General Information:

Course ID: English 147A  
Days: Monday & Wednesday  
Time: 1:30 pm – 3:20 pm  
Location: Lathrop 298

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Jesse Nathan  
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Office: TBA  
Office Hours: TBA

Since its invention in the nineteenth century, baseball has been steeped in lore and literature. A cultural commentator recently pegged it one of three significant American contributions to world culture, along with jazz and the U.S. Constitution. Literary and artistic representations of baseball abound, often treating it as more than a game and only a little less than a religion. In this class, we'll track representations and grand claims made for baseball by American poets, novelists, and commentators of all sorts. We'll weigh the cornucopia of literary nonfiction depicting the game. The goal will be to map the scope of this literature, defining a tradition’s edges, determining its peaks, assessing its limits, challenges, and stakes.

This class is open to anyone, whether familiar with the game, or totally new to it. We'll cover a variety of issues: Americana, mythologies of sport, gender and class, race, history, sociology, lots of poetry, film ...

After the violence of the Civil War, Walt Whitman called the then-new sport a balm: “I see great things in baseball,” he said, “It’s our game—the American game. It will take our people out-of-doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism. Tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set. Repair these losses, and be a blessing to us.” A century later, former Major League Baseball commissioner and one-time Yale President (and literary scholar) Bart Giamatti would wax thusly: “It breaks your heart. It is designed to break your heart. The game begins in spring, when everything else begins again, and it blossoms in the summer, filling the afternoons and evenings, and then as soon as the chill rains come, it stops, and leaves you to face the fall alone.”

In this class, we'll track all kinds of lyrical notions of baseball, from Whitman and Giamatti and many others. We'll explore why they wrap their claims in such weightiness. We'll read poetry by Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Donald Hall, novels like Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, films like *Field of Dreams*, and literary nonfiction like David Halberstam’s *Summer of ‘49* and Michael Lewis’s *Moneyball*. We'll consider recent representations like *Pitch*.

Time and approval pending, we may also take a behind-the-scenes field trip to an Oakland Athletics game.

Required Texts:

- A packet of short readings by Whitman, Moore, Williams, Hall, Frost, Kenneth Koch, Robert Pinsky, Don DeLillo, and others (handed out by instructor).


### Main Assignments

Your grade will be based on your written assignments, as well as class attendance and participation. If you are shy, please talk to me in private the first week—we’ll figure out how to measure your involvement, and the depth of your contact with the readings, in a way that works for you.

The written assignments will consist of two “thinkpieces”—one-page writing exercises designed to help you focus and compress your writing. In each of these, you will “read” closely a very short passage from one of our texts or films, working to contextualize and illuminate what’s going on in the passage, and why it demands such close attention. The final paper, 5–8 pages, will synthesize several sources in a well-developed research inquiry. We’ll develop research questions and workshop your draft during the course. Each student will meet with the instructor about the paper, and each student will undertake revision with instructor guidance.

### Schedule

#### WEEK 1

June 26 (M): Introduction to the course. What is literature? What is literary history? Why baseball?

#### WEEK 2


#### WEEK 3

July 10 (M): What is the meaning of this history? And is it literary? **First think piece due.**
WEEK 4


July 19 (W): Finish Malamud. Reading from hand-outs, as well as Dawidoff. **Final paper topic proposal due.**

WEEK 5

July 24 (M): Sketching a “poetics of baseball.” Readings from the packet, as well as Dawidoff.


WEEK 6


WEEK 7

August 7 (M): Readings from Dawidoff. Poetry. Readings from *Into the Temple of Baseball*.

August 9 (W): **Rough draft of final paper due at class-time.** Peer reviewing. Revision.

WEEK 8


August 16 (W): Excerpts from *Moneyball* by Michael Lewis. **Final paper due, TBA.**

Other Important Notes
Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae).

Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading.

2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.

3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.

4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

Course Material Support

Stanford University and its faculty are committed to ensuring that all courses are financially accessible to all students. If you are an undergraduate who needs assistance with the cost of course textbooks, supplies, materials and/or fees, you are welcome to ask the Diversity & First-Gen Office for assistance by completing their questionnaire on course textbooks & supplies: http://tinyurl.com/jpbarn or by contacting Joseph Brown, the Associate Director of the Diversity and First-Gen Office (jlbrown@stanford.edu, Old Union Room 207). Dr. Brown is available to connect you with resources and support while ensuring your privacy.