

# TAKE A CHANCE: AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF THE NOVEL *THE MUSIC OF CHANCE* BY PAUL AUSTER LLC WINTER TERM 2021 | SYLLABUS

Welcome to LLC'S winter-term course examining in depth Paul Auster's short novel, *The Music of Chance*.

## THIS COURSE AT A GLANCE

- This is a six-week course (January 5–February 9), meeting Tuesdays from 10 a.m.–Noon through Zoom. You will receive a link the morning of the class.
- Please order and read the book before the first day of class.
- We will examine the book in chapters—covering two chapters each week. We also hope to stream the 1993 movie based on the book.
- Our collaborative model involves using a random drawing to assign each of you to one of six teams that will be responsible for a given class.
- See page 4 for the class schedule and team assignments.
- See page 5 for a roster of class members and how to contact them.

## INTRODUCTION

As we observed in our welcome email message, most book clubs tend to discuss a work in a single meeting. You may be wondering how we can spend six weeks on a single, relatively short novel. We simply would respond that this novel deals with many meaty issues that should spark spirited discussion. For example, what roles do chance, randomness and chaos play in the novel and in your life? How often do seemingly unrelated events affect one another? The book also offers a good platform for delving into classical music, literary references, and philosophy.

The book is actually a “quick read” at only 217 pages. But don't let the length fool you. Some critics consider it the “modern existential novel.”

## PURCHASING THE BOOK

At this point, we'd like you to purchase and read the book before class begins on **Tuesday, January 5**. The book is available through [Amazon](#) new for \$16 and used for as little as \$1.35 from other online booksellers. Your local bookstore can order a copy, and the RI library system has three copies available. (We suggest that you'll probably want your own copy to mark up during the course).

In a surprise development, we have figured out how to stream over Zoom the 1993 movie inspired by the book. Among the film's stars are Mandy Patinkin and James Spader. We will organize a class “movie night,” and then devote our last class to compare/contrast the book with the movie.

## CLASS MEETINGS

Our class will meet each Tuesday at 10 a.m. for six weeks—from January 5 through February 9—through the video conferencing app Zoom. Most of you should already be familiar with Zoom (available free at [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)), but if not, or if you'd like a refresher on how to use the app, please email or call us, and we'll arrange for a personalized tutorial.

Our class this term is a bit larger than we originally anticipated, but that will mean we'll collectively benefit from more points of view during discussion! Most of you are veterans of LLC, so you know how collaborative classes operate.

As wonderful as video conferencing technology can be—hey, we wouldn't be able to meet like this had the pandemic hit us 15-20 years ago—many people have complained that classes on Zoom also can be exhausting. As most LLC classes, we will be meeting for two hours each week—but we'll schedule a decent break midway.

## COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURE

The Music of Chance has nine chapters. There are 23 members in this class (not including the coordinators). We debated how best to structure the class to make it as collaborative as possible, and here's what we decided:

- We are dividing the class into five “teams” of 4–5 people each, and one team of 2 people.
- We have assigned each of you to one of these teams by drawing your name randomly from a hat—i.e., by chance! Team assignments are listed on page 4. And you can contact fellow team members through our class roster on page 5. If you'd like to trade places with someone on another team, feel free.
- Each team will be responsible for covering two chapters in a given week.
- How each team manages its assigned chapters is pretty much up to the team. We encourage you to meet (virtually) outside of class to decide your approach. For example, some members might prefer to do background research on a particular topic, while others would prefer to make a presentation, or lead the class discussion. Or as a team you might decide that two people would cover a given chapter. We want you to collaborate in ways you're most comfortable doing. As a team, you also might want to explore specific thematic aspects of the book that play a role in your chapters. Among these, consider: musical and literary themes; the role of chance (and gambling) in life; the dynamics of families and other relationships; and the myth of Sisyphus.

See page 4 for the course schedule and team makeup. As coordinators we will lead the first class and talk about possible approaches for presenting the upcoming chapters by covering the first chapter ourselves.

## ABOUT USING ZOOM

Since the pandemic began, LLC has been learning a lot about improving the overall Zoom experience. Here are a few tips:

- We encourage you to use a computer (either PC or Mac; desktop or laptop) with a built-in camera and microphone to access Zoom. The user interface on a computer tends to be easier to use than on a tablet. But if all you have is a tablet (iPad or Android device), that's fine.
- We strongly *discourage* you from joining the class from a smart phone (Android or iPhone). The screen is small and the controls more limited than on a computer.
- If you plan to share YouTube clips or have slides to show (created in Microsoft Powerpoint, Apple Keynote or Goggle Slides), we'd like you to alert us to ensure you understand how to use Zoom's screen-share function. We'll also ask you to send us a copy of your presentation in advance, just so we have a back-up should there be any technical glitches.
- You will receive a link to each week's call the morning of our class. We'll open the call early so you'll have a chance to resolve any technical issues or simply to visit with each other.
- There are certain Zoom "etiquette" rules that LLC is advocating. You'll find them on page 6 of this syllabus.
- Finally, a reminder that we're here to help you, should you need it. LLC offers technical resources and even 1:1 help to make sure you're comfortable using this technology. Just ask!

## HOW TO REACH US

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## MUSIC OF CHANCE | WINTER 2021 SCHEDULE

WEEK/DATE	TEAMS	TOPIC
<b>Wk 1:</b> Tues., 1/5 10 a.m.	Nick & Maggie Miles  Tom Backman Janice Golden	Introduction to the class and lead discussion of Chapter 1.  <b>Team 1:</b> Present a biography and lead discussion on author Paul Auster.
<b>Wk 2:</b> Tues., 1/12	Michele Boyd Carol Gjelsvik Ruth Guyer Sam Shamoon	<b>Team 2: Chapters 2 and 3</b>
<b>Wk 3:</b> Tues., 1/19	Martha Cussler Chris Rose Mary Shepard Paul Wortman	<b>Team 3: Chapters 4 and 5</b>
<b>Wk 4:</b> Tues., 1/26	Sandra Gandsman Donna Lancaster Bill Minifie	<b>Team 4: Chapters 6 and 7</b>
<b>Wk 5:</b> Tues. 2/2	Suzanne Cohn Vicky McGrath Mary Agnes Murphy Michael Rosenberg Susan Wolfson	<b>Team 5: Chapters 8 and 9</b>
<b>TBA: Movie Night</b>		
<b>Wk 6:</b> Tues. 2/9 10/22	Penny Backman Mary Ball Howkins Christian Miles Barbera Nesto Barbara Simon	<b>Team 6: Compare/contrast movie with book</b>

**LLC | TAKE A CHANCE**  
**CLASS ROSTER | WINTER TERM 2021**

NAME	TOWN	PHONE	EMAIL
<i>Coordinators</i> Nick Miles Maggie Miles	Barrington	401.337.5445 (H) 201.956.1234 (M) 201.956.1235 (M)	nbmiles@mac.com maggie.miles@gmail.com
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Susan Wolfson	Fall River	508.679.4638	susanwolfson@comcast.net
Paul Wortman	Providence	631.742.6903	paul.m.wortman@gmail.com

## LLC | TOP 10 TIPS ON ZOOM ETIQUETTE

*When you attend an LLC class through Zoom, think of yourself as being in a real classroom. The same rules of etiquette apply. Your classmates will appreciate seeing that you're fully engaged with the class. Here are some general tips to keep in mind when joining a Zoom call.*

**Tip 1: Silence is golden.** Typically, Zoom calls are disrupted more by audio issues than video. Learn how to mute yourself right way after joining a call. You can unmute to speak simply by clicking the unmute button or by pressing the space bar (on most computers).

**Tip 2: Find a quiet place for the call.** To minimize disruptions, try to isolate yourself (to the extent you can) so that others won't disrupt you. (That includes your pets!)

**Tip 3: Silence your other devices.** Pretend you're in a theater and turn off your phone or set it to silent mode. Same for computer notifications.

**Tip 4: Be prepared.** If you'll be presenting or sharing content during the meeting, make sure you have the files and/or links ready to go before the meeting begins. It also helps to send your material to your coordinator ahead of time on the chance you encounter an unexpected tech glitch.

**Tip 5: Be present.** Position your camera as though you were taking a photograph of yourself—straight on and nicely framed with a plain background. Consider raising your computer or device on a stack of books for a better perspective. Face a light source (window or lamp) so your bright and charming countenance isn't in shadow. Smile!

**Tip 6: Be punctual.** Take a few minutes ahead of your call to test your settings and then join the call a bit early to be sure you're "well connected."

**Tip 7: Play to the camera.** When on the call, speak into the camera as though you're speaking directly to a classmate. And remember: So long as your camera is active, you are always on display! People will notice when you're multitasking. But if you need a break or to step away from the meeting, simply remain muted and turn off your video.

**Tip 8: Respect your classmates.** Let others finish speaking without interrupting them. (Only one voice can be heard at a time!) In fact, let your coordinator or session leader manage the discussion. Raise your hand when you want to speak and try to keep your remarks brief and to the point.

**Tip 9: Resolve tech issues offline.** If you're having technical issues, avoid using class time to address them. Most classes have an assigned tech adviser whom you can call for support.

**Tip 10. Stay secure.** Never, ever forward a Zoom link for an LLC class or post it on social media.