



Introduction to the Literatures of the Middle East

Syllabus and Course Schedule (Fall 2020)

An epic adventure through thousands of years of literature in the Middle East. Stories & songs, poetry & prose, travelogues, comic books, food, etc. etc.

Format

Asynchronous remote course on SAKAI and VoiceThread.

All readings in English.

Grades

10% Lectures
25% Worksheets
25% Forums
30% Quizzes
10% Final Paper

Instructor

Prof. Ben Koerber
bk311@amesall.rutger.edu

Office Hours by appointment via Zoom, Skype, or Webex

What is it?

This course covers a broad sampling of literary works from the Middle East, presented in English translation. Through the readings, films, and podcasts, we'll visit contemporary Jerusalem, medieval Spain, the ancient Sumerian underworld, lands conquered by Alexander the Great, pirate ships in the Mediterranean and Arabian seas, and elsewhere. Along the way, we'll learn about the historical contexts that animated these texts, as well as discuss their bearing on contemporary social and political issues. The course is organized around three thematic units: 1) Identities, 2) Spiritualities, and 3) Transformations. No previous coursework required. All are welcome!



Why are we here?

We're here, in part, because we're interested in the Middle East, and want to know more about its peoples, cultures, histories, religions, or politics. Maybe we want to visit, maybe we already did visit, maybe we come from there, or maybe we're just curious. The principle aim of this course is to cultivate this curiosity, and channel it into a detailed, contextualized, and humanistic understanding of other times and places.

Literature helps us do that in several ways. First, it gives us a view of the complexity of lived human experience. People are not just the categories and labels we hear in the news: they have everyday lives, histories, futures, problems, and aspirations. Second, stories and storytelling are pervasive in all aspects of our own lives, whether social, economic, political, or medical. Understanding how stories work will therefore help us better understand the institutions that govern our society, and gain insight into all the other subjects we're studying. Last and not least, literature has a moral purpose. Whether fiction or non-fiction, literature provides a safe space to reflect on our values, work through ethical dilemmas, compare ourselves to the examples set by others, and clarify our sense of purpose in this world.



How are we going to do this?

Every week of this course will have **three (3)** different activities. They are as follows:

1) The Lecture

- * At the beginning of each week, you will watch a lecture on **VoiceThread**, or a film.
- * Each VoiceThread lecture will have a few very **simple questions** to answer to make sure you're following along. This counts for **10% of your overall grade** (see above).
- * There is no specific deadline for submitting your responses to the lecture questions. However, you should view the lecture (or film) **before** getting starting on the week's reading, as it will contain important information and guidelines for approaching the text.
- * We will get practice using VoiceThread during the first week, so don't panic if it's new to you!

2) The Reading (& Worksheet)

- * All readings will be made available as PDFs free of charge! Go to **SAKAI** → **Resources**.
- * For each reading, you must complete a **worksheet** (or similar assignment) containing basic comprehension questions. This counts for **25% of your overall grade**.
- * Please read these questions **before** you start reading so you know what you're reading for!
- * Submit the worksheet on **SAKAI** → **Assignments** each week before Thursday, 11:59 pm.

3) The Forum

- * For more in-depth discussion of the reading, you will post an **original response or question** to a prompt in the forum (**SAKAI** → **Forums**).
- * This is due each week before Thursday, 11:59 pm – that is, at the same time as the worksheet. So, you should consider them part of the same assignment, even though they are graded separately.
- * Your response/question should be thoughtful and demonstrate real engagement with the reading. However, it doesn't need to be long. A few sentences should do it.
- * You must also post **two (2) responses** to a question or comment posted by another student. This is due each week before Sunday, 11:59 pm.
- * This counts for **25% of your overall grade**.



Assessments

Quizzes

In lieu of a midterm exam, there will be **three (3)** short quizzes spread evenly throughout the semester. In each, you will be asked to define 10 to 15 key terms, and write one short essay (2-3 paragraphs) on a topic previously discussed in class. Each quiz counts for **10% or your total grade = 30% all together**.

Final Paper

This will be a long essay or a series of short essays in response to given prompts. 6-10 pp. double-spaced. Counts for **10% of your total grade**.

Instructor Information

Communication

I welcome and encourage you to share ideas, questions, and concerns about the class with your classmates and with me in whatever format you feel most comfortable with. I also value your feedback on any aspect of the course, including content, format, or anything else you would like to discuss.

The best way to contact me is through email: bk311@amesall.rutgers.edu. I usually respond within 36 hours during the week, or within 48 hours if it's a weekend. If I don't respond within that period, feel free to send me a follow-up email. I am also available for office hours via Skype, Zoom, or Webex. To set up an appointment, please send me an email so we can agree on a time.

A note on sending emails: You do not need to begin your message by apologizing for something, whether that's lateness or illness or whatever. No excuses needed. Just begin with a simple greeting ("Hello Prof. Koerber ...") and explain how I can help you.

I accept emojis as valid linguistic-communicative tools 😊

Teaching Approach

I am committed to helping everyone succeed in this class. I recognize and respect differences in learning styles, reading speed, comfort with academic and literary language, and so forth. If you **contact me for help**, I will think *more* highly of you, not less. *Please do reach out to me as frequently as you want to*, so that I may help you more effectively.

I subscribe to the theory of **"multiple intelligences."** Some of us are better with visual-spatial intelligence, others are better with verbal-linguistic intelligence or logical-mathematical intelligence. Some of us are geniuses when it comes to emotions, sounds, bodily movement, or moral and spiritual dimensions. The activities in the class aim to address all of these abilities, though obviously some more than others: there will be plenty of visual and verbal engagement, and a good deal of opportunities for emotional and moral judgment, but – alas – not much bodily movement, as we're all confined to our homes.

As much as we all have different kinds of intelligence, all of us also have what are called **"learning disabilities."** These might be technical aspects of how our brains function differently, or they can be related to medical or emotional/mental states. I recognize all of these as potential hurdles to academic success, and urge you to reach out to me, or to advising and counseling services at Rutgers. Any information you share with me will be confidential.

Finally, whatever your strengths and weaknesses, please be advised that **self-advocacy is key** to your success in this class and beyond. I can only help if you communicate with me as clearly and frequently as possible.



Course Policies

Technology

A **desktop or laptop** computer with **regular and reliable internet access** is required for this class. A smartphone is not acceptable to use for any part of this class. Please sort out any and all technology-related issues **before** enrolling, and make sure you have a stable and comfortable learning environment.

If you want to enroll in this course but anticipate special issues with technology or work/living environment, please contact me before the first week of this class so we can work something out. Keep in mind, however, that **I am not your IT assistant**.

Course Announcements

You must check your email regularly for course updates and announcements. Reminders and changes may be issued regarding course readings, assignments, or due dates.

Note on Content

Some of the texts we'll read deal with issues like war, violence, and sexuality that some students may find disturbing or offensive. This is part of the experience, and part of the special challenge, of engaging with world literature.

Discussion Guidelines

During the first week, we will **collaborate to create “etiquette” guidelines** for our class discussions. I'd like to hear from everyone about how we can best have engaging, productive, and mutually respectful conversations. What kinds of behavior are acceptable, and what kinds are best avoided? What does a responsible conversation look like online?

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism or cheating in any form is a serious offense and will result, at the very least, in a grade of F for the course, and possible expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with policies on academic integrity at Rutgers: academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/



Help!

Rutgers SAS has a very useful webpage for students needing help with anything from writing skills and tutoring to mental health counseling, disabilities, and registration issues: sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/help
Please take advantage of this resource!



Course Schedule

Week 1 (Tuesday, Sept. 1 – Sunday, Sept. 6)

All activities for the first week are required, but you will not be graded for them. This will give us the opportunity to familiarize ourselves with the online landscape of the course.

- Carefully Read Syllabus
- VoiceThread: Watch Course Intro 1 (Topics and themes)
- VoiceThread: Watch Course Intro 2 (Course policies and personal introductions)
 - Record personal introduction on final slide
- Forums: contribute to discussion “etiquette” guidelines
- Optional: Video on “Active Reading”

Week 2 (Monday, Sept. 7 – Sunday, Sept. 13)

- Lecture: “Where is the Middle East?”
- Reading: Hussain, *Muslims and the Making of America*
+ Worksheet
- Forums

Unit I: Identities

Week 3 (Sept. 14 – Sept. 20)

- Lecture: “Arabs, Jews, and Arab Jews”
- Readings: Ella Shohat, “Dislocated Identities: Reflections of an Arab Jew”; Almog Behar, “I’m One of the Jews”
+ Worksheet
- Forums

Week 4 (Sept. 21 – Sept. 27)

- Film: *The Ornament of the World* (PBS, 2019)
- Reading: “Songs and Poetry of al-Andalus” + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 5 (Sept. 28 – Oct. 4)

- Lecture: “Arabs and Persians in India and China”
- Reading: Ramhurmuzi, *Wonders of India* + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 6 (Oct. 5 – Oct. 11)

- Lecture: “The Wondrous World of Evliya Çelebi”
- Reading: Selections from Çelebi, *Book of Travels* + Worksheet
- Quiz I: Complete before Sunday at 11:59pm

Unit 2: Spiritualities

Week 7 (Oct. 12 – Oct. 18)

- Film: *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2007)
- Reading: Selections from *Persepolis* + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 8 (Oct. 19 – Oct. 25)

- Lecture: “Literature and Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia”
- Reading: Selections from *Inanna* + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 9 (Oct. 26 – Nov. 1)

- Lecture: “Judaisms in North Africa”
- Reading: Danon, *Ninette of Sin Street* + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 10 (Nov. 2 – Nov. 8)

- Lecture: “How to Read Islamic Mystical Poetry”
- Reading: Selections from Attar, *Conference of the Birds* + Worksheet
- Quiz 2: Complete before Sunday at 11:59pm

Unit 3: Transformations

Week 11 (Nov. 9 – Nov. 15)

- Lecture: “Alexander in History and Legend”
- Reading: Selections from the *Alexander Romance* + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 12 (Nov. 16 – Nov. 22)

- Lecture: “Arabic Comics”
- Reading: Selected comics + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 13 (Nov. 23 – Nov. 29) (NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Recess)

Week 14 (Nov. 30 – Dec. 6)

- Lecture: “The *Maqamat*” + Podcast
- Reading: Selections from al-Hariri, *Impostures* + Worksheet
- Forums

Week 15 (Dec. 7 – Dec. 10)

- Lecture: “How to Write and Other Advice”
- Quiz 3: Complete before Dec. 10 at 11:59pm
- Final Paper due before Monday, Dec. 14 at 11:59pm