ENGLISH 241: INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE
Spring 2019
MW 10-11:20 am
117 Fenton Hall

Dr. Weeber
sweeber@uoregon.edu
Office: 265 PLC
Office hours: M 4-5pm; W 11:30-1:30pm; and by appointment.

*If you have questions about the course that can’t be answered by first checking the syllabus or assignment sheets, or if you want to set up an appointment with me outside of my regularly scheduled office hours, please email me at least 24 hours in advance.

Course description
This course surveys African American literature from the late 1700s to the present. We will read a wide variety of genres, including poetry, fiction, and essays (and occasionally, music and visual art). While we look for thematic and formal threads running through these texts, we will also ask questions about the relationship between this literature and our cultural narratives about nationhood and national belonging. We will discuss how African American literature both reflects and revises American history, politics, and culture. And we will read and respond to debates about the purpose, audience, and scope of African American literature. What is the political or social responsibility of these texts? For whom are they written? How do we decide which texts to read and study? This class contends that the study of African American literature helps us more fully understand both our history and our present moment.

Course objectives
• Gain a deeper understanding of African American literature, including a sense of how these texts constitute a literary tradition—how they build on and revise each other
• Interrogate the relationship between African American literature and its broader historical, political, and social contexts
• Develop our reading skills so that we can recognize and analyze literary conventions, genres, and traditions
• Improve our writing and analytical thinking skills through regular writing and close reading

Required texts:
You are expected to bring the required readings to class each day. When purchasing or renting these texts, make sure you have the correct editions. I will also place these on course reserve in the library. Additional readings will be posted in Canvas, and these should be printed and brought to class.

• The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Third Edition, Volume 1
• The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Third Edition, Volume 2

A note on content:
Some of the material in this class describes racial and sexual violence. Occasionally, the language and material may be graphic or difficult to read, and our conversations in class will cover difficult topics. If this is something you think might interfere with your learning, please talk to me.
Assignments:
Weekly Canvas response posts (10 total) 20%
Participation 15%
2 close reading essays 40%
Final project 25%

Participation
Participation includes consistent attendance as well as attentive, active engagement in class. Please come to class each day having done the assigned reading. I recommend you arrive with at least one comment, one question, and one passage from the assigned text you would like us to discuss. Please also note that missing more than two classes jeopardizes your overall, final course grade. 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 B-) for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. If you know you are going to miss a class, please reach out to me. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to get notes for that day from a classmate and otherwise catch up on any material you have missed. Finally, if you are physically present in class but are distracted by technology or otherwise not paying attention and not engaging in the class, I reserve the right to mark you as absent for that day. Please silence cell phones and stow them out of sight unless I ask you to look something up.

*If participation drops, I reserve the right to implement reading quizzes.

Canvas response posts
You will submit weekly response posts to Canvas (each week, with the exception of the first week, you can choose to respond to Monday’s or Wednesday’s assigned material). In 200 words (minimum), engage with the week’s reading assignment, and post your response by midnight the day before that reading is due. Be sure to check Canvas before starting your response; usually the prompt will be open ended, but occasionally I will give you a specific prompt to respond to.

Avoid plot summary or description in your posts. You’re writing to the rest of the class, so don’t feel the need to recap the plot. These posts should make arguments or claims about the assigned material. You can focus on a scene, moment, or image that struck (or surprised, intrigued, or perplexed) you or you can try out an argument about a topic, thread, or theme you see emerging throughout the piece. If the former, practice your close reading skills by paying attention to specific details in a section of the text. What does this moment show us? What effects does it produce? Why might it matter? If the latter, point us toward a few moments/scenes/images as evidence for your argument. Try to raise key questions and make a claim (even if the claim is speculative or half-formed at this stage). You can also use the response posts to ask questions you think the assigned material raises—questions we can take up in class discussion. I will use these responses to generate class discussion, and they will also help you practice close reading and other analytical skills you’ll hone further in your essays.

Writing tutoring
The Writing Associates Program offers free peer tutoring for students in 100- and 200-level English and Composition classes. Writing Associates are advanced English majors trained to tutor writing. They are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course. To make an appointment with a Writing Associate, go to https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu.
Accessibility
I am committed to making this class an inclusive learning environment. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC) in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaecc@uoregon.edu.

Academic honesty
All of your work in this class should be your own, and all sources you use in your work should be properly acknowledged and documented. If you have questions about plagiarism, please see https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism, and feel free to talk to me, too.

COURSE SCHEDULE
** This schedule is subject to change. I will give you advanced notice of any changes to assignments or dates.

Week 1
M 4/1  Phillis Wheatley, “To the University of Cambridge, in New-England” & “On Being Brought from Africa to America” (1773) (Vol 1: 143-144)
W 4/3  Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself, 1845 (Vol 1, ch. I-III; VI-VII; & part of X: 337-345; 350-356; 362-370)
* Post Canvas response for Wednesday

Week 2
M 4/8  Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) (Vol 1, preface-XXI: 224-246)
W 4/10 Jacobs, Incidents (Vol 1, XXIX-end: 246-261)
* Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Week 3
M 4/15 Booker T Washington, “1895 Atlanta Compromise” (Canvas)
* Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Week 4
M 4/22 James Weldon Johnson, Preface to The Book of American Negro Poetry (1921) (Vol 1: 871-879)
Paul Laurence Dunbar, “Ode to Ethiopia,” “We Wear the Mask,” “The Haunted Oak,” & “Philosophy” (1893-1903) (Vol 1: 896-897; 906; 911-913)
Alice Moore Dunbar Nelson, “Violets” (1917) & “I Sit and Sew” (1920) (Vol 1: 918)
W 4/24 Claude McKay, all poems (1917-1922) (Vol 1, p 1004-1007)
Langston Hughes, all poems pp. 1308-1329 & “Cubes” (Vol 1: 1314-1315)
* Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday
Close Reading #1 due Wednesday (2-3 pages)
Week 5
W 5/1 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) (Vol 1: 1120-1141)
*Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Week 6
James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (1949) (394-399)
*Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Week 7
Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement” (1968) (Vol 2: 784-787)
*Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Close Reading #2 due Wednesday (3-4 pages)

Week 8
Toni Cade Bambara, “Gorilla, My Love” (1972) (Vol 2: 842-846)
*Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Week 9
M 5/27 Memorial Day – No Class
*Post Canvas response for Wednesday

Week 10
Contemporary poetry: Claudia Rankine (Canvas)
W 6/5 Contemporary poetry: Danez Smith (Canvas)
*Post Canvas response for Monday or Wednesday

Final project due June 11 by 11:59pm