

## ENGL 217 -- The Age of the Autodidact Section XX | Fall 2022

### Class Details

Instructor: Kari Daly

Email:

Office:

Office Hours:

Class Meetings:

Room:

### Course Inquiry

Merriam Webster defines an autodidact as “a self-taught person.” But what, exactly, does that mean? Completely self-taught? Mostly self-taught? Does learning from a YouTube video count as a form of autodidacticism? When we start to tease out variations of self-education, the lines begin to blur. In this class, we will explore different transatlantic representations of autodidacticism in literature. Since the writers in the nineteenth century were

especially interested in the potential of autodidactic learning, we will start there, examining representations of self-education in works such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), among others. But our analysis isn’t tethered to the nineteenth century; we will bring our examination into the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries and analyze how autodidacticism has changed. As a class, we will, over the course of the semester, develop a reading list of representations of these twentieth- and twenty-first century autodidacts which will also guide you in developing your own inquiry into autodidacticism today. How have representations of autodidacticism changed since the nineteenth century? What does autodidacticism look like today? Can it enhance or perhaps take the place of higher education? These are some of the questions which will guide our journey.

### Course Objectives

In this course, you will:

- Examine different representations of autodidacticism
- Practice reading and analyzing scholarly articles
- Define autodidacticism
- Identify and pursue an inquiry about autodidacticism
- As a class, create a list of readings regarding autodidacticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Hone your writing skills by composing in a variety of modalities

### Required Texts

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)\*

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845)

Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop* (1888)

Mary Wilkins Freeman, *A New England Nun* (1891)

Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

James Wheldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)

Margaret Drabble, *The Millstone* (1965)

\*Most of these works are in the public domain and therefore can be read for free online or are available in cheap paper editions. I don’t care which editions you use, but I suggest that you try to obtain the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, as I think it is more useful for our purposes in analyzing autodidacticism.

Electronic copies of some of these, as well as supplementary readings, will be provided via our learning platform. You are expected to either bring a written copy of the text under discussion for the day *or* a laptop/tablet (if using an e-book). Students who attend class without either a paper copy of the texts or a laptop/tablet to reference an electronic copy will not be given credit for class activities (for more on class activities, see below).

### **Grading**

We will be using a grading contract for this class. In a grading contract, your grade is calculated entirely on the basis of what you do – on your labor, your conscientious effort and participation. Additionally, your grade is not about your knowledge of literature, your educational background, your writing ability, or your technical skills. Instead, this course assigns grades in such a way that foregrounds your active participation, engagement, and sustained effort as a student. For details on the grading contract, please see the end of this syllabus.

### **Electronic Devices**

While the use of electronic copies of the texts is acceptable, phones are discouraged. However, I understand there are times when technology fails and students aren't left with many options. Please be respectful of our time and resist the urge to be distracted. Students found engaging in social media, texting, YouTube videos or the like will not get credit for participating in class activities.

### **Email and Communications**

Please be aware that I frequently use the announcement feature in our learning platform. You are responsible, therefore, for regularly checking your college email, especially if classes are canceled. Note, too, that I will only respond to emails from your official Mount Holyoke email address.

### **Writing Center**

I strongly encourage you to make use of the Writing Center for your projects. This is a free service and can help you identify weak points in your work.

### **Ethical Scholarship**

It is crucial to find and use sources legally and ethically. Please review and abide by the college's code on academic misconduct (plagiarism and misuse of sources); you will be held responsible for understanding these materials. Anyone found plagiarizing will not get credit for completing the assignment and possibly the course.

### **Accommodations**

It is important to me that all students have the tools and resources necessary to be successful in this course. I have worked to ensure that this class is as accessible as possible for all students, incorporating UDL, multimodal texts, accessible content, and flexible deadlines and schedules. I am dedicated to meeting any accommodation requests, whether or not you are registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities. I am also always learning, so I encourage you to approach me at any time with suggestions or requests for ways to make this class more accessible.

## **Details on Class Assignments**

### **Reading Responses:**

Students are required to submit a 300-600 word response on our learning platform for each text we read this semester. These can be casual responses, but should be respectful and thoughtful. Mere summaries of the texts we have read will not be accepted.

### **Scaffolding Assignments:**

Each major assignment includes a series of scaffolding assignments that build up to the final product.

### **Class Activities:**

Students will be expected to participate in activities during each class session. These may be collaborative or individual projects (such peer review or mini-multimodal assignments) and I will try as best I can to design activities which can be completed asynchronously if a student cannot attend a class meeting. Your suggestions are always welcome.

### **Major Assignments:**

There are five major assignments in this course: a personal narrative of autodidacticism; a multimodal curation of autodidactic narratives and accompanying analysis; a precis of a scholarly article; an annotated bibliography; and a final research project. I will provide a detailed assignment sheet with scaffolding assignments for each project.

## Class Schedule

Note: This is an ambitious reading schedule. We will negotiate readings as snow days and pandemic-related phenomena arise. If the schedule changes, I will alert you through our learning platform and post an updated version.

Week	Day	Date	Due
1	Monday		Introductions
	Wednesday		Excerpts from Rose; Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i>
2	Monday		Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i>
	Wednesday		Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> ; personal narratives due
3	Monday		Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>
	Wednesday		Curation project due
4	Monday		Levy, <i>The Romance of a Shop</i>
	Wednesday		Levy, <i>The Romance of a Shop</i>
5	Monday		Bronte, <i>Jane Eyre</i>
	Wednesday		Bronte, <i>Jane Eyre</i>
6	Monday		Bronte, <i>Jane Eyre</i>
	Wednesday		TBD
7	Monday		Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i>
	Wednesday		Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i>
8	Monday		Freeman, <i>A New England Nun</i>
	Wednesday		Precis due
9	Monday		Johnson, <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i>
	Wednesday		Johnson, <i>Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i>
10	Monday		Annotated bibliography due
	Wednesday		Drabble, <i>The Millstone</i>
11	Monday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
	Wednesday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
12	Monday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
	Wednesday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
13	Monday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
	Wednesday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
14	Monday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
	Wednesday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
15	Monday		TBD -- Class-curated reading
	Wednesday		Draft of research project due; in-class workshops

## Grading Contract

### Why do a grading contract?

So, why are we doing a grading contract this semester? For students, grades tend to produce a sense of uncertainty and anxiety. With our grading contract, you -- the student -- have more control over how you are evaluated in this course, as you can set the terms of the contract alongside your peers and you can make informed decisions about completing and submitting work in this course. Studies have found that contract grading tends to produce more interesting work, as students feel more freedom to submit creative or unconventional projects. Grading contracts also minimize systemic or personal implicit biases (e.g. related to language use, identity, political beliefs). In short, the decision to make use of contract grading for our course this semester was done because I think it's best for learning and for creating an equitable and just classroom.

### Proposed Grading Contract:

Grade	# Missed Class Activities (24)	# Missed Reading Journals (12)	# Missed Major Assignments (5)	# Scaffolding Assignments (TBD)	#Late Assignments (Class Activities, Journals, Major Assignments, Scaffolding Assignments)
A	0-4	0-2	0	TBD	TBD
B	4-5	2-3	0	TBD	TBD
C	6-7	4-5	1	TBD	TBD
D	8-10	6-7	2	TBD	TBD
F	10+	8+	3	TBD	TBD

*\*\*In order to achieve an "A" for this course, you will need to fulfill the requirements listed above AND earn three **Additional Activities** points as explained on the next page*

I've proposed a grading contract based on my values as an instructor -- that is, **engagement** (completing assignments) and **consideration** (completing assignments on time, when possible). I've also attempted to prioritize **flexibility** by giving room for error, tardiness, incompleteness, etc. while still making commitments to high standards for our course.

### How does this contract work?

Using this contract, your grade is determined by the *lowest listed score*. So, if you have 0 missed class activities and assignments but miss 3 journal entries, your baseline grade would be a "B."

**Please Note:** All assignments must be completed in good faith. This means that submissions which do not meet the criteria of the assigned work will not be accepted.

This contract is negotiable on a class-wide basis. I will check in mid semester to see how we feel about it. If you have concerns prior to or after that point, please let me know and we can see if the class would like to renegotiate.

### **Additional Activities**

To earn an "A" for this course, you must complete three points worth of Additional Activities.

Some examples of this are:

- Taking notes for a class session (1pt; you may do this as many times as you like)
- Creating a presentation for the text we are currently reading (2pts)
- Guiding class discussion for the day (2pts; may be done in groups of 2)
- Coming to office hours (1pt per visit; you may do this as many times as you like, but office hour visits must include substantial discussion or question)

I am also open to other ideas if you'd like to suggest some. You must connect with me prior to the class meeting of your choice if you'd like to complete any of these Additional Activities. We don't want overlapping note-takers or presenters in one class session, so the sooner we talk and you get on the schedule, the better! I will share a Google doc schedule.

***Please note:*** Additional Activities are not extra credit. Completing these activities will enhance your grade **only** if you already meet the requirements for an "A" grade as outlined in the table above.