What is the relationship between an adventure story like *Robinson Crusoe* and the discovery of America? What does Yeats’s poetry – its styles, settings, and themes – reveal about contemporary attitudes to nature, history, and the individual? What does the staging of *Waiting for Godot* tell us about alienation, human cruelty, and power and manipulation in the second half of the 20th century? How do Alice Munro’s short stories illuminate the plight of those who don’t belong? What does Joy Harjo’s *Crazy Brave* tell us about contemporary race relations, friendship, and family in America?

In other words, what is the relationship between literature and the culture in which it is produced?

In this class, we will explore this above question by tracing the history of an idea – that the use of reason and the development of technology led to social and cultural progress – through a series of literary texts. I have chosen to read work that draws from various literary genres and geographies: Britain, Ireland, Africa, and North America.

In “Introduction to English Studies,” we will learn about literature via a number of different approaches: through understanding its social context, by learning about the author, by studying its formal language, and through reading language in order to decipher what lies beneath the initially apparent and obvious meaning. The focus of this course will be on close reading and critical analysis of texts. The aim is to show literature’s ability to shed light on some of the most important social questions of our time: how does progress get defined; what use is literature in today’s society; how can the full purpose and quality of our lives be enhanced; what limits our freedom?

Texts include the following (with one or two to be added):


-- Various critical articles, a selection of poetry, and a series of short stories will also be uploaded to D2L.