



Welcome to the Whedonverse: Exploring Popular Culture through the Works of Joss Whedon

English 258.001
American Popular Culture
CRN 12363 – Spring 2013
MWF 11:30am – 12:20 pm
317 Clark Hall

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Office Hours: MW 10:15-11:15am, or by appt.

Course Overview & Goals

Welcome to English 258, which fulfills the GEC requirements for Objective 7, American Culture. Students are expected to develop knowledge critical to the understanding of the issues that shape the culture of the United States. This section of English 258 is not a historical investigation of popular culture, nor is it an introduction to American culture generally. This section is focused on contemporary culture and assumes cursory knowledge of said culture; we will not be investigating the origins or history of American Popular Culture, though we may certainly reference this history as we consider how the past has influenced the present. Throughout this course, students will 1) study what is meant by the phrase “pop(ular) culture”; 2) be introduced to a series of critical methodologies to guide them through cultural texts; 3) enhance their understanding of American popular culture and the way that it shapes our perceptions and definitions of “American”; 4) practice critical thinking and writing about culture; and 5) begin to understand the role of genre in popular culture and its role in forming narratives. Students will learn to develop a research question and thesis about a cultural text, and support that thesis with evidence; and recognize and develop multiple analyses for a single text.

Required Texts

*Please note that you do not have to purchase all of the movies and television episodes. Most (if not all) of the television episodes are available online (Netflix streaming is highly recommended, as most (if not all) of the TV shows are currently streaming), and the movies can be found online (through Netflix), in Redbox or Blockbuster, or in the school library. Some sites (like Amazon) offer streaming services where you can purchase individual episodes or “rent” a film at a reduced cost. You are responsible for finding and watching all assigned viewings, as well as printing and reading all assigned texts.

Required Primary Texts Available at the WVU Bookstore:

- PopMatters, *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion* ISBN: 9780857689863
- Whedon, Joss. *Astonishing X-Men: Ultimate Collection Vol. 1* ISBN: 9780785161943

Required Primary Texts NOT Available at the WVU Bookstore:

- *The Cabin in the Woods*
- *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*
- *Firefly*, Season 1
- *The Avengers* (2012)
- *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Seasons 1-7
- *Dollhouse*, Seasons 1-2
- *Serenity*

Required Secondary Readings:

*Please note that all of these readings are required, not optional.

- “Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths” PDF (eCampus)
- Storey, John. “What is Popular Culture?” PDF (eCampus)
- McDonagh, Maitland. “What’s Inside the Cabin?” TXT (eCampus)
- “Can We Talk About ‘Cabin In the Woods’ Yet?” TXT (eCampus)
- Grossman, Lev. “The Hero Whisperer” TXT (eCampus)

Course Policies & Procedures

Attendance Policies: I expect you to attend every class. This class is primarily discussion-based, and is one that encourages collaborative learning through critical discussion of the assigned readings. Because the course depends on your active participation for every class and your active involvement during every class meeting, regular and on-time attendance and active participation are critical to your success in this class. Please note: You are responsible for making up any work you may miss by failing to attend class, even if the absence is necessitated by illness or personal emergency. If you are absent (or even if you are just late to class), any quizzes missed cannot be made-up. Additionally, I do not accept late work (I will take them early though!). Scheduled tests may be made-up based only on specific medical concerns, on a case-by-case basis. If illness or personal emergency requires you to miss multiple class periods, I will probably advise you to drop the course and take it again in a semester when you can be present to do your best work. Multiple absences will necessarily limit your academic success in this class. Please keep track of your own attendance, and if you notice it is becoming a problem, please visit me during my office hours, or send me an email and we discuss it further.

Cheating/Plagiarism: Students are expected to be familiar with the sections on Academic Honesty in the **University Student Conduct Code, Policy Bulletin 31**, online at: <http://studentlife.wvu.edu/studentconductcode.html>. If you have any questions about when and how to document sources, or any other question that will help you avoid unintentional plagiarism, please come and talk to me. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offences. Clear cases will result in an F for the course and appropriate academic discipline. In all English courses, we expect students to submit their own *original* work. When you recycle your own past work or submit essentially the same paper in more than one class, you are self-plagiarizing. For instance, if you are repeating the class, you must talk to me about whether you may use a previous assignment as the basis for further revisions. If you are using a similar assignment from another class, permission must be obtained from me and the instructor of the other class. Permission is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Failure to disclose recycled or dual-submission work may result in an automatic F.

Computers and Cell Phones: Classroom activities require your full attention, so please keep your cell phones out of sight and refrain from texting in class. I should not see or hear your cell phone during class time. Since our work in class will primarily be using books and printed PDFs, computers (in the form of laptops, tablets, iPads, Kindles, Nooks, etc.) are not permitted unless you have the required documentation that they are a necessity or if you make special arrangement with me. If you are ever using technology in a way that is distracting or unrelated to the work of the class, you will be asked to put away the device. If you have to be asked more than once, you may be asked to leave. If there is an unusual circumstance where you must leave your phone on, please just speak to me privately *before* class.

Any use of electronic or web-linked devices during a quiz or test will result in failure of the course.



Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented learning disability, a serious hearing or vision problem, or any other special need that might affect your performance and participation in class, please be sure to let me know and contact Disability Services in room G30 of the Mountainlair. Their phone number is: (304)-293-6700, and their email is: access2@mail.wvu.edu.

Writing Center: The WVU Writing Center is located in G02 Colson Hall and is a free resource for students where you can meet with a tutor to go over any assignment or just to get help brainstorming the best topic. Call 304-293-5788 to schedule an appointment or stop by to see if a tutor is available. For more information, check online at: http://english.wvu.edu/centers_and_projects/wcenter.

Office Hours: My office hours are on the top of this syllabus. Please drop in to see me at the listed times, or make an appointment with me to talk at other times. I can confer with you via email, too. I will try to respond to you (in email or in class) within 24 hours, Mon through Fri.

Assignment & Grading Overview

Comprehensive Tests (60%)

You have two tests in this course: a mid-semester test (30%) and one towards the end of the semester (30%). Each test may contain multiple choice questions, short answer questions, true/false questions, and an essay component. We will review in class for each major test. Your quizzes, any handouts, and class notes will also be valuable study sources for these tests.

Written Responses (15%)

Throughout the semester you must complete 3 written responses (5% each) to the texts that we have read in that specific section (since the last response). Each response should be 3 full pages in length, typed (double-spaced), and directly engage a specific work that we have examined. The best responses will draw a connection between a specific text we've discussed in class (like one episode) and something else that is also specific: perhaps another text we have read in class, or perhaps some event going on in our current society, political system, or popular culture (avoid broad generic themes). These should not be summaries, nor should they re-hash our class discussions. Avoid personal reactions—instead focus on analytical argument. Responses should be printed and brought to class on or before the due-date listed on the syllabus. Emailed or Late responses will not be accepted.

Quizzes (15%)

Expect viewing/reading quizzes often. They are unscheduled and will generally occur at the start of class. The purpose of quizzes is two-fold. First, the quizzes ensure that you are watching/reading the required material. Secondly, the quizzes will help you gauge your viewing/reading practices. Are you watching/reading critically and closely? Your quiz grades will be averaged at the end of the semester and comprise 10% of your overall grade. Please note that there are no “trick” questions on these quizzes. Put simply: if you read *carefully*, you should pass the quiz. If you find that you are having trouble with this aspect of the course, despite reading the assigned materials, come talk to me. We can go over strategies for reading critically and retaining what you read. Quizzes cannot be made-up if you are absent or late to class.

Participation (10%)

Participation is assessed based not only on attendance, but also on your investment in class activities and discussion and your ability to respect and work well with others. You are welcome to talk to me if you have questions about your progress in the class.

Grade Descriptors

“A” range: You have coherent, thoughtful, and original responses. The writing is excellent and you have demonstrated a critical understanding of the texts. You have a clear thesis and evidence from the text. You are prepared for every class period and contribute to class discussion every (or almost every) day. You have insightful and relevant contributions and go “above and beyond” an average engagement with the day’s readings. You respond to your peers comments and questions and help facilitate dialogue in the classroom.

“B” range: You have a solid reading response and a good engagement with the texts. You have a clear thesis, but may have some minor issues with development or cohesion. Your paper is well written and has next to no typos or proofreading errors. You use an adequate amount of evidence from the text. You are prepared for every class period and contribute to most class discussions. Comments are relevant and insightful and demonstrate a careful reading of the texts assigned. You respond to other’s comments on a regular basis.

“C” range: This is an average response paper. You may not have a clear thesis, but your paper does contain a cursory reflection of the text. There are several (more than 2) proofreading errors. There may be issues with writing that distracts from the overall readability of your response. You have, however, met the major requirements, such as page requirement. Proper citation methods are not used. You are typically prepared for class and contribute to class discussion approximately half of the time. “C” participation reflects a “quiet” role in group work.

“D” range: You have not completed the assignment or have done so in a far-below average way. Not following the minimum requirements (such as page requirement or quoting from the text at least once) results in a “D.” There are several proofreading errors and it is obvious that the assignment was rushed or carelessly composed. This student is often unprepared for class which is reflected by both class discussion and low quiz scores. This student rarely comments or adds insight to class discussion, shows little interest in the material, and is “off task” during class (reading non-relevant material, sending text messages, sleeping, etc...).

“F” range: This student shares many of the same qualities as the “D” student. Additionally, this person distracts others, intentionally offends others, and/or no longer attends classes or completes assignments.



Grade Breakdown:

A+ → 100-98	B+ → 89-88	C+ → 79-78	D+ → 69-68	F → <60
A → 97-94	B → 87-84	C → 77-74	D → 67-64	
A - → 93-90	B - → 83-80	C - → 73-70	D - → 63-60	

***Please Note*:** The best way to be successful in this course is to do the viewings & readings, participate and attend class regularly, and to complete ALL of the course assignments. Failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in the failure of the course.

Course Schedule

What follows is the course schedule of readings and assignments. Please note that it is subject to change throughout the semester. In the event of a class cancellation (for any reason), please continue to follow the schedule unless otherwise indicated by me. Assignments from *Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion* are abbreviated as JWCC and include the page numbers (JWCC 11-21). When a television series is assigned, the season and episode is abbreviated; for example, 1.9 indicates that you should view season 1, episode 9. *If there is a doubt as to which episode goes with which number, always use the JWCC as the correct source. Generally I recommend that, when there are both readings and viewings due on the same day, you should do the viewings first, then the readings (they are still important, but they may spoil some of that day's episodes).

***Viewings/Readings are due on the day they are listed on the schedule.**

Date	Viewing Due	Reading Due	In-Class Work
“Zombies Redneck Torture Family”: Pop Culture Archetypes			
M 1/14			Intro to syllabus
W 1/16		“Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths” PDF (eCampus)	
F 1/18		Storey, John. “What is Popular Culture?” PDF (eCampus) & JWCC 11-21	
M 1/21	NO CLASS		
W 1/23	<i>Cabin in the Woods</i>	JWCC 440-442	
F 1/25		McDonagh, Maitland. “What’s Inside the Cabin?” TXT (eCampus) & “Can We Talk About ‘Cabin In The Woods’ Yet?” TXT (eCampus)	
“By the way, I like your dress”: Gender & Sexuality in <i>Buffy, the Vampire Slayer</i>			
M 1/28	<i>Buffy</i> 1.1, 1.2, & 1.7	JWCC 25-28	
W 1/30	<i>Buffy</i> 1.12, 2.9, & 2.10		
F 2/1	NO CLASS		
M 2/4	<i>Buffy</i> 2.13, 2.14, & 2.17	JWCC 102-111	
W 2/6	<i>Buffy</i> 2.21, 2.22, & 3.3		
F 2/8	<i>Buffy</i> 3.9, 3.10, & 3.14		
M 2/11	<i>Buffy</i> 3.15, 3.21, & 3.22		
W 2/13	<i>Buffy</i> 4.10, 4.22, & 5.1	JWCC 49-55 & 112-124	
F 2/15	<i>Buffy</i> 5.5, 5.16, & 5.22		
M 2/18	<i>Buffy</i> 6.1, 6.2, & 6.7		
W 2/20	<i>Buffy</i> 6.19 & 6.20	JWCC 140-153	
F 2/22	<i>Buffy</i> 6.21 & 6.22		
M 2/25	<i>Buffy</i> 7.1, 7.18, & 7.19		
W 2/27	<i>Buffy</i> 7.20, 7.21, & 7.22	JWCC 83-101	
F 3/1			Reading Response #1 Due Test Review Day
M 3/4			Test 1 In-Class

“A few idiots tried to fight it”: Multiculturalism in <i>Firefly</i> & <i>Serenity</i>			
W 3/6	<i>Firefly</i> 1.1 <i>*note: episode is called “Serenity” and is not the same as the movie</i>		
F 3/8	<i>Firefly</i> 1.2 & 1.3	JWCC 223-225	
M 3/11	<i>Firefly</i> 1.4, 1.5, & 1.6		
W 3/13	<i>Firefly</i> 1.7, 1.8, & 1.9	JWCC 253-257	
F 3/15	<i>Firefly</i> 1.10 & 1.11		
M 3/18	<i>Firefly</i> 1.12, 1.13, & 1.14		
W 3/20	<i>Serenity</i> <i>*the movie!</i>	JWCC 239-242	
F 3/22		JWCC 243-252	Reading Response #2 Due
NO CLASS 3/25, 3/27, & 3/29: SPRING BREAK!			
“It’s not about making money, it’s about <i>taking</i> money”: The Internet & Popular Culture			
M 4/1			
W 4/3	<i>Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog</i>		
F 4/5		JWCC 371-385	
“We have to astonish them”: Heroes & Villains in <i>Astonishing X-Men</i> & <i>The Avengers</i>			
M 4/8		<i>Astonishing X-Men</i> issues 1-6	
W 4/10		<i>Astonishing X-Men</i> Issues 7-12	
F 4/12		JWCC 310-320 & 341-351	
M 4/15	<i>The Avengers</i>		
W 4/17		Grossman, Lev. “The Hero Whisperer” TXT (eCampus) & JWCC 443-454	
“We are lost, but we are not gone”: Reality in <i>Dollhouse</i>			
F 4/19	<i>Dollhouse</i> 1.1, 1.9, & 1.11	JWCC 389-392	
M 4/22	<i>Dollhouse</i> 1.12, 1.13, 2.1, & 2.5		
W 4/24	<i>Dollhouse</i> 2.6, 2.9, & 2.10	JWCC 407-411	
F 4/26	<i>Dollhouse</i> 2.11, 2.12, & 2.13	JWCC 411-425	
M 4/29			Reading Response #3 Due Test Review
W 5/1			Test Two (part one, in class)
F 5/3			Test Two (part two, due today in my office during classtime)

