TEXTS: Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Shakespeare’s “Sonnets”, Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Sarah Ruhl’s *Dead Man’s Cell Phone*. Various handouts.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A selection of plays, poems, and stories of the last three thousand years—from Homer’s *The Odyssey* (c. 1190 BC) to Conor McPherson’s *The Seafarer* (2007). By **READING**, **DISCUSSING**, and **WRITING ABOUT** these works, we should begin to sense that no matter by whom or when a given work of literature was written and no matter if a given work be a poem, a play, or a story, all works of literature possess that quality celebrated by no less a witness than Aristotle: Universality—or, as he puts it—“universals”. (See attachment.) Aristotle claims that “poetry (literature) is more philosophical and a higher thing than history in that poetry tends rather to express the universal, history rather the particular fact. A universal is: The sort of thing that (in the circumstances) a certain kind of person will say or do either probably or necessarily, which in fact is the universal that poetry aims for (with the addition of names for the persons such as Oedipus or Pentheus); a particular, on the other hand is: What Aleiobades (a brilliant but unscrupulous Athenian statesman of the fifth century B.C.) did or had done to him.”

**READING** means that students will not only have read the work assigned for a particular class but will have spent some time in reflecting on what they have just read. This period of reflection should help prompt a more lively discussion of the work.

**DISCUSSING** means the students will use class time to engage the teacher and one another in what we trust will be a productive dialogue; but, when advisable, and especially in early days, some lectures will issue forth from the pedagogical podium.

**WRITING ABOUT** means writing some argumentative essays about the works we read.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Students should read all the assigned texts and not fall behind in the reading. Students will be tested on the reading assignments. Students will write seven essays, each one exhibiting the principles of formal criticism. And, of course, students will write a final exam. While not a requirement, office visits are encouraged as they afford the student help outside the limitations of the fixed class-time.

EVALUATION: Tests count 10%. Essays count 50%. The Final counts 40%. Tests will be graded numerically as a percentage of 100, the last digit to be dropped: a “10” on a test means you made a “100” on the test, and so on. Essays will receive a letter grade. There is no “make-up work,” but, to ease the pain, at least two of your lower test grades as well as your lowest essay grade will be dropped. (In order to receive this act of gratuitous beneficence, you must, of course, write the essay.)
**SYLLABUS**

**AUGUST**
23: INTRODUCTION.
25: Homer. _The Odyssey_ (c. 1190 BC). Read “Intro.” ix-xiii and BOOKS I-IV.

30: _Odyssey_. Books V-VIII

**SEPT.** 1: _Odyssey_. Books IX-XII.

6: _Odyssey_. Books IX-XII (con’d). **Essay #1 Due.**
8: _Odyssey_. Books XIII-XVI.

15: _Odyssey_ (con’d). **Essay #2 Due.**

22: _Oedipus the King_ (con’d).

27: _Oedipus the King_. Pages 196-251.
29: _Oedipus the King_. **Essay #3 Due.**

**OCT.**
4: Shakespeare. _The Sonnets_.
6: _The Sonnets_.

11: **Mid-Semester Break.**

20: _Macbeth_. Act 5.

25: _Macbeth_.
27: _Macbeth_. **Essay #4 Due.**

**NOVEMBER**
3: _Jekyll & Hyde_. 14-35.

8: _Jekyll & Hyde_. 36-54.
10: _Jekyll and Hyde_. **Essay #5 Due.**

17: _Cell Phone_
22: **CELL PHONE**  Part Two.
23-27: **THANKSGIVING BREAK.**

29: **CELL PHONE**: **ESSAY #6 DUE.**

DECEMBER
1: **LAST DAY (OF T/TH CLASSES). FINAL PREP.**

(Monday, Dec. 5th, is the last day of the semester.)

**THE FINAL EXAM WILL BE IN THIS ROOM ON THURSDAY, DEC. 8TH FROM 8:00 TO 10:30AM.**

(This syllabus is not holy writ. Changes could occur.)
ARISTOTLE ON TRAGEDY: UNITY, UNIVERSALITY, AND THE POETICS.

ARI: TRAGEDY is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear [what we call] the catharsis of such emotions. By "embellished language" I mean language having rhythm and melody, and by "separately in different parts" I mean that some parts of a play are carried on solely in metrical speech while others again are sung. (From Poetics)

Commentary: There is a long-standing controversy over what he meant by 'catharsis'. It is enough to note that its main meanings in most Greek contexts of the time were 'purification' and 'purification'.

ARI: Now, according to our definition, Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.

...Unity of plot does not, as some persons think, consist in the unity of the hero. For infinitely various are the incidents in one man's life which cannot be reduced to unity; and so, too, there are many actions of one man out of which we cannot make one action. Hence the error, as it appears, of all poets who have composed a Heracleid, a Theseid, or other poems of the kind. They imagine that as Heracles (Hercules) was one man, the story of Heracles must also be a unity. But Homer, as in all else he is of surpassing merit, here too—whether from art or natural genius—seems to have happily discerned the truth. In composing the Odyssey he did not include all the adventures of Odysseus—such as his wound on Parnassus, or his feigned madness at the muttering of the host—incidents between which there was no necessary or probable connection: but he made the Odyssey, and likewise the Iliad, to center round an action that in our sense of the word is one. As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole. (Poetics)

Commentary: UNITY, then, means that a literary work shall have in it some organizing principle to which all its parts are related so that, viewed in the light of that principle, the work is an organic whole. A work which has unity is cohesive in its parts, complete, self-contained, and integrated; it possesses "one-ness". The concept of unity in a story or play is often considered to reside in a unified action, or plot or in characterization.

A work may, however, be unified by form, by intent, by theme, by symbolism—in fact, by any means which can so integrate and organize its elements that they have a necessary relationship to each other and an essential relationship to the whole of which they are parts.

ARI: Poetry (literature) is more philosophical and a higher thing than history in that poetry tends rather to express the universal, history rather the particular fact. A universal is: The sort of thing that (in the circumstances) a certain kind of person will say or do either probably or necessarily, which in fact is the universal that poetry aims for (with the addition of names for the persons such as Oedipus or Pentheus); a particular, on the other hand is: What Alcibiades (a brilliant but unscrupulous Athenian statesman of the fifth century B.C.) did or had done to him. (Poetics)

Commentary: UNIVERSALITY, then, is a critical term frequently employed to indicate the presence in a piece of writing of an appeal to all readers of all time. When writing presents the great human emotions common to all peoples of all civilizations—love, pride, jealousy, courage, etc.—in literary form and through characters and actions that remain meaningful to other ages, it may be said to have universality. Of all qualities which make for universality in literature, the successful portrayal of human character is the most important.

(Elsewhere in his writings, Aristotle claims that the universal resides in the particular. That is, when we look at a particular tree we are made aware not only of that particular tree but of ALL trees, or "treeness" [As Odysseus, in his particular character, thoughts, and actions is our "representative" in that story].)
Further Comments on Universality

"The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose....The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." From The Poetics. Aristotle.

The following is from Alain de Botton's work, The Consolations of Philosophy.
The chapter being referenced is titled "Consolation for a Broken Heart." As a possible "consolation" for this miserable condition, Botton cites Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774): "a novel that describes the unrequited love felt by a particular young man for a particular young woman (the charming Lotte, who shared Werther's taste for The Vicar of Wakefield and wore white dresses with pink ribbons at the sleeves), but it simultaneously describes the love affairs of thousands of its readers (Napoleon was said to have read the novel nine times)." de Botton continues:

The greatest works of art speak to us without knowing of us. As Schopenhauer put it: The...poet takes from life that which is quite particular and individual, and describes it accurately in its individuality; but in this way he reveals the whole of human existence...though he appears to be concerned with the particular, he is actually concerned with that which is everywhere and at all times.* From this it arises that sentences, especially of the dramatic poets, even without being general apothegms, find frequent application in real life.

Goethe's readers not only recognized themselves in The Sorrow of Young Werther, they also understood themselves better as a result, for Goethe had clarified a range of the awkward, evanescent moments of love, moments that his readers would previously have lived through, though would not necessarily have fathomed. He laid bare certain laws of love, what Schopenhauer termed essential 'Ideas' of romantic psychology. He had, for example, perfectly captured the apparently kind—yet infinitely cruel—manner with which the person who does not love deals with the one who does. Late in the novel, tortured by his feelings, Werther breaks down in front of Lotte:

'Lotte' he cried, 'I shall never see you again!'—'Why ever not?' she replied: 'Werther, you may and must see us again, but do be less agitated in your manner. Oh, why did you have to be born with this intense spirit, this uncontrollable passion for everything you are close to! I implore you,' she went on, taking his hand, 'be calmer. Think of the many joys your spirit, your knowledge and your gifts afford you!'

We need not have lived in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century to appreciate what is involved. There are fewer stories than there are people on earth, the plots repeated ceaselessly while the names and backdrops alter. 'The essence of art is that its one case applies to thousands,' knew Schopenhauer.

In turn, there is consolation in realizing that our case is only one of thousands.

By reading a tragic tale of love, a rejected suitor raises himself above his own situation; he is no longer one man suffering alone, singly and confusedly, he is part of a vast body of human beings who have throughout time fallen in love with other humans in the agonizing drive to propagate the species. His suffering loses a little of its sting, it grows more comprehensible, less of an individual curse. Of a person who can achieve such objectivity, Schopenhauer remarks:

In the course of his own life and in its misfortunes, he will look less at his own individual lot than at the lot of mankind as a whole, and accordingly will conduct himself...more as a knower than as a sufferer.

We must, between periods of digging in the dark, endeavor always to transform our tears into knowledge. (Consolations, pages 199-202)

*(i.e., "The Universal")
GRADING SYMBOLS.
Sp: Spelling error
P: Punctuation error
SS/Syn.: Sentence structure/Syntax (Same thing.)
Awk.: Awkward phrasing
WW: Wrong word
?/Huh?/What?: What are you saying?
Para.: Parallelism error: “He got an A in Chemistry, a B in Shop, but Home Ec. cooked his goose.
X: Wrong (What you say is not in the text or in any known world.)
Sense?: Incomprehensible as written
Avoid.: Avoid.
Ant.: Antecedent error: “Everyone must pay their taxes.” (To avoid the “his or her” horror, use a plural pronoun: “All must pay their taxes.”)
Agr.: Verb agreement: “To be, or not to be, that are the question.”
gr.: Grammar error
Vague: Vague
Aargh.: Aargh. An egregious instance of gobbledygook.
Rel.: Relevance?
NSW: No such word exists.
Tense: (See “Conventions,” question “1”.)
ATQ: Answer the question.
Quote: When directly quoting lines from the text, use quotation marks. (Note: “Quotation” is a noun or an adjective. “Quote” is a verb.)
CS: Comma splice: “She boarded the bus, she kicked the driver.” (Use a period.)
red.: redundant
Trans.: Link paragraph to paragraph. Link sentence to sentence.
NS: a non-sequitur. Faulty reasoning: the conclusion does not follow from the premise: “If it’s Tuesday, this must be Ithaca” or “He ain’t heavy, Father, he’s my brother.”
(Although this latter statement is a non-sequitur—a logical fallacy—its compassion cannot be denied.)
Plotly: Mere plot summary. You must analyze. (See number 5, below.)

CONVENTIONS OF THE ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY.
1) When referring to events in a work of literature, use the present tense: NOT “Hamlet killed Claudius” but “Hamlet kills Claudius.” (A play or a story is a work of literature, not history.)
2) Avoid using such phrases as “This scene reveals to the audience...” or “In this scene the reader learns that...” or “This shows the reader that...” EVERYTHING in the story, poem or play reveals something to the reader and/or to the “audience,” so there is nothing special in saying that. It is an answer that begs the question.
3) Avoid using such phrases as “In my opinion...” or “I believe...” or “I think...” You are writing argumentative essays. We know that you are expressing your opinion. To say that is at best redundant.
4) When quoting two or more lines of poetry, put a slash after the end of each line: “To be or not to be, that is the question./Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer/The slings...,” etc., and if you are quoting more than three lines of poetry you should indent the left margin.
5) As the reader of your essay has read the story or play you are analyzing, plot summary is, at best, redundant.