What lies ahead? How will it all end?

Description, Objectives, and Thematic Orientation:

First Year Seminars are intended to serve as an introduction to academic inquiry and the modes of expression that lie at the heart of a liberal arts education. They aim to foster habits of mind fundamental to students’ intellectual and academic development, including critical reading and thinking, sharing ideas and research through discussion, and the ability to write and think clearly and effectively. Integrating explorations of specific questions and topics with the development of skills, these seminars will hopefully foster intellectual curiosity and students’ ability to act on it.

All First Year Seminars have the same five common goals:
1. to expand and deepen students’ understanding of the world and of themselves;
2. to enhance their ability to read and think critically;
3. to enhance their ability to communicate effectively, in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms;
4. to develop the fundamentals of information literacy and library research; and
5. to provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor.

In this particular seminar, which is the second in a two-course sequence on Human Life from Start to Finish, we will try to achieve these goals by reading, discussing, and doing some library research on classic and more recent depictions of the end of individual lives as well as the end of human life and society in general. Readings will include the ancient Babylonian epic of *Gilgamesh*, the Hebrew story of *Job*, Plato’s *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*, the early Christian Revelation to John, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, James Agee’s *A Death in the Family*, Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*. As we read these texts, we will consider, among other things, what they suggest about the nature and significance of human existence.

The preceding course in this sequence – a seminar entitled “In the Beginning: Envisioning the Origin of Human Life” – focused on classic and more recent depictions of the origin of human life and society in general as well as the origin of individual lives in particular. Readings included the ancient Hebrew book of *Genesis*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Charles Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, Kenzaburō Ōe’s *A Personal Matter*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, and Riane Eisler’s *The Chalice and the Blade*. The discussion of these texts included consideration of what they suggest about the nature and significance of human existence. Although the current seminar represents a fitting complement to this previous course, no one will be expected to know or address the texts or issues from this earlier seminar during the current semester.

Other useful information is provided by the following supplementary materials, which will be given to you in paper format and will also be available on our class Blackboard site:
1. Introductory Comments
2. Assignments, Grading, and Other Issues
3. Guidelines for Independent Research
4. Guidelines for Reading and Discussion
5. Guidelines for Essays
**Required Texts** (in the order of reading, with ISBN numbers of required editions):

- John of Patmos, *The Revelation to John* (you will be given a copy of this work)

Be sure that you have these same editions, which are on sale in the campus bookstore, so we will all be on the same page during our discussions. *You are to bring your marked-up copy of each day’s text to class.*

**CLASS SCHEDULE**

Mon. Jan. 14  
Introduction to the Course

**THE END OF INDIVIDUAL LIVES**

Wed. Jan. 16  
*Gilgamesh* (1-9, 65-66, & 69-90)  
(Babylonia/Mesopotamia, ca. 2000 B.C.E.)

As you read, confer the notes (201-283) for clarification and the glossary (286-290) for the identification of names and places.

Fri. Jan. 18  
*Gilgamesh* (91-140)

Mon. Jan. 21  
Review of Library Resources (I)

Meet promptly at 12:00 noon in the Boatwright Computer Classroom (B26).

Wed. Jan. 23  
*Gilgamesh* (141-164)

Fri. Jan. 25  
*Gilgamesh* (165-199)

Mon. Jan. 28  
James Agee, *A Death in the Family* (3-56)  
(U.S.A., 1957)

Wed. Jan. 30  
Agee, *Death* (57-125)

Fri. Feb. 1  
Agee, *Death* (126-187)

Mon. Feb. 4  
Agee, *Death* (188-256)

Wed. Feb. 6  
Agee, *Death* (257-310)

“Critical Thinking, Exploratory Writing, & Formal Essay Writing” will be distributed.

Fri. Feb. 8  
Review and Reflections on *Gilgamesh* and Agee

Discussion of “Critical Thinking, Exploratory Writing, & Formal Essay Writing.”

Essay #1 assignment will be distributed.

Mon. Feb. 11  
No Class – Independent Research

I will be available for consultation in my office from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Your independent research proposal, including an initial bibliography, will be due by
5:00 p.m. as a Word-compatible attachment emailed to dleary@richmond.edu and cwittig@richmond.edu.

(Greece, 4th century, B.C.E.)

Fri. Feb. 15  Plato, *Crito* (*Five Dialogues*, 45-57)

Mon. Feb. 18  No Class – Time for Writing

   Essay #1 will be due in paper format by 5:00 p.m. in my office (Ryland 320)  
or in my mailbox in the English Dept. office (Ryland 307).


Mon. Feb. 25  Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych* (87-121)  
(Russia, 1886)

Wed. Feb. 27  Tolstoy, *Death* (121-144)

Fri. Mar. 1  Review and Reflections on Plato and Tolstoy

   Essay #2 assignment will be distributed. You are strongly encouraged to come  
and speak with me about the argument and evidence that you plan to present in this  
essay.

**THE END OF HUMAN LIFE AND SOCIETY**

Mon. Mar. 4  *Job* (3-10 & 11-88)

Wed. Mar. 6  *Job* (89-179)

Fri. Mar. 8  No Class – Independent Research

   I will be in my office for consultation from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Your updated  
and expanded independent research proposal, with a fully annotated bibliography,  
will be due by 5:00 p.m. as a Word-compatible attachment emailed to  
dleary@richmond.edu and cwittig@richmond.edu.

Spring Break = March 11-15

Mon. Mar. 18  Review of Library Resources (II)

   Meet promptly at 12:00 noon in the Boatwright Computer Classroom (B26).

Wed. Mar. 20  Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (3-72)  
(U.S.A., 2006)

Fri. Mar. 22  McCarthy, *Road* (73-144)


Wed. Mar. 27  McCarthy, *Road* (226-287)

Fri. Mar. 29  No Class – Time for Writing

   Essay #2 will be due in paper format by 5:00 p.m. in my office (Ryland 320)  
or in my mailbox in the English Dept. office (Ryland 307).
Mon. Apr. 1 Review and Reflections on Job and McCarthy

Essay #3 assignment will be distributed. Feedback will be given on any full draft that is submitted by April 19; the final version will be due on April 26. Whether or not you submit a draft by April 19, you are strongly encouraged to come and speak with me about the argument and evidence that you plan to present in this essay.

Wed. Apr. 3 John of Patmos, The Revelation to John (420-434)
(Asia Minor, 81-96 C.E.)

Fri. Apr. 5 Revelation (434-449)

Mon. Apr. 8 No Class – Independent Research

I will be in my office for consultation from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. A written progress report on your independent research project, updating earlier information and providing a summary of your emerging argument or theme, will be due by 5:00 p.m. as a Word-compatible attachment emailed to dleary@richmond.edu and cwittig@richmond.edu. All references, including all new references, should include full bibliographic citations as well as annotations.

Wed. Apr. 10 Don DeLillo, White Noise (1-60)
(U.S.A., 1985)

Fri. Apr. 12 DeLillo, Noise (61-105)

Mon. Apr. 15 DeLillo, Noise 107-163)

Wed. Apr. 17 DeLillo, Noise (165-241)

Fri. Apr. 19 DeLillo, Noise (241-321)

Optional full draft of Essay #3 will be due in paper format by 5:00 p.m. in my office (Ryland 320) or in my mailbox in the English Dept. office (Ryland 307).

Mon. Apr. 22 Review and Reflections on John of Patmos and DeLillo

Evaluation of the Seminar will be conducted.

Take-Home Exam assignment will be distributed.

Wed. Apr. 24 Class Presentations on Independent Research Projects

Fri. Apr. 26 Class Presentations on Independent Research Projects

Essay #3 will be due in paper format by 5:00 p.m. in my office (Ryland 320) or in my mailbox in the English Dept. office (Ryland 307).

Thurs. May 2 Independent Research Project will be due by 5:00 p.m. as a Word-compatible attachment emailed to dleary@richmond.edu and cwittig@richmond.edu.

Fri. May 3 Take-Home Exam will be due by 5:00 p.m. as a Word-compatible attachment emailed to dleary@richmond.edu.