

First-Year Composition Section Themes Fall Semester 2025

American Pop Culture

We will be exploring “popular culture” in America, asking questions like: What is “pop culture”? How does it differ from other forms or aspects of culture? We will also engage a number of elements that constitute this theme, such as music, film, literature, and advertising, investigating how pop culture has evolved over time and some of the ways that these aspects influence our perceptions, ideas, choices, and lives.

Deconstructing Disney

In this FYC section, we will focus on the work and influence of the Walt Disney Co. on U.S. and world cultures while developing our writing and communication skills. For generations, Disney has been an American icon. We will begin the semester by analyzing the ways in which individual Disney films construct value messages within particular historical contexts before examining the larger impact of the Disney Company as a corporation and a force of cultural export. Topics may include: the line between homage and appropriation, the politics of representation, the influence of media on childhood, the impact of the Disney Corporation on copyright law, the globalization of American culture, and more.

Democracy Under the Microscope

Winston Churchill famously said, "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried." In this section of First-Year Composition, we put democracy under the microscope and consider the wisdom of Churchill's observation. What is democracy? How well is democracy working in the United States and around the world? What are its benefits and its flaws? Etc.

Exploring the Death of Poe Through Historical Fiction

The mystery surrounding Edgar Allan Poe's death has never been solved. Historical fiction often tries to solve unanswered questions about gaps in history through research and narrative. This course will use works of historical fiction and historical accounts to explore the circumstances leading up to and including the death of Poe after having been found delirious on a dark, cold street. Students will study and explore this event through composition and study.

Food: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Food plays a huge role in our everyday lives. In this section of FYC, we will look at food differently, including where your food comes from and the value of eating locally. We will consider if eating locally full time, or most of the time, is overly difficult, or even possible. Other issues that will be explored include how food may contribute to the poverty cycle and the cost difference of healthy vs. less healthy food. We will end with how food affects culture. What will you be eating over winter break?

Make 'Em Laugh: Comedy and Culture

In this FYC section, we will focus on comedy—literature, TV shows, podcasts and other media that are designed to make us laugh. We will ask questions like, What is “funny?” How does comedy work? And how does humorous art engage with serious topics? Possible topics include: how humor has changed over time, the role of comedy in current pop culture, humor as political tool, and more.

Monsters

This class explores the mythology of monsters through readings, writing assignments, and class discussion. Course content will cover an array of historical periods and genres--from ancient folklore to urban legends, internet culture, and cautionary tales about artificial intelligence. Our focus on this topic will help us better understand why monsters captivate our attention and how they can be viewed as a manifestation of the values and concerns of their cultural and historical moment.

Politics and Animals

This First-Year Composition course explores the relationship between humans and non-human animals. We will discuss political theories of animals and how humans should treat them. Topics will include animal welfare laws, animal domestication, wildlife conservation, cloning, the ethics of animals as food, zoos, and more.

This Weird Language We Call English

Have you ever noticed that language is a funny thing? Even when we speak the same language, is it actually the same? For example, do you drink soda or pop? Do you eat a sub or a hoagie (or even a grinder or a hero)? While English might seem to have stable vocabulary and rules, if we look closely, we can see that that is not necessarily true. In fact, it is more like an ever-changing mixture of words and structures (old and new, originating from many different sources) seemingly thrown together in a blender and then poured out all over the place. In this section, we will use our readings, writings, and conversations to investigate where our strange and amusing language comes from, the impact of linguistic variation on communication, and the ways in which we use language and its varieties for expressions of self and of power.

Understanding Fairy Tales

In this FYC section, we will focus on fairy tales, some that are widely adored and others that you may not have encountered before. We will delve into various cultures and explore the writing styles of fairy tales throughout the ages. Fairy tales are introduced to us as children and follow us throughout adulthood, but do they only have one meaning or one intended audience? The semester will start with an introduction to fairy tales, including their history and why they are so universal and constant. Then we will dive into the inner workings of each story and how compositional tools affect our understanding of the tales and how we can transfer this knowledge to our writing for both school and the future. Bring an open mind and a need to question everything because we will.