

The Well-Trained Mind Academy
Classics of East Asian Literature

Course Blackboard site: www.wtma.blackboard.com

Recommended Prerequisites: (at least one course out of the following)

- Literature of the Ancient World
- Literature of the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds
- History of the Ancient World
- History of the Medieval World

Course Texts

- Selections from *The Analects of Confucius* (free online)
- Selections from *Mencius* (free online)
- Rexroth, Kenneth. *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*. ISBN 0811201805
- Rexroth, Kenneth. *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese*. ISBN 0811201813
- Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. ISBN 0679729534
- Sei Shonagon, *The Pillow Book*. ISBN 0140448063
- Daughter of Sugawara no Takasue. *The Sarashina Diary*. (free online)
- Kamo no Chomei. *An Account of My Hut* (free online)
- Wu Ch'eng-en. *Monkey: Folk Novel of China*. ISBN 0802130860

Note: There are multiple translations and abridgements of most of these works. To reduce confusion, please be sure to purchase the texts with the ISBNs given on this syllabus.

Course Description

The classics of East Asia were written over the course of approximately two thousand years, from c. 500 B.C. to A.D. 1600, and span various genres. This survey course attempts to provide students with broad exposure to the most influential texts across this time period, from ancient philosophical works to poetry, memoir to short essay, and early examples of the novel. Through lectures and discussion, students will learn about the cultural, religious, and philosophical background that gave rise to the East Asian literary tradition. We will pay particular attention to how the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism echo throughout the texts, sometimes at odds with one another.

Students are expected to bring a critical eye to class, making connections and comparisons between these texts and what they know of the great works of the West. They will examine the historical contexts of the works, and investigate the influence of literary figures and works of literature on the political and societal development of Asia.

Please note: This course is designed for high-school students. These readings are composed in prose styles that younger readers may have difficulty understanding, and some of the texts contain subjects and themes that more sensitive readers may find uncomfortable. If you have any concerns we encourage you to check the texts out at the local library before enrolling your student.

Written Assignments

Students will be expected to post responses to general prompts on the discussion board on a weekly basis. These responses require students to analyze, critique, and engage the required reading(s) of the week. For example, a critical response could identify a strategy deployed by the author, theorize why the author uses it, and pose a question of the class. Think of the critical response as an opportunity to process your thoughts on the reading and inspire responses from classmates. Along with posting their own discussion board responses, students are expected to engage meaningfully with no fewer than 2 of their classmates' posts.

Additionally, students will write two analytical essays (1,000 word min.) in which they posit original arguments/theses about texts covered in class, or, with permission, a related text not on the list. These essays are original (not based on prompts) and graded by rubric.

A final project will combine critical analysis and the opportunity for creative invention. Students could write a longer argumentative essay about one or more of the course texts. Students could also make an audio or video presentation, or respond to one of the course texts in original poetry or Socratic dialogue. Since this is the culminating work of the semester, students should feel at liberty to develop project ideas as they see fit, as long as they are capable of articulating how and why the project is relevant to the course.

Class Participation

The vast majority of the student's evaluation will be derived from their willingness to engage in classroom discussion and to engage critically with the new concepts introduced by the texts. The ability to eloquently and thoughtfully articulate one's perspective is at the heart of all writing and reading. Successful students will submit polished, formal discussion board responses and papers which examine the course texts and their fellow students' ideas with mature, critical yet respectful eyes.

To receive full credit for participation, students actively pose and answer questions in class and online discussion, and contribute to the analysis and evaluation of peer work. Students **must** request excused absences in advance; absences without notification will result in a participation grade of zero for the day.

Grading Breakdown

Attendance & Participation: 25%
Discussion board responses: 25%
Analytical essays: 25%
Final project: 25%

Example Schedule

Each week below will have a reading assignment, and an accompanying discussion board response (see Blackboard for weekly prompts). These assignments will be due before the *next* class session.

Week 1. Introduction to Chinese philosophy and the historical context of Confucius and Mencius.

Assignment: Read selections from *The Analects of Confucius*.

Week 2. Confucius and Mencius, continued.

Assignment: Read selections from *Mencius*.

Week 3. Introduction to Chinese Poetry

Assignment: Read the first thirty-five poems of *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* and listen carefully to the audio recordings.

Week 4. Introduction to Japanese Poetry

Assignment: Read the first thirty-three poems of *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* and listen carefully to the audio recordings.

Week 5~8. *The Tale of Genji* and the literary Golden Age of Japan.

Assignment: Read *The Tale of Genji* (abridged, 3 chapters per week)

First analytical essay due Week 7

Week 9~10. *The Pillow Book*: The invention of the blog?

Assignment: Read *The Pillow Book*.

Week 11. Japanese memoir as history, philosophy, and social commentary

Assignment: Read *The Sarashina Diary* and *An Account of My Hut*.

Week 12. Chinese Poetry, continued

Assignment: Read the remaining poems from *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* and listen carefully to the audio recordings.

Week 13. Japanese Poetry, continued

Assignment: Read the remaining poems from *One Hundred Poems from the Japanese* and listen carefully to the audio recordings.

Second analytical essay due

Week 14~17. *Journey to the West*: Chinese fiction

Assignment: Read *Monkey* (abridgement of *Journey to the West*, 8 chapters per week)

Week 15: Final project topic due

Week 18. What Have We Learned? What Did We Miss?

Assignment: Finish your final project.