In English 503, Edward Gorey and Nonsense, we will study the life and work of illustrator and poet Edward Gorey. Gorey is the author of works like *The Gashlycrumb Tinies: A Very Gorey Alphabet Book* ("F is for Fanny sucked dry by a leech") and *The Curious Sofa: A Pornographic Work by Ogdred Weary* (which you have to see to believe), and illustrator of T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (which inspired the musical Cats) among other works. Gorey is a master of drawing—and casting in verse—images of staid, Edwardian manor houses and elegant motorcars and complex topiaries (check out his *The Evil Garden* or *The Remembered Visit*) and faceless horrors and insectoid grotesqueries (*The Insect God*) and be-sneakered creatures instilling vague disquiet (*The Doubtful Guest*). He’s a weird one, Mr. Gorey. In this seminar, we will read his works, study his peers (Dr. Seuss, Shel Silverstein, Hilaire Belloc), and trace his influences (Edward Lear, among others). A class on poetry, illustration, book design, visual culture, childhood, theory, and any number of other subjects: English 503 Edward Gorey and Nonsense will be one for the ages.

**WARNING/TEASER:** Be aware that in this course we will be discussing race, class, sexuality, politics, violence, love and other touchy subjects, along with more conventional literary topics such as aesthetic value and form. If you believe that discussing these issues in a rigorous, intellectual fashion might be too much for you, then consider taking another course this semester. However, you might also consider staying in the course and confronting/interrogating these issues alongside your sensitivities and their ideological and cultural roots. Regardless, if you ever feel that our discussions are needlessly offensive and/or unsettling, please come to my office hours and voice your concerns, especially if you feel that your classmates or I are not treating the issues with the sensitivity they deserve.

**Books**

**Required**

*You Read to Me, I'll Read to You*
  ISBN: 97800644460606
  Author: Ciardi, John, Gorey, Edward

*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*
  ISBN: 9780151686568
  Author: Eliot, T. S., Gorey, Edward

*Amphigorey*
  ISBN: 9780399504344
  Author: Gorey, Edward

*Amphigorey Too*
  ISBN: 9780399504204
  Author: Gorey, Edward
The Gashlycrumb Tinies: Or, after the Outing
ISBN: 9780151003082
Author: Gorey, Edward

The Cat in the Hat
ISBN: 9780394800011
Author: Dr. Seuss

Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book!
ISBN: 9780679882817
Author: Dr. Seuss

On Beyond Zebra!
ISBN: 9780394800844
Author: Dr. Seuss

Uncle Shelby's ABZ Book
ISBN: 9780671211486
Author: Shel Silverstein

Recommended

The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense
ISBN: 9780142002278
Author: Lear, Edward

Scans (On Blackboard)
Hilaire Belloc, Cautionary Tales
Jane Merrill Filstrup, “An Interview with Edward St. John Gorey at the Gotham Book Mart”
Edward Gorey, Gorey x3
Michael Heyman, excerpts from This Book Makes No Sense
Michael Heyman, “A New Defense of Nonsense; or, Where Then Is His Phallus? and Other Questions Not to Ask”
Michael Heyman, “The Performative Letter, from Medieval to Modern”
Michael Heyman, introduction from The Tenth Rasa
Michael Heyman, Kevin Shortsleeve, “Nonsense”
JonArno Lawson, A Voweller’s Bestiary
Lawson & Michael Heyman, “How Dare You” (Nonsense Interview)
Roderick McGillis, “Introduction: Literary Nonsense”
Sarah Minslow, “Challenging the Impossibility of Children’s Literature: The Emancipatory Qualities of Edward Lear’s Nonsense”
Phil Nel, excerpt from Dr. Seuss, American Icon
Nodelman, excerpt Pleasures of Children’s Literature
Theodore Roethke, “Some Remarks on Rhythm”
Theodore Roethke, I Am! Says the Lamb
Kevin Shortsleeve, “Edward Gorey, Children's Literature, and Nonsense Verse”
Kevin Shortsleeve, “Nonsense, Magic, and Superstition”
Alexander Theroux, excerpts from The Strange Case of Edward Gorey
Joseph Thomas, A Few Thousand Words on Theodore Roethke, Children’s Poetry, and Three Poems Concerning Two Turtles (One of Whom Is Named Myrtle)
Joseph Thomas, Poetry’s Playground, Chapter IV (“Street Cries”)
Wim Tiggs, “The Limerick: The Sonnet of Nonsense”
Attendance and Quizzes:

Because the success of the class depends upon your discussion and interpretations of the various texts we encounter, you should attend every class session. I will compose tests based on what we do in the classroom—from my lectures and your comments and ideas. This course is designed to facilitate your learning; thus, we will spend a large amount of our time discussing and interrogating what you find interesting and compelling about the works I assign. Of course, I will lead our analysis, playing, at times, devil's advocate, providing you with various and sometimes contentious readings of the literature. You will be evaluated on how actively you participate in and extend our classroom discussions, so please come to class with something to say. I may give reading quizzes if it seems that the class is consistently unprepared.

Late Work:

Work will be turned in on the date due or not at all. We all have schedules, and it is imperative that we keep to them. However, I am not completely draconian. In extreme cases I may accept late work, but don't count on it.

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is taking someone else's words, idea, or argument and claiming it as your own. Don't do it unless you have a interesting and rigorous intellectual or aesthetical reason. Cite all your sources unless you discuss your appropriation with me first. Instances of plagiarism designed to avoid intellectual work will earn you an F for the course, and, in egregious cases, may result in expulsion from the university. Please familiarize yourself with SDSU plagiarism policies, discussed in your handbook. Throughout the syllabus and my links page are links to many useful web sources. Do not take the words or ideas from any of these sources without providing the appropriate citations unless, again, you discuss your aims with me first. This goes for oral presentations as well as written work.

GRADES:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tweets</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Grades &amp; Attendance</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Project (&amp; Pres.)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Term</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tweets (10%):

You need to write (at least) two (2) tweets every week. (Remember: these are just 140 characters—including any hashtags—so I’m not asking too much.) They should end with the hashtag

#Gorey15
Don’t tag ME in your tweet unless you’re specifically asking me something. Typically, you’ll just use the #Gorey15 hashtag (or tag another classmate if you want to tweet to them). I’ll see what you’ve tweeted; I’ll visit your Twitter page every week and count your class-related tweets.

You should have tweeted at least twenty eight (28) times by the end of the semester.

Your tweets for class should comment on or relate to the readings and our discussion. Try to make each tweet individual, so it can stand by itself (that is, avoid multiple tweets that add up to one LONG, serialized tweet: the point is to craft concise, interesting commentary.)

Again: you can engage with your classmates, tweet to me, post links to relevant online commentary or whatever. Retweets don’t count as one of your weekly tweets. But please, do retweet. They’re not “for credit,” but they’re fun. (And if I retweet one of yours, you know it’s especially good. ;-) Have fun with this part! Be imaginative and playful (or imaginative and serious). But don’t stress out about it. Mostly, it’s just a way for us to all interact on Twitter—like informal chatting before or after class. It’s a way for me to get to know you. Follow me as soon as you get your account up and running. You might want to create a special account especially for this class.

Make sure the Twitter account you use for this class is PUBLIC: if you have your account set as “private” no one will be able to see what you tweet (and you won’t get credit).

My Twitter handle is: @josephsdsu (And, yes, feel free to unfollow me as soon as the semester is over. There’s no harm in that.)

And remember: I’ve added this social media assignment to my courses to build community, to get you all talking to one another. So read each other’s tweets; follow each other; interact (if our class is full, every student in this class should have at least 30 or so followers).

Daily Grades & Attendance (15%):

If the class seems consistently unprepared (if our discussions aren’t lively and engaged with specifics from the readings) I may give you short (usually five question) quizzes. I might also give you short, in-class writing assignments before or after we begin discussing each work. These assignments count as quiz grades, and will be graded pass/fail. To earn a passing grade, you have to show a familiarity with the assigned text and some degree of critical engagement. In-class work cannot be made up.

Group Presentation (15%):

In a group of four or five, you will select a book or text from our reading list and prepare a 15-minute report on it and its creator(s). You will also prepare a one-page handout outlining important information. The form of your presentation and of your handout is up to you. Ideally, your presentation will help us segue into our discussion of the work at hand. Remember, you need to have fifteen minutes of discussion planned. You can go over, but I’d like you to be as close to fifteen minutes as possible. So rehearse and plan.
These should be tight, well planned, and to the point. **Important:** this is a group presentation, yes, but it's one presentation. That is, it's not a collection of five or six mini presentations that don't have much to do with one another. So work together so that your presentation works as a coherent statement about the work.

In your presentation you’ll want to:
- Discuss biographical information about those who made the piece (be selective, choosing details relevant to your overarching argument or position on the work)
- Engage the historical moment in which the work was produced (again, be selective: talk about history and context when it relates to your overarching position on the work)
- Use terms and concepts from the course
- Relate the piece to other works we’ve read and discussed so far in the semester (make connections to previous discussions, yes, but when talking about previous works we’ve read or watched for class, consider how your work relates to themes or scenes or techniques that we didn’t discuss class)

**Creative Project (20%)**:

More on this as we go.

**Mid-Term: (20%)**:

Your mid-term will be composed of a short answer section and an essay section. If you read and actively engage in class discussion you should do fine. This exam is an occasion for you to discuss the knowledge you’ve produced—so don’t expect it to dwell on minutiae. It cannot be made up.

**Final Exam (20%)**:

As with the mid-term, your final will be composed of a short answer section and an essay section. Again, if you read and actively engage in class discussion you should do fine. This exam is an occasion for you to discuss the knowledge you’ve produced—so don't expect it to dwell on minutiae. It cannot be made up.

**Note:**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Final Comments:**

This class should be challenging, but it should also be fun. Remember, I want you to do well. I don’t lecture too much; mostly I like to chat with you, to get your impressions, to help you to understand some of the complexities and subtleties that might not be obvious. I'm here to give you biographical and historical data that will enable you to make your interpretations and
conceptions of Gorey and his peers and influences more convincing, to show you how other critics interpret the assigned texts, and maybe to tell you how I interpret them. I look forward to working with each of you.
Weekly Syllabus
**Tentative**
This schedule can change. However, all changes will be announced in class

Week One:

Tuesday, Aug. 25
Introductions

Thursday, Aug 27
Lawson & Michael Heyman, “How Dare You” (Nonsense Interview)
Jane Merrill Filstrup, “An Interview with Edward St. John Gorey at the Gotham Book Mart”
Michael Heyman, Kevin Shortsleeve, “Nonsense”

Week Two:

Tuesday, September 1
Interviews

Thursday, September 3
[Verse, Meter, and other Things]
Theodore Roethke, “Some Remarks on Rhythm”
Roethke, *I Am! Says the Lamb*
Thomas, A Few Thousand Words on Theodore Roethke, Children’s Poetry, and Three Poems Concerning Two Turtles (One of Whom Is Named Myrtle)

Week Three:

Tuesday, September 8
Special Collection: Gorey’s Books @SDSU Love Library

Thursday, September 10
Roethke, *I Am!* cont.
Wim Tiggs, “The Limerick: The Sonnet of Nonsense”

Week Four:

Tuesday, September 15
Joseph Thomas, *Poetry’s Playground*, Chapter IV (“Street Cries”)
Roethke, *I Am!* cont.
Ciardi, *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You*

Thursday, September 17
Ciardi, cont.

Week Five:

Tuesday, September 22
Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*
Phil Nel

Thursday, September 24
Kevin Shortsleeve, “Edward Gorey, Children's Literature, and Nonsense Verse”
Gorey, *The Disrespectful Summons* (From *Amphigorey Too*)
Gorey, *The Wuggly Ump* (From *Amphigorey*)
Gorey, *The Doubtful Guest* (From *Amphigorey*)
Lear, to be announced

**Week Six:**

Tuesday, September 29
Edward Lear, Limericks
Gorey, *Gorey x3*
Roderick McGillis, “Introduction: Literary Nonsense”
Michael Heyman, “A New Defense of Nonsense; or, Where Then Is His Phallus? and Other Questions Not to Ask”

Thursday, October 1
Sarah Minslow, “Challenging the Impossibility of Children’s Literature: The Emancipatory Qualities of Edward Lear’s Nonsense”
Michael Heyman, introduction from *The Tenth Rasa*
Lear, to be announced

**Week Seven:**

Tuesday, October 6

Nodelman, excerpt *Pleasures of Children’s Literature*
Gorey, *The Gashlycrumb Tinies: Or, after the Outing*
Gorey, *The Nursery Frieze* (in *Amphigorey Too*)
Michael Heyman, “The Performative Letter, from Medieval to Modern”

Thursday, October 8
Seuss, *Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book!*
Seuss, *On Beyond Zebra!*

**Week Eight:**

Tuesday, October 13

JonArno Lawson, *A Voweller's Bestiary*

Thursday, October 15
Seuss, *Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book!*
Seuss, *On Beyond Zebra!*
Week Nine:

Tuesday, October 20
Review

Thursday, October 22
Midterm

Week Ten:

Tuesday, October 27
Silverstein, *Uncle Shelby's ABZ Book*
Thomas, excerpt *Devil's Favorite Pet*

Thursday, October 29
Silverstein, *Uncle Shelby's ABZ Book*
Thomas, excerpt *Devil's Favorite Pet*

Week Eleven:

Tuesday, November 3
Hiliare Belloc, *Cautionary Tales*

Thursday, November 5
Hiliare Belloc, *Cautionary Tales*

Week Twelve:

Tuesday, November 10
Eliot, *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*

Thursday, November 12
Eliot, *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*

Week Thirteen:

Tuesday, November 17
Gorey, *Amphigorey*

Thursday, November 19
Gorey, *Amphigorey*

Week Fourteen:

Tuesday, November 24
Gorey, *Amphigorey Too*

Thursday, November 26
NO CLASS / THANKSGIVING

Week Fifteen:
Tuesday, December 1
Presentation Workshop

Thursday, December 3
Presentations

**Week Sixteen:**

Tuesday, December 8
Presentations

Thursday, December 10
Presentations

**FINAL EXAM WEEK**