

Lehrkraft: Petra Balai

### **How the West was Won: The American Frontier in History and Fiction**

In this course we will explore the American expansion into the West between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. We will have a look at both historical and fictional aspects of the frontier myth. The range of topics is vast and students may decide for themselves where they would like to put their emphasis. It is suited for students who are interested in regional and cultural studies, as well as for students who have an interest in literature or in history.

Here are only a few suggestions:

- a) **Historical, geographical, and economical topics:** e.g. the Louisiana Purchase, the fur trade, the Mexican-American war, the California Gold Rush, etc.
- b) **The conditions and hardships of the settlers' lives:** e.g. everyday life, the Oregon Trail, the Pony Express, the transcontinental railways, law and order, etc.
- c) **The role of the Native Americans (or other ethnicities):** e.g. from Indian attacks to the Indian wars, the Trail of Tears, the establishment of the reservations, the shifting role of the Native American in movies from *The Searchers* to HBO's *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*, etc.
- d) **The depiction of the frontier myth in Western fiction:** e.g. Hope Leslie (Catharine Maria Sedgwick), *The Leatherstocking Tales* (James Fenimore Cooper), but also in dime novels or Karl May's books
- e) **The development of the Western genre:** from classical Western movies, e.g. *The Unforgiven*, *True Grit*, to Costner's *Dances with Wolves* or the Netflix series *Godless*.