

## **ENG 316 African American Women's Novels, Spring 2016, CRN 36671**

T/Th 12-1:20pm Clinical Services 216

Professor Thorsson, thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: T/Th 10-11:30am 521 PLC

### **Course Description**

In this course, we will examine formal strategies and thematic concerns of a selection of African American women's novels from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. 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, 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. 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. 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 Canvas.

- Syllabus\*
- Assignment Sheet\*
- Close Reading Handout\*
- Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929), Penguin
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Harper Perennial
- Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (1953), Third World Press
- Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976), Harcourt
- Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), St. Martin's
- Toni Morrison, *Love* (2003), Vintage

### **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](http://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)	20%
Response to Prof. Ford Talk (2 pages)	10%
Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pages)	20%
Paper Proposal w/ Bibliography (2-3 pages)	10%
Final Paper (7-10 pages)	30%

**Week One**

T 3/29 Introduction

Th 3/31 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) Introduction and Part One (pages vii-xxxiv and 1-47)  
Syllabus\*

**Week Two**

T 4/5 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) Parts Two and Three (pages 48-114)  
Close Reading Handout\*

Th 4/7 Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Foreword and Chapters 1-5 (pages ix-xviii and 1-50)  
Assignment Sheet\*

**Week Three**

T 4/12 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 6-15 (pages 51-138)

Th 4/14 Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Chapters 16-20 and Afterword (pages 139-205)

**Week Four**

T 4/19 Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (1953), Chapters 1- 20 (pages 1-99)  
**Close Reading (2-3 pages) Due**

Th 4/21 Brooks, *Maud Martha*, Chapters 21-34 (pages 100-180)

**Week Five**

T 4/26 Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976) (pages 1-76)

Th 4/28 Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976) (pages 77-132)

Fri 4/29 **Prof. Tanisha Ford talk, 12-1:30pm, Knight Library Browsing Room**

**Week Six**

T 5/3 Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976) (pages 133-198)  
**Response to Prof. Tanisha Ford Talk (2 pages) Due**

Th 5/5 Alice Walker, *Meridian* (1976) (pages 199-242)

**Week Seven**

T 5/10 Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982) (pages 1-66)  
**Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pages) Due**

Th 5/12 Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (pages 67-140)

**Week Eight**

T 5/17 Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (pages 141-207)

Th 5/19 Paper Proposal Workshop  
**Paper Proposal w/ Bibliography (2-3 pages) Due**

Th 5/19 **Asali Solomon reading, 4pm, 301 Chapman**

**Week Nine**

T 5/24 Toni Morrison, *Love* (2003), Foreword, Prologue, and Sections 1-3 (pages ix-xii and 1-68)

Th 5/26 Morrison, *Love*, Sections 4-6 (pages 69-141)  
**Extra Credit Response to Asali Solomon Reading Due**

**Week Ten**

T 5/31 Morrison, *Love*, Sections 7-9 and Epilogue (pages 142-202)

Th 6/2 Conclusion

**T 6/7 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.