

Humanities University

Study Guide

LIT 535 Middle Eastern Literature

Bedford Anthology of World Literature, Books 1-6. Boston: Bedford-St. Martins, 2004.

UNIT	WEEKS	TOPICS	READINGS
I		Ancient Middle East	
	1	Mesopotamia: Earliest Literatures The Descent of Inanna The Epic of Creation	Book 1, pp. 15-22 Book 1, pp. 23-39 Book 1, pp. 40-54
		Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of key stories and include any ideas and themes.
		Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: myth, epic
		Essay Topics	E1: What is the form of the earliest writing in Mesopotamia? E2: How did the political system affect writing? E3: Which stories could also be considered mythical?
	2	Epic of Gilgamesh	Book 1, pp. 55-91
		Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of plot, themes, main characters, character analysis of the main character, critical scenes.
		Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: cuneiform, hero
		Essay Topics	E1: What kind of society existed in Mesopotamia at the time of Gilgamesh? E2. How does reading Gilgamesh bring one a deeper understanding of the nature of friendship? E3. Why does Aruru make Enkidu? E4. Who gave Gilgamesh a "restless heart"?
	3	Egypt Hymns Love Poems	Book 1, pp. 93-103 Book 1, pp. 104-117 Book 1, pp. 118-126
		Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: poetry, hieroglyphics, simile
		Essay Topics	E1: Describe the context of the Egyptian writings. Who wrote the poems and hymns? E2. In the Hymns, What caused the creation of man? E3. In Love Poem 37, how does the poem depict love sickness? What is the cure for it? E4. In Love Poem 40, how does the poem liken the lady love to a gazelle? In what condition is the gazelle? What is the overall feeling that the poem communicates?
	4	Ancient Hebrew Literature The Song of Songs	Book 1, pp. 127-133 Book 1, pp. 208-220
		Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: metaphor

Essay Topics
 E1: Describe the Song of Songs. What is it about? Where does it take place?
 E2. In Song of Songs, what are the bride and the bridegroom awaiting?
 E3. Why might some people suggest that the Song of Songs is a metaphor for the desire that the pure of heart have to be united with heaven?
 E4. In Psalm 23, how does the passage provide comfort to the reader? What role does it assign to God?

II Middle Period

5	Christianity and Islam The New Testament The Koran	Book 2, pp. 15-22 Book 2, pp. 23-27 Book 2, pp. 97-105
Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.	
Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms:	
Essay Topics	E1: What is the relation of the Koran to earlier works? E2. When was the Koran written? E3. Describe some of the primary characteristics of the New Testament. What was its initial impact? What language(s) was it written in? Who was the first audience? E4. Describe the structure of the Koran. What was its initial impact? What language was it written in? Where was it first adopted?	
6	Muhammad Ibn Ishaq The Life of Mohammed	Book 2, pp. 130-133 Book 2, pp. 134-158
Author	Please write a brief author biography.	
Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.	
Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: biography, sura	
Essay Topics	E1: Discuss how the book describes the life of Muhammed. E2. In "The Ascent to Heaven" what does Muhammed learn about the nature of heaven and hell?	
7	St. Augustine The Confessions	Book 2, pp. 64-69 Book 2, pp. 70-96
Author	Please write a brief author biography.	
Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: confessional	
Essay Topics	E1: What kind of person does Augustine claim to be before conversion? E2. What does St. Augustine's confession suggest about human nature? Is it good, bad, flawed, or perfect? What is the purpose of confessing / admitting one's flaws? E3. What kinds of behaviors, attributes, and thoughts does Augustine confess to having?	
8	Arabia and Persia Pre-Islamic Arabic Literature	Book 2, pp. 355-363

	Imru Al-Qays	Book 2, pp. 364-376
Author	Please write a brief author biography.	
Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.	
Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: qasida	
Essay Topics	E1: Please describe the life and the works of Al-Qays. E2. What are the forms and divisions of the qasida? E3. Please provide an overview of the Mu'allaqah, and describe the memories and feelings. How does the poem depict lovers' emotions? E4. What does the narrator of Mu'allaqah remember and how does he feel about Fatimah? What does the poem say about what an individual will do for love?	
9	Abu Al-Qasem Ferdowsi The Tragedy of Sohrab and Rostam Farid Ud-Din Attar The Conference of the Birds	Book 2, pp. 377-381 Book 2, pp. 382-400 Book 2, 401-405 Book 2, 406-419
Author	Please write a brief author biography.	
Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.	
Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: epic, couplet, epic, sufi poetry	
Essay Topics	E1. How does the story explore the concept of heroism? E2. What the fact that Rostam does not recognize his son, what does it signify? What is the significance that he kills his own son? E3. What literary device is used to describe Sohrab's steed? E1. Describe Sufism. E2. In "The Conference of the Birds," a group of birds (individual human souls) is under the leadership of a hoopoe (spiritual master) who determine to search for the legendary Simurgh bird (God). How do they explore their human limitations? E3. What significance does the quest have? Who finishes it and how?	
10	Jalaloddin Rumi Selected Poems	Book 2, 420-426 Book 2, 427-434
Author	Please write a brief author biography.	
Literary Terms	Please briefly define terms: mysticism, sufism	
Essay Topics	E1: Please provide an overview of Rumi's life and works. E2: Please discuss mysticism and Sufism. E3. How does Rumi's poetry explore love and transcendence? E4. Please describe themes and ideas in "A Basket of Fresh Bread." E5. How does "A Basket of Fresh Bread" explore looking within oneself rather than outside?	

E6. What is the theme of "Checkmate"? How does Rumi express that tests and trials of life are necessary for the soul's progression?
 E7. In "Only Breath," what does Rumi say about the mystical experience of the Beloved?
 E8. What are the images in the poem that reinforce the idea of an inner life being more valuable than the outer life.

11-12 A Thousand and One Nights Book 2, 435-440
 From *The Arabian Nights* Book 2, 441-459

Literary Analysis Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.

Literary Terms Please briefly define terms: story, tale

Essay Topics
 E1: Describe how the stories reflect on the nature of narrative and its affect on human emotions.
 E2. Who does Sheherazade tell the stories to? Why? What is the nature of the stories?
 E3. In the Tale of the Merchant and His Wife, what does the donkey do to the ox?
 E4. In the same tale, from whom does the merchant learn how to deal with his wife? What is the significance?

III Early Modern

13 Celebi Book 3, pp. 245-246
 Book of Travels Book 3, pp. 248-251

Author Please write a brief author biography.

Literary Analysis Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.

Literary Terms Please briefly define terms: travel literature

Essay Topics
 E1: Describe how the Ottoman Empire's structure made it possible for Celebi to travel and write about his observations.
 E2. Discuss the role of curiosity in developing an open mind and an ability to appreciate different cultures.
 E3. What are some of Abdal Khan's skills? What is his attitude about science?
 E4. Describe the pools, jets, and fountains in the Khan's pleasure garden. Where is this region? How do Celebi's descriptions help one get a sense of the values that are held by the Khan?

IV Modern

14 Tawfiq Al-Hakim Book 6, 586-589
 The Fate of a Cockroach Book 6, 590-647

Author Please write a brief author biography.

Literary Analysis Please provide a brief description of the plot of the play and describe ideas and themes.

Literary Terms Please briefly define terms: theatre of the absurd, satire

Essay Topics
 E1: Describe the surrealism found in "The Fate of a Cockroach".
 E2. Who are the main characters in "The Fate of a Cockroach"? What kind of play is it? Where does it take place?
 E3. Describe the satire found in The Fate of a Cockroach. How

does the play offer a criticism of society and the social order?

15	Naguib Mahfouz Zaabalawi Alifa Rifaat My World of the Unknown	Book 6, 797-802 Book 6, 803-811 Book 6, 1127-1129 Book 6, 1130-1140
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Author	Please write a brief author biography for Naguib Mahfouz and Alifa Rifaat.
Literary Analysis	Please provide a brief description of key narratives and include any ideas and themes.
Literary Terms	Please briefly define the terms: social realism, existential modernism, Hadith, djinn, archetype
Essay Topics	E1: How is the narrator' search for Zaabalawi also a quest for his own spiritual roots? Please cite specific passages to support your point. How is the story concerned with the secularization of Egyptian life and the loss of religious traditions? E2. Discuss the role of faith in the story. E3. Discuss the views of women as expressed in Alifa Rifaat's writing. E4. What are some of the themes in "My World of the Unknown"? Describe what happens when the narrator encounters the snake while she is in the kitchen. What could be a possible interpretation of this event or scene? What types of figurative meanings or interpretations are possible? How does the presence of creatures that can move from one dimension to the next – such as djinn – make one more aware of the limits individuals place on their own thoughts, and their own consciousness?

V

Finals

16	Review, Essay, Exam
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