pm. Please submit your paper to me via email.**