

Wittenberg Teacher Academy Nov. 2025



Leucorea Foundation Lutherstadt Wittenberg



STORYTELLING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY USA

THURSDAY, 13 NOV. 2025

15:00 Arrival and Check in

16:30 **Welcome and Introduction**

The Organizers, Representatives of the Muhlenberg Center for American Studies, and Representatives from the Institute for English and American Studies at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

17:00 Keynote

Teaching with Katniss: Critical and Ethical Literacy in *The Hunger Games Trilogy*
Maxi Albrecht (Universität Siegen)

18:30 Snack Buffet (Leucorea)

20:00 Workshop

Improv Night

Schoko mit Gurke, Freies Improvisationstheater, Halle

FRIDAY, 14 NOV. 2025

8:00 Breakfast (Leucorea)

9:00 Workshop I

Reading Nature and Youth in Contemporary Picturebooks

Amanda Halter (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena)

Workshop II

'We tell ourselves stories in order to live': Teaching the Vitality of Poetic Diction

Lucy Cheseldine (University of York)

10:30 Coffee break

11:00 Workshop I + II continued

12:30 Off Time

14:00 Lecture

Teaching Graphic Narrative

Birte Wege (JFKI/Freie Universität Berlin)

15:00 Lecture

Challenging Democracy in the Digital Age: Corporations, Civil Rights, and Intersubjectivity in Jennifer Haley's *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*

Johanna Hartmann (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

16:00 Coffee break

16:30 Discussion Groups

Conversation Groups with Speakers

19:00 Roundtable with Speakers and Thanksgiving Dinner
(Best Western Stadtpalais)

SATURDAY, 15 NOV. 2025

8:00 Breakfast (Leucorea)

9:00 Seminar

Indigenous Storytelling

Erik Redling (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

10:30 Coffee break

11:00 Workshop

Exchange Forum for Teachers

Julia Nitz and Jiann-Chyng Tu
(Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

12:30 **Feedback and Farewell**

14:00 Tour of Lutherstadt Wittenberg

Leucorea | Collegienstraße 62, 06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg

WELCOME TO WTA 2025

The Wittenberg Teacher Academy 2025 offers 2.5 days of talks, interactive workshops, readings and informed conversation sessions by US, British, and German scholars, practitioners, and emerging artists that train participants in political, social, and cultural America related issues at Stiftung Leucorea in Lutherstadt Wittenberg. We will focus on the theme of “**Storytelling in the Twenty-First-Century USA.**” The event will feature talks on issues of storytelling in a wide array of literary contexts. We are going to explore genres, themes, and literary trends in contemporary US literature, discuss new and old canons, examine novel approaches of teaching literature in the EFL-classroom as well as practice creative text production.

Julia Nitz and Jiann-Chyng Tu
Main Organizers

Keynote

TEACHING WITH KATNISS: CRITICAL AND ETHICAL LITERACY IN THE *HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY*

Maxi Albrecht (Universität Siegen)

13. November 2024 | 17:00 Uhr

Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games trilogy* is part of a vast corpus of dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction that has defined pop cultural production for the first two decades of the 21st century. What is more, this trilogy in particular sparked a significant output of speculative fiction aimed primarily at young adult audiences, portraying the future of humankind as dire and featuring heroes who face a multitude of repressions, conflicts, and tribulations. In tandem with the continued polarization of the political landscape of the United States, a host of political motivations and affiliations have been read into these fictions. *The Hunger Games* in particular has been read as a liberal, even leftist, dystopia that criticizes capitalist exploitation, while conservative groups, such as the Tea Party Patriots, have also embraced the trilogy as representing the potential evils of government overreach.

Aside from the trench warfare of polarized real-life US politics – including the “correct” way to understand this trilogy’s political message – young adult dystopias dramatize issues such as marginalization, social and economic inequality, moral and ethical dilemmas, and, of course, the ways in which the heroes of these narratives, with whom their audiences are encouraged to identify with, endure and overcome systemic and personal oppression and attempt to build better worlds. Asking not only “what if...” but also “what then...,” speculative fiction emerges as a medium that can offer a site for young adults a way to examine real-life problems they face in the real world, as these narratives offer them a point of connection through experiencing similar challenges. This lecture, therefore, examines the ways in which *The Hunger Games trilogy* can be used as a vehicle for critical and ethical literacy for young adult readers in- and outside of the classroom.

Maxi Albrecht is currently a researcher and lecturer at the University of Siegen, where she previously completed a DFG-funded research project on the serial circulation of German-American city mysteries from the 1850s. Before joining Siegen, she substituted for a junior professorship in the Department of Culture at Freie Universität Berlin’s John F. Kennedy Institute (JFKI), where she also completed her PhD on *Speculative Survival, Intelligence Politics, and Neoliberalism*. Her time in academia actually started at MLU Halle-Wittenberg, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in Intercultural European and American Studies and History. She fondly remembers a block seminar here at the Leucorea, where she found the topic for her Bachelor’s thesis.

READING NATURE AND YOUTH IN CONTEMPORARY PICTUREBOOKS

Amanda K. Halter (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena)

14. November 2025 | 09:00 Uhr

The environment – and the roles young people play in it – has become a prominent topic in English language classrooms. As students encounter ecological issues more often through media and everyday life, literature that explores these themes has become more prevalent. At the same time, using topics and texts that reflect students' interests has been shown to boost motivation, enhance critical thinking, and deepen intercultural understanding.

Building on this growing interest and relevance, this workshop highlights contemporary picturebooks as an innovative medium for exploring environmental themes through the lens of youth. Far from simple early-reader books, today's picturebooks are sophisticated, multi-modal narratives that depict young people's complex relationships with nature amid times of crisis, change, and discovery. These stories invite readers to reflect on questions such as the meanings of "nature" and "human," as well as themes such as climate anxiety, resilience, belonging, and agency – while simultaneously fostering language development and visual literacy.

Participants will be introduced to a curated selection of English-language picturebooks centered on nature and youth, alongside critical theoretical frameworks that explore how visual and verbal elements collaborate to create meaning. Through guided interaction with the texts, participants will also practice strategies for integrating these picturebooks into EFL-classrooms, including techniques for close reading, classroom discussion, and differentiated instruction.

By incorporating picturebooks into their teaching, English-language educators can offer students meaningful opportunities to develop language skills while engaging with "green issues" relevant to their generation. All in all, this workshop aims to equip teachers with the tools to approach these texts both as artistic works and valuable educational resources.

Amanda Halter (she/her) is a research associate in American Studies at Friedrich Schiller University of Jena. After earning her teacher education degree (BS and state examinations) in New York State, she taught English Language Arts in the Bronx before completing an MA in English Studies at FSU Jena. Drawing on her teaching experience and research interests at the intersection of nature, youth literature, and environmental education, Amanda has published, guest lectured, and taught courses exploring these interdisciplinary themes. She is currently completing a dissertation on "Reading Environmental Violence in Young Adult Fiction".

"WE TELL OURSELVES STORIES IN ORDER TO LIVE": TEACHING THE VITALITY OF POETIC DICTION

Lucy Cheseldine (University of York)

14. November 2025 | 09:00 Uhr

Poetry is arguably more important than ever in a Twenty-First Century America where trust, truth and sustained attention have been eroded. In this workshop, we will slow down and examine the experiential and revisionary vitality of poetic diction, word by word. In doing so, we will explore how poets do not set out to *tell* a story. Rather, they – and we – travel into the unknown through each word on the page, embarking on a journey which is constantly changing course. Taking reading and writing poetry as a life-force and a life-skill in contemporary society, we will discuss examples of poetic diction by asking what kinds of stories they contain and evoke and how they refract and re-frame what a 'story' is. We will then experiment with methods for teaching the creative writing of poetry by starting with the stories of a single word.

Lucy Cheseldine is a postdoctoral researcher in Twenty-First Century American poetry. She completed her PhD at the University of Leeds in 2022 and has previously studied and taught Literature in Glasgow, Alabama, Dublin, Tokyo, and York. Her scholarship on the poetry and textual practice of American poet Donald Hall and his contemporaries has been published in numerous scholarly journals. Lucy is a practicing poet and writes regularly for poetry magazines in the UK. She is passionate about outreach and engaging people with poetry; she has taught students across all age ranges and has supported the organisation of public poetry projects including The New York City Poetry Festival. Alongside her research, Lucy advocates for a more inclusive and collaborative research culture in academia and beyond.

TEACHING GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

Birte Wege (JFKI, Freie Universität Berlin)

14. November 2025 | 14:00 Uhr

Comics in all forms are enjoying ever-increasing popularity, both among the general reading public and as an academic field of study. They have also become increasingly relevant as a teaching tool – both for discussing literature and for learning language and culture more generally. But how exactly might we teach with them? To address this question, this lecture will provide tools, methods, and vocabulary for understanding, analyzing, and critically evaluating comics and other forms of graphic narratives. It will give an overview of the medium's history, as well as the various forms and genres of comics, and explore the didactic potential of these texts in the context of an EFL-classroom through a number of case studies and examples.

Birte Wege is assistant professor of American literature at the John F. Kennedy Institute, Freie Universität Berlin. She wrote her dissertation on the graphic narrative documentaries of Emmanuel Guibert, Ho Che Anderson, Art Spiegelman, and Joe Sacco; it was published as *Drawing on the Past* by Campus Verlag in 2019. Her current project examines robots and performance in American theatre. She has taught extensively on 20th- and 21st-century North American literature, theatre, and comics, as well as Foreign Language Pedagogy and didactics of culture.

CHALLENGING DEMOCRACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CORPORATIONS, CIVIC RIGHTS, AND INTER- SUBJECTIVITY IN JENNIFER HALEY'S *NEIGHBORHOOD 3: REQUISITION OF DOOM*

Johanna Hartmann (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

14. November 2025 | 15:00 Uhr

The impact of digital phenomena – such as social media, fake news, or deepfakes – on democracies has become a growing concern. Jennifer Haley's "tech plays" explore these concerns by depicting fictional worlds in which corporate structures replaced democratic ones, and digital innovations disrupt social relations. In this presentation, I focus on Haley's play *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom (N3RD)* (2008/2009) which portrays an American suburban community divided by a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) popular among teenagers. I argue that the primary dystopian theme is the impact of deregulated corporate control over digital spaces on social and political life. Through its themes and aesthetics, Haley's play suggests that digital realms are not separate from physical reality but extensions thereof. The possibility of disembodiment in virtual spaces is critiqued as a myth that has enabled corporate domination and the absence of democratic regulation in digital realms.

Johanna Hartmann is an assistant professor of American Literature at Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg. In her research, she focuses on American drama and theater since the nineteenth century, questions of (inter-)mediality (for example, painting, photography, film), and contemporary literature. She is the author of *Literary Visuality in Siri Hustvedt's Works: Phenomenological Perspectives* (2015). In her habilitation project, she focused on modernist American short plays and theater photography. She is the editor of *Censorship and Exile* (together with Hubert Zapf, 2015), *Zones of Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (together with Christine Marks and Hubert Zapf, 2016), *The Tragic in Contemporary American Drama and Theater* (together with Julia Rössler, special issue of *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, 2019), *Theater and Community: Poetics, Politics, Performances* (together with Ilka Saal, special issue of *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 2024), and *The Body in/of Don DeLillo's Plays* (special issue of *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, forthcoming 2025).

INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING

Erik Redling (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

15. November 2025 | 09:00 Uhr

This seminar is designed for educators interested in incorporating Indigenous perspectives and storytelling traditions into their teaching practices. In the first part of the seminar, a lecture will introduce several key issues in Native American literature, including cultural contact and conflict, forced assimilation, oral narrative traditions, the trickster figure, Indigenous identity, and the emerging genre of Indigenous horror. It will cover a selection of short texts ranging from the early 20th-century Modernist period through the Native American Renaissance in the 1960s to Postmodernist and contemporary works, providing brief historical and literary contexts to help understand these texts.

The second half of the seminar consists of an interactive workshop with an emphasis on practical approaches to teaching Indigenous short stories in the EFL-classroom. We will examine a few short texts by authors such as Zitkala-Ša, N. Scott Momaday (together with a video clip made by his daughter), Thomas King (together with the graphic novel adaptation of his short story), and others, and discuss strategies for effectively integrating these works into classroom curricula. A seminar reader, including sample texts and teaching materials, will be provided.

Erik Redling is professor of American literature at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. He has co-edited *The Handbook of the American Short Story* (with Oliver Scheiding, De Gruyter, 2022) and regularly teaches courses on American short fiction, including Indigenous short narratives.

EXCHANGE FORUM FOR TEACHERS

Julia Nitz and Jiann-Chyng Tu (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

15. November 2025 | 11:00 Uhr

In this workshop, we encourage teachers to share their ideas and experiences of teaching literary texts in the EFL-classroom. Please feel free to bring materials, books, worksheets etc. and be ready to discuss your pedagogical approaches with others.

Julia Nitz is associate professor of Anglo-American cultural studies at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. She has served as Executive Director at the Center for American Studies and is co-founder of the Intercontinental Crosscurrents Network for the study of transatlantic women's networks in the long nineteenth century (crosscurrents.uni-halle.de).

Her research focusses on the American Civil War, women's life writing, intertextual cultural studies, historiographic and museum narratology as well as Anglophone (Caribbean) film and adaptation studies. Her publications include *Georg III. Rezeption und Konstruktion in den britischen Medien* (1990–2006) (WVT, 2010), *Towards a Historiographic Narratology* (2011), and with Sandra H. Petruionis and Theresa Schön, an edited volume on *Intercontinental Crosscurrents: Women's Networks across Europe and the Americas* (2016).

Her most recent monograph *Belles and Poets: Intertextuality in the Civil War Diaries of White Southern Women* (LSUP, 2020) establishes the extent to which literature offered a means of exploring ideas and convictions about class, gender, and racial hierarchies in the Civil War-era South.

Jiann-Chyng Tu is lecturer and research associate in American literature and culture at MLU Halle-Wittenberg. He received his BA in German and English from Wake Forest University (USA) and his MA in American Studies (Literature and Culture) from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where he is also a doctoral candidate in American literature. Before joining MLU Halle-Wittenberg, he held teaching positions at universities in Berlin, Münster, Bamberg, Regensburg, and Augsburg. His research interests include African American literature and culture, multiethnic literature of the United States, transnational American studies, Black internationalisms, literary history, and food studies. Currently, he serves as one of the two postgraduate representatives to the advisory board of the German Association for American Studies (GAAS/DGfA).

Organized and moderated
by Julia Nitz and Jiann-Chyng Tu

Assistant Organizers:
Aline Leuchtenberger and Lena Holz

Anglistik/Amerikanistik, MLU Halle-Wittenberg
wta@amerikanistik.uni-halle.de



online program

This teacher training is officially accredited by
LISA, Sachsen-Anhalt, (#25L1620001)
and ThiLLM, Thüringen.

Leucorea
Collegienstraße 62
06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg

