Reading:
Reading is what we do in this class, plus talking about our reading, and the hits just keep on coming, all semester long. The reading assignments are ambitious (else you’d never get through all those books you’ve bought) but not unreasonable, presuming you have done the summer reading. With those two big books under your belt, you can start reading *Blindness* as we discuss *USA* and thus keep on pace all semester long. As we discuss our second big summer book, you’ll plough more than halfway through *Middlemarch*. The schedule anticipates daily reading, not the every-other-day of the 1-3-5 schedule, and also counts weekends as reading days. Students in the past have reported that the class requires about 10 hours of reading a week, less for those who are faster readers.

Group Elective Books:
Germans have a nice term for an “elective” course: *Wahlpflicht* or “Required Choice.” You will each make a required choice and, in addition to the books all of us read in common, you’ll choose a book to read that is not on the reading list for either this semester with me or Spring semester with Scott Richardson (a list of likely books for Spring comes at the end of this syllabus). There’s safety in numbers, so we’ll group together in these choices: maybe 4-6 groups of about 3-4 students reading each book. The books should be moderate length, and I’m willing to negotiate some deals, such as a selection of Boccaccio’s tales from the *Decameron* or Chaucer’s from *Canterbury Tales*, etc. Let’s decide on these groups soon—by the second week of classes. Each group will spend about twenty minutes talking to the class about its book, either on Halloween or All-Souls’ Day.

Writing & Responding:
In addition to an 8-10 page essay near the end of the semester, each of you will write six shorter essays, all for shared reading and response in a public folder. (We’ll switch from our summer Google Group to Public Folders since the schedule of posting will be predictable.) I have divided the class into four groups for these essays:

- **Group A:** Shaina, Dave, Lindsey, Mandy
- **Group B:** Brett, Sophia, Nick, Jessica
- **Group C:** Anna, Ben D, Erin O, Elizabeth
- **Group D:** Ben B, Rachel, Erin W, Matt

Your sworn duty on days when your group’s code letter appears on the schedule is to post to the Public Folder by 10 PM the night before class an essay addressing the book to be discussed the next day. Essays will be some 300-500 words, longer if you are inspired. Your essay may explore a topic for class discussion or it may respond to previous writing and/or discussion on this book, connecting this with the new reading. Essays can be exploratory in character rather than locked-down thesis defenses, but should be reflectively coherent and not stream-of-consciousness musings. They should evince careful thought, delight, inspire or provoke your classmates, and, in a word, be brilliant.

Each of us swears to read each classmate’s essay before class. I also expect you to use the public folder to comment on either these essays or class discussion by posting brief responses from time to time. These can be more spur-of-the-moment (or carefully worded, if you choose) Feel free to post comments you couldn’t get in during class or any other worthy reflection, factoid witty repartee or other bon mot. Let’s say that a dozen or so of these random responses to the Public Folder during the course of the semester will constitute a minimal expectation of good participation on this front. I will try to respond to the essays *tout ensemble* each day.
Final Essay:
By the end of the term, you will have written a longer essay (2400-3500 words) that is polished, insightful, brilliant, perhaps profound, certainly literate, possibly creative—in short, a wowie-kazowie essay. This essay should treat at least one of the books we have read together during the semester. You are free to trace an idea or character-type, dilemma, theme or trope through several works or focus on one particular work. In early December (around the 4th) we will gather in groupings of 4-5 students (determined by schedules), plus me, at the Meeting Grounds for an hour and a half session to discuss each paper. You will email your essay to me and the others in your reading session by 6 PM on the day before we meet. We will all come to the coffeehouse with comments prepared on each paper. No class on December 4 to help with this scheduling.

Objectives:
Educational experts claim that no learning can ever take place unless clear objectives are established. Clarity of objectives is one of the five sacred _topoi_ of the CSB/SJU course evaluation ritual. Even though this belief may be hoo-haw, we will have objectives: to read fifteen great books and have thirty-some equally great discussions about them. Our intended outcomes are intelligence, wit, humor, and wisdom, as well as cultivating a vital and interactive acquaintance with the writers, thinkers, and artists who wrote these books, and with one another as readers of them.

Method, Attendance and Other Expectations:
In philosophy classes, I start this section of the syllabus with a Nietzsche quote about “slow reading.” Not so here! I’ve already explained the reading: you will have to stay on a regular schedule, developing the habit of always having a book beside your favorite chair, in your backpack, somewhere at hand. Class will not primarily be teacher-led, but be dominated by you in various modes of discussion: small and large group, perhaps with a gimmick here or there to shake us up. I have been counseled by other Great Books teachers that good discussion doesn’t just happen: you will have to work on it, and that means from time to time that we may talk about how to organize our discussions. I will not lecture—maybe a mini-commentary here and there on some particular topic or approach. This is a special class and I will expect that discussions be more substantive and reach more profound levels than in other classes, even other honors classes. That does not mean that everything you say will be brilliant: many false steps and even patently obvious steps are needed for any steps eventually to find fruitful avenues of thought about the remarkable books we’re tackling.

Here is the place for a remark I hinted at this summer. We will aim always to be generous readers, not just intelligent or critical readers. A generous reader—of the books as well as of one another’s essays and comments—always assumes that the text in question has something of real value to convey. If a text doesn’t click right away or seems boring or even repugnant, think to yourself, “But this author threw herself into this work with all her energy and passion.” Assume that the author considered an idea to be so important that he dedicated a significant portion of his life to getting it right in his novel or poem or play or essay. A generous reader realizes that he or she owes it to the author to try to unlock what’s great in the work at hand. And that goes for our own writings and discussion comments: read one another with the generosity and respect with which you’d like to be read yourself. It will open discussion and insight up and not close it down. And be generous to yourself as well: if you don’t immediately “get it” with a book, respect your own intelligence and sensibility and assume that this author wanted you to moved to think or feel in various ways and be patient enough with yourself to try to discover a way in—the class is designed to help one another here.

Attendance: As always, I have strict attendance policies: no free misses. none, zilch, nada. All absences are to be cleared with me, preferably ahead of time. I consider only illnesses and family emergencies to be valid excuses—regular doctor appointments should be scheduled at times outside of class time. If in unusual circumstances, something else comes up—the sooner you can let me know about a conflict, the better. If you miss class without communicating or by neglect, your grade will suffer.
Your Commitments:
- Attend every class meeting.
- Read faithfully all book assignments and public folder essays by the due date.
- Participate in every small-group and most large-group discussions.
- Write very good public folder essays by the designated time and other responses as described.
- Write an A quality final essay, again in time to share it prior to your assigned session.
- Attend extracurricular class events (see below) insofar as possible.

Grading: Your records tell me you should all expect to receive A’s in this class. Given those records and the ability and eagerness you’ve manifested, I am ready and willing to comply with your desires (referring only to grades here!) so long as you live up to your hype. Several previous Great Books teachers have warned me that it’s very possible, even likely, for Great Books students to take on too much and let the class responsibilities slide a bit, including not only reading schedule but quality of essays and class participation. I don’t want cultivate the usual “grade consciousness” but focus instead on quality consciousness and idea consciousness. Thus, I won’t grade individual essays, but will have a visit with you if your work—public folder essays, final essay, discussion participation—is below the expectations for A-level work, and I won’t be shy about this. I’d like to give all A’s and will hope that I can. But I won’t compromise standards.

Extracurriculars:
All work and no play makes Jack and Jill dull children. (inclusive language kind of ruins those old saws, doesn’t it?!) I’d like to carry on the tradition of carrying on outside of class to the extent that this is possible. We may need to draft or elect a social commissar, but here are some starter suggestions:
- Games like Trivial Pursuit, Pictionary, Balderdash, Catch-Phrase, sometime soon, in some lounge or apartment or “festival house” in Saint Joe.
- Big Yellow Ball: a Game for All and None (all can enjoy and none can master). Sometime in week two, for an hour, on the tundra?
- A movie on DVD, either contemporary or classic, or one in town if something decent shows up.
- An excursion to the Twin Cities, perhaps to visit the new Guthrie Theater or some other fun event.

Prognostications:
Scott has declared the following books to be likely candidates for the Spring list, so they are out-of-bounds for the Fall elective book. He “won’t necessarily choose all of these but I might, definitely the great majority of them.”
- John Fowles, The Magus
- Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita
- Thomas Pynchon, V.
- Robertson Davies, What’s Bred in the Bone
- Iris Murdoch, The Sea, the Sea (interim reading)
- An unnamed Icelander, Njal’s Saga
- Homer, The Odyssey
- Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote
- Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary
- Henrik Ibsen, (could be any of the four plays in our volume)
- Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse
- Henry David Thoreau, Walden
- Euripides, The Bacchae
- Isak Dineson, some of Seven Gothic Tales
- Knut Hamsun, Hunger
- Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude
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<tr>
<td><strong>August 28</strong></td>
<td>29 1 Short class—Intro, Dos Passos, <em>USA</em></td>
<td>30 2</td>
<td>31 3A Dos Passos, <em>USA</em>: <em>Forty-Second Parallel</em></td>
<td>September 1 4</td>
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<td>Dos Passos, <em>USA</em>: <em>Nineteen-Nineteen</em></td>
<td>6 1C</td>
<td>7 2</td>
<td>8 Saramago, <em>Blindness</em></td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>19 Shelley, <em>Frankenstein</em>, X–XXIV</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>22 Dostoevsky, <em>Brothers Karamazov</em> I</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>26 Dostoevsky, <em>Brothers Karamazov</em> II</td>
<td>27 Heritage Day</td>
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<td>29 Dostoevsky, <em>Brothers Karamazov</em> III</td>
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<td><strong>October 2</strong></td>
<td>3 1C Dostoevsky, <em>Brothers Karamazov</em> IV</td>
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<td>5 Long weekend</td>
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<td>10 4</td>
<td>11 5A</td>
<td>12 6</td>
<td>13 Eliot, <em>Middlemarch</em>, VI</td>
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<td>17 Eliot, <em>Middlemarch</em>, VII</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>31 Freud, <em>Civilization and Its Discontents</em></td>
<td>November 1 2</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7 6</td>
<td>8 1C</td>
<td>9 2</td>
<td>10 Faulkner, <em>Light in August</em>, 13–16</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>14 Faulkner, <em>Light in August</em>, 17–21</td>
<td>15 6</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>3C Group Books II</td>
<td>21 4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23 Thanksgiving</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>28 6</td>
<td>29 1 Conrad, <em>Heart of Darkness</em>, continued</td>
<td>30 2</td>
<td>December 1 3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5 Paper Meetings Day</td>
<td>6 6</td>
<td>7 1 Shakespeare, <em>Hamlet</em>, I–II</td>
<td>Voltaire, <em>Candide</em></td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>12 4</td>
<td>13 5 Stoppard, <em>Rosencrantz &amp; Guildenstern Are Dead</em></td>
<td>14 6</td>
<td>15 Study Day</td>
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Fall Semester 2006: Reading & Discussion plan

1. August 29 (T1): John Dos Passos, *USA*
2. August 31 (Th3): *USA: 42nd Parallel*, Group A
4. September 6 (W1): *USA: The Big Money*, Group C
5. September 8 (F3): José Saramago, *Blindness* (complete), Group D
6. September 12 (T5): José Saramago, *Blindness*, Group A
9. September 20 (W5): Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*
10. September 22 (F1): Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* I, Group D
11. September 26 (T3): Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* II, Group A
12. September 29 (F5): Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* III, Group B
13. October 3 (T1): Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* IV, Group C
22. October 31 (T1): Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (complete), Group C
24. November 6 (M5): No Class (Dennis in San Francisco)
28. November 16 (Th1): Group Books I
29. November 20 (M3): Group Books II
32. December 1 (F3): Voltaire: *Candide*
33. December 5 (T3): No class—paper meetings
34. December 7 (Th1): Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I–II
36. December 13 (W3): Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*