

ENG 316 African American Women's Novels, Fall 2014, CRN 16405
Tuesday and Thursday 2-3:20, 140 Allen Hall
Professor Thorsson
Email: thorsson@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: Thursday 10am-1pm, 521 PLC

Course Description

In this course, we will examine formal strategies and thematic concerns of African American women's novels from the 19th century to the present. Using close reading and historical context, we will consider how these novels construct race, class, and gender; the possibilities and limits of the novel form; whether and how these texts engage with Black Nationalism, Civil Rights, Black Power, Black Arts, Feminism, and other political movements; how these novels envision home, community, and nation; and, finally, whether these novels are part of a distinct tradition of African American women's writing and, if so, what formal and thematic traits characterize that tradition. This class requires substantial reading and writing and vigorous participation.

Goals:

The goal of this course is to help you engage with African American literature, improving your writing, reading, and critical thinking skills in the process. To that end, you will:

1. read literary and cultural texts with comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary and other cultural texts;
4. write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to your interpretive thesis about a text.

Required Readings – Books are at UO Bookstore and on reserve at Knight Library. Items marked with an asterisk are on Blackboard.

- Syllabus*
- Assignment Sheet*
- Close Reading Handout*
- Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy* (1892), Dover edition
- Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928), in Rutgers University Press edition of *Quicksand and Passing* edited by Deborah McDowell
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Harper Perennial Edition
- Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946), Mariner Books edition
- Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), Picador edition
- Toni Morrison, *Love* (2003), Vintage edition with Morrison's 2005 introduction

Course Requirements and Policies:

Careful reading, vigorous participation, and regular attendance are mandatory. Bring the assigned readings to class and be prepared to discuss them. Your participation grade is based on your work in class including discussion, in-class writing, and group work.

Missing class more than twice in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes for that day from a classmate and otherwise catch up on any material you have missed.

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. Please also print and consult the assignment sheet posted on Blackboard. Assignments must be submitted in hard copy at the beginning of class on the due dates listed below and formatted according to current MLA guidelines (1 inch margins, single-side printed, stapled, correct citation and quotation, and a works cited page). Consult the *MLA Handbook* if you are uncertain of correct format. I will mark late assignments down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late. I will not accept late assignments more than one week after the due date.

If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. Please request that the Accessible Education Center (<http://aec.uoregon.edu/>) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

The University Student Conduct Code (available at conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. Students should acknowledge and document all sources of information. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, see me.

Please be advised that any UO faculty member who becomes aware of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, or gender-based stalking is required to report that information to the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity (<http://aeo.uoregon.edu/>). For confidential help, contact University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sass-lane.org/>).

In this class, we are studying literature in its historical and political contexts. This means that we will read about and discuss racial and sexual violence. There are incidents of both in our readings, some of which include explicit language and graphic sexual acts, both consensual and not. If you wish to select another class to take instead of this one, I will be happy to meet with you in office hours to select a suitable course.

Grading:

Participation	10%
Close Reading (2-3 pages)	25%
Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pages)	25%
Paper Proposal w/ Bibliography (2-3 pages)	10%
Final Paper (7-10 pages)	30%

Week One

T 9/30 Introduction

Th 10/2 Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy* (1892), Introduction and Chapters I-XV (pages 1-112)
Syllabus*

Week Two

T 10/7 Harper, *Iola Leroy*, Chapters XVI-XXXII and Note (pages 113-219)
Close Reading Handout*

Th 10/9 Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928), Introduction and Chapters 1-12 (pages ix-xxxv and 1-66)
Assignment Sheet*

Week Three

T 10/14 Larsen, *Quicksand*, Chapters 13-25 (pages 67-135)

Th 10/16 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Foreword and Chapters 1-5 (pages ix-xviii and 1-50)
Close Reading (2-3 pages) Due

Week Four

T 10/21 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 6-15 (pages 51-138)

Th 10/23 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 16-20 and Afterword (pages 139-205)

Week Five

T 10/28 Ann Petry, *The Street* (1946), Chapters 1-6 (pages 1-162)

Th 10/30 Petry, *The Street*, Chapters 7-12 (pages 163-301)

Week Six

T 11/4 Petry, *The Street*, Chapters 13-18 (pages 302-436)

Th 11/6 Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), Pages 1-75
Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pages) Due

Week Seven

T 11/11 Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, Pages 76-154

Th 11/13 Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, Pages 155-225

Week Eight

T 11/18 Paper Proposal Workshop
Paper Proposal w/ Bibliography (2-3 pages) Due

Th 11/20 Toni Morrison, *Love* (2003), Foreword, Prologue, and Sections 1-3 (pages ix-xii and 1-68)

Week Nine

T 11/25 Morrison, *Love*, Sections 4-6 (pages 69-141)

Th 11/27 Thanksgiving, no class

Week Ten

T 12/2 Morrison, *Love*, Sections 7-9 and Epilogue (pages 142-202)

Th 12/4 Conclusion

T 12/9 **Final Paper (7-10 pages) due to Prof. Thorsson's office (521 PLC) by 5pm.** If you would like your paper back with comments, please attach a self-addressed, stamped envelope when you turn it in.