

Mystery and Detective Fiction

ENGL 21

Spring 2026 Section 01 In Person 3 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/21/2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Colton S Saylor

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Office: 112

Please give me 24 hours to return emails. If I do not respond within that window, please feel free to follow up!

Office Hours

Tuesday, Thursday, 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM, Office Hours Link: <https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/8767305039?pwd=VWdZNGhFWitEazVFVit0aHhwZVp4UT09>

Waiting Room will be activated on the Zoom Office Hours, meaning I will let students in one at a time as they come in.

Course Description and Requisites

Examines mystery or detective fiction from its inception in the 19th century and follow it across the globe as the genre has been taken on and developed by a variety of cultures.

Satisfies 3B. Humanities (Formerly Area C2).

Grading: Letter Graded

Classroom Protocols

Extension Policy

I will grant extensions (no questions asked) for the following assignments. Extensions can be requested at any point **EXCEPT** not on the day that the assignment is due:

Essay # 1 (Noir Analysis)

Essay # 2 (Final Paper)

All other assignments must be submitted by the times listed on this syllabus and Canvas.

Late papers for Major Essays will be docked -5% each day they are late.

Late papers for credit/half credit/no credit assignments (all responses, activities, etc.) will receive half credit if submitted late.

Absence Policy

It is essential to attend class if you want to succeed and do well on our assignments.

That said, please DO NOT excuse absences with me over email.

If you are absent, please note that I DO NOT review what was missed over email. Instead, you can catch up with what you missed via any of the following options:

- email another person in the class
- schedule an office hours appointment with me

AI Policy

In this class, we are working together to become better writers, readers, and thinkers. In that spirit, no use of any artificial intelligence will be allowed on any of your assignments. I know some of you use programs like Grammarly or Quill to check your assignments before submitting, but as these are also examples of AI, they are also not permitted in this class. I do not deduct points specifically for grammar mistakes, and I am more concerned with you writing in your own original voice. Despite their marketing, these programs damage that voice rather than enhance it.

I will be using turnitin.com (SJSU's approved plagiarism detector) to help me check assignments for any use of AI. As I know turnitin is not perfect, I'll also be using my own knowledge of our course, our texts, and common sense.

Any usage of AI in any capacity to complete an assignment will be treated as plagiarism

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php) (<https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php>).

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area 3B: Humanities

Across the disciplines in Area 3 coursework, students cultivate and refine their affective, cognitive, and expressive faculties by studying works of the human intellect and imagination. Area 3 courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. In their intellectual and subjective considerations, students develop a better understanding of the interrelationship between the self and the creative arts and the humanities in a variety of cultures.

3B (Humanities) courses encourage students to analyze and appreciate works of philosophical, historical, literary, aesthetic, and cultural importance. Students may take courses in languages other than English in fulfillment of 3B if the courses do not focus solely on skills acquisition but also contain a substantial cultural component. This may include literature, among other content. Theater and film courses may be approved if they emphasize historical, literary, or cultural considerations. Logic courses may be accepted if the focus is not solely on technique but includes the role of logic in humanities disciplines.

GE Area 3B Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a 3B course, students should be able to:

1. analyze and understand works of philosophical and humanistic importance, including their temporal and cultural dimensions;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such texts;
3. analyze and assess ideas of value, meaning, and knowledge, as produced within the humanistic disciplines; and
4. research and write effective analyses of works of the human intellect and imagination.

Writing requirement

3B classes require a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Diversity Statement

This class will begin with a focus on early detective fiction writers from Europe and the United States to establish a working definition of the genre. From there, we follow how writers of various backgrounds and communities (including those working in African American and Chinese American literary canons) have both honored and subverted the genre. In addition, we will examine how contemporary female artists have responded to early detective fiction's depiction of gender. These explorations will allow us to appreciate detective fiction's ongoing evolution as a narrative tradition.

Course Materials

Available for Purchase through Canvas page

A Rage in Harlem, Chester Himes, ISBN-10: 9780679720409; ISBN-13: 978-0679720409

Gone Girl, Gillian Flynn, ISBN-10: 0307588378; ISBN-13: 978-0307588371

Other required readings can be found either linked in the syllabus or as PDFs in Canvas.

The two films (*The Thin Blue Line* and *Chan Is Missing*) will be shown in class. Attendance for these days will be important--it will be up to you to watch the films if you miss these class days.

Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, you are expected to spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on.

All assignments due to Canvas unless otherwise instructed.

Assignment Word Count and Assignment GELO

Assignment	Word Count	Learning Goals	Final Grade %
Essay # 1 (Noir Analysis Paper)*	500-750	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3	17.5
Essay # 2 (Final Paper)*	1,250-1,500	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	22.5
Diagnostic	500	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	5

Whodunit Activity	250	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	5
True Crime Response	500	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	7.5
Group Detective Profile Presentation	-	GE 1, 2; E 1, 2, 3, 4	10
GG Character Comparison	250-500	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	5
<i>Chan is Missing</i> Response	250-500	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	5
Final Exam	-	GE 1, 2, 3; E 1, 2, 3, 4	22.5

* - assignment requires rough draft and final draft

Bolded – letter-grade assignments

All other assignments are Credit/Half Credit/No Credit

✓ Grading Information

We will have two different kinds of assignments in this class: **letter-graded** and **credit/half-credit/no credit**.

A **credit/half-credit/no credit** assignment is meant to help you practice and/or reflect on a concept from our class. In general, I will grade these assignments based on the following criteria (**note: certain assignments will have unique criteria which I will go over in class**)

Full Credit: the assignment is completed on-time, hits the required word count, and follows the instructions on the assignment description

Half-Credit: the assignment is submitted late OR the assignment does not meet word count OR the assignment does not follow the description's instructions (could be a combination of any of these three)

No Credit: the assignment is not submitted OR the assignment is submitted using AI in any capacity

We will have two **letter-graded** essays. In class, I will discuss specific requirements that each genre of essay demands, but in general, I grade essays based on the following three areas:

Thesis - a strong thesis has a clear and (in our case) argumentative stance and detailed supporting reasons that forecast the essay's general content and structure. A paper with a strong thesis makes it easy to identify what you're arguing and gives your reader a clear picture of how your essay will specifically and uniquely make that case

Argumentation - strong argumentation means both the inclusion of effective evidence to support your claim as well as clear and logical discussion of that evidence. In a strongly argued paper, each example/point you include to support your thesis feels unique in how it builds up your stance but still cohesive with the rest of your essay.

Structure - a paper with a strong sense of structure excels at two levels: the global (the essay as a whole) and the local (each paragraph). At a global level, strong structure means logical arrangement of paragraphs (intro, body, rebuttal, conclusion) in a way that clearly guides the reader from one section to the next (by use of strong topic sentences and, when appropriate, transitions). At a local level, strong structure means arranging each sentence in your paragraph in such a way that each new idea builds logically from the previous ones. In a body paragraph, for example, this means using topic sentences, inclusion of evidence/examples, analysis and/or discussion of those examples, and finally the lead-out of that paragraph.

Your grades for these papers will be out of 100 in 2.5% increments

An A range paper (90-100) is strong in all three of these areas (how high or low in the range depends on how strong or weak these areas are).

An B range paper (80-87.5) is strong in two of these areas, but weak in the third (here again, how or low in the range depends on the strength and/or weaknesses in all three areas)

An C range paper (70-77.5) is strong in one of these areas but weak in the other two (same note as above regarding where in the range the grade falls)

An D range paper (60-67.5) is weak in all three areas

An F grade (0-57.5) will only be given to a non-submitted assignment, a paper guilty of plagiarism (such as AI-use), or a paper submitted so late that the penalties take it to under a 60%.

Final Course Grade Breakdown (I round up or down to the nearest tenth of a decimal point)

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 (<60)

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance,

counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/22	<p>In Class: Introduction</p> <p>On Canvas: Detective Diagnostic due 1/24, 11:59PM</p>
2	1/27	<p>Read before Class: Edgar Allan Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"</p> <p>In Class: Discuss Reading; Introduce 'Whodunit'</p>
2	1/29	<p>Read before Class: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Dancing Men"</p> <p>In Class: Discuss Sherlock Holmes' cultural influence; discuss reading</p>
3	2/3	<p>In Class: Finishing discussing Doyle</p> <p>On Canvas: Whodunit Activity due 2/5, 11:59PM</p>
3	2/5	<p>Read before Class: Raymond Chandler, The Simple Art of Murder</p> <p>In Class: Discuss Readings; Introduce Noir</p>
4	2/10	<p>In Class: Assign Noir Analysis Essay</p>
4	2/12	<p>Read before Class: Chester Himes, <i>A Rage in Harlem</i>, pp. 1-50</p> <p>In Class: Introduce Himes</p>

5	2/17	Read before Class: Chester Himes, <i>A Rage in Harlem</i> , pp. 51-100 In Class: Discuss Reading
5	2/19	Read before Class: Chester Himes, <i>A Rage in Harlem</i> , pp. 101-151 In Class: Finish discussing <i>ARiH</i>
6	2/24	In Class: Peer Review Workshop # 1 On Canvas: Noir Analysis Paper Final Draft Due 2/28, 11:59PM
6	2/26	In Class: Extra Credit Mystery # 1
7	3/3	In Class: Assign Group Detective Profiles
7	3/5	In Class: Group Detective Profile Work Day
8	3/10	In Class: Group Detective Profile Presentations (Groups 1-5)
8	3/12	In Class: Group Detective Profile Presentations (Groups 6-10)
9	3/17	Read before Class: "The Trash Balance," Soraya Roberts In Class: Introduce True Crime; discuss reading
9	3/19	Listen to before Class: Serial/Season 1, Episode 1 "The Alibi" In Class: Discuss podcast episode
10	3/24	Watch in Class: <i>The Thin Blue Line</i> (dir. Errol Morris)

10	3/26	<p>Finish watching in Class: <i>The Thin Blue Line</i> (dir. Errol Morris)</p> <p>In Class: Discuss film</p> <p>On Canvas: True Crime Response Due 3/28, 11:59PM</p>
11	3/31	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK
11	4/2	NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK
12	4/7	<p>In Class: Review Noir Analysis Essay; Assign Final Paper</p>
12	4/9	<p>Read before Class: Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> (pp. 1-108)</p> <p>In Class: Introduce Flynn; Introduce The Thriller</p>
13	4/14	<p>Read before Class: Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> (pp. 109-216)</p> <p>In Class: Discuss reading</p>
13	4/16	<p>Read before Class: Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> (pp. 217-324)</p> <p>In Class: Discuss Reading; Assign Final Paper</p> <p>On Canvas: Complete <i>GG</i> Character Comparison Activity (Due 4/18, 11:59PM)</p>
14	4/21	<p>Read before Class: Gillian Flynn, <i>Gone Girl</i> (pp. 325-423)</p> <p>In Class: Finish discussing <i>GG</i></p>
14	4/23	Watch in Class: <i>Chan is Missing</i> (dir. Wayne Wang)
15	4/28	<p>Watch in Class: <i>Chan is Missing</i> (dir. Wayne Wang)</p> <p>In Class: discuss film</p> <p>On Canvas: Complete <i>Chan is Missing</i> Response Due 4/30, 11:59PM</p>
15	4/30	In Class: JSTOR Research Exercise

16	5/5	In Class: Extra Credit Mystery # 2
16	5/7	In Class: Peer Review Workshop # 2 On Canvas: Final Paper Final Draft Due 5/12, 11:59PM
	5/19	Canvas: Final Exam, Due on Canvas 5/19, 3:00PM