ENG 241 Introduction to African American Literature
CRN 32142, 4 credits, Spring 2020
Monday/Wednesday 12-1:20pm, Gerlinger 246
Professor Thorsson (thorsson@uoregon.edu)
Office Hours: Please email me to make an appointment to meet via Skype or phone.

Course Description
This course is a survey of writings by African American authors. We will study fiction, essays, and poetry in their historical, political, and literary contexts from the late eighteenth century to the present. We will investigate whether there are specific formal and thematic elements that define an African American literary tradition. We will study how these texts navigate ideas about race, gender, and class and how they use and defy conventions of various forms, genres, and time periods. We will work to understand the relationships among our readings and between our readings and other art forms such as music and visual arts. This means that as we read each text, we may also listen closely to a relevant speech, poetry reading, or piece of music. This class requires substantial reading and writing and vigorous participation.

This course satisfies two Core Education group requirements: Arts & Letters and US: Difference, Inequality, Agency.

The course counts as a lower-division elective for the English Minor and the English Major.

Learning Outcomes
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 information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
3. Perform critical, formal analyses of literary or other cultural texts.
4. Write focused, analytical essays in clear prose with correct grammar and correct citation.
5. Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.

Remote Learning Plan
While UO is not holding in-person classes, we will work together to help you learn remotely. This is not an online course. Rather, I have adapted this syllabus to allow your learning to happen as best it can during times we cannot meet in person. We are in this together, we will be patient and flexible with each other, and we will figure it out as we go!

I am available via email, phone, and Skype to talk with you about our readings, assignments, or anything else. I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and may take a bit longer to respond on the weekend. If you would like to talk on the phone or meet via Skype, please email me at thorsson@uoregon.edu to make an appointment.
In the case of the current health emergency and in the case of any emergency that disrupts academic activities, our course requirements, assignments, due dates, and grading percentages are subject to change. I will communicate any changes as soon as possible via Canvas and email.

Whether or not we are meeting in person, please continue to do the reading and other assignments per the schedule below on this syllabus.

**Required Texts**
There is one required text for this course: the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, third edition, volumes one and two (2014), edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Valerie Smith. The *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* is available at the UO Bookstore, from online retailers, and at the Knight Library reserves desk. All handouts on the schedule below are in the files section of the Canvas website for our class.

**Course Requirements and Policies**
You will spend more than half of the time you devote to this course actively reading our assigned texts. Active reading means reading with a pen in your hand, taking notes, writing down observations and questions you have about the text, and looking up words you don't know or that the author is using in a surprising way.

Given the circumstances this term, I will not record attendance and will not penalize students for missed classes.

The Writing Associates Program offers free, one-on-one peer tutoring for students in 100- and 200-level English and Composition classes. Writing Associate tutors are available to help students with any aspect of their writing for this course, from learning how to write about literature and media to crafting clear and effective arguments. To make an appointment with a Writing Associate, go to [https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu](https://writingassociates.uoregon.edu). There will likely be remote tutoring options during weeks that classes are not meeting in person.

Online tutoring will be available starting April 6th, Monday-Friday 9am-5pm through UO's Online Writing Lab (OWL), a free service that allows all UO students to submit work via an online portal and receive detailed feedback within 24 hours. Log in at [https://owl.uoregon.edu/](https://owl.uoregon.edu/).

If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please let me know. If applicable, please request that the Accessible Education Center (aec.uoregon.edu/) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

The University Student Conduct Code (dos.uoregon.edu/conduct) defines academic misconduct. Students may not commit or attempt 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.

UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender-based stalking. If you have experienced gender-based violence, know that you are not alone. UO has staff trained
to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, getting academic and housing accommodations, getting legal protective orders, and accessing other help. If you tell me about harassment or assault, I am not required to report this information to anyone unless you request that I do so. I am required to consult with a confidential UO employee (someone with legal confidentiality, such as a counseling professional or a crisis center advocate) to ensure that you are supported. If you decide to make a report, I and other UO employees will help you to do so. My goal is to make sure you are aware of the options available and that you have access to the resources you need. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO’s 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options or visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

In this class, we are studying literature of the United States 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. Please consider whether the content of the course may be disturbing to a degree that interferes with your learning. We will not use the n-word in this class, even if it appears in our texts. We will not use the f-word in this class, regardless of a person’s perceived sexual orientation or gender expression. When reading aloud from a text, for example, we will simply pause for a beat or say "n" or "n's." We will work together to apply this policy to other slurs and biased language as needed over the course of the term.

**Grading**

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<td>Concluding Reflection</td>
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**Grade Point Distribution:**

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**Assignments**

Please complete all assignments via Canvas **by 12pm (noon)** on the due dates listed below on our schedule. Please read assignment instructions on the schedule below, look at the assignment on Canvas, and then email me if you have questions.

All assignments are open-book.

Regardless of whether we are able to meet in person or not, I will grade generously this term given the circumstances we are working under. If there are things I can do to make it possible or easier for you to complete each assignment by noon on the day it is due, please let me know.
Schedule

Week One
M 3/30  Post answers to the three questions in "Welcome to ENG 241" discussion.
Read the Syllabus available in the files section on Canvas.
Post any questions you have about the syllabus to "Syllabus Questions" discussion.
Read posts and replies to both above discussion threads.
Read A Brief Introduction to African American Literature available in the files section on Canvas.

W 4/1   Read Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Vol 1, p 330-350).
Read the Close Reading Handout available in the files section on Canvas.
Post any questions you have about the handout or about close reading to the "Close Reading Questions" discussion.
Read posts and replies to "Close Reading Questions" discussion.

Week Two
M 4/6   Read Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Vol 1, p 350-380).

W 4/8   Read Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Vol 1, p 381-393).
Complete Quiz *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Reading Comprehension Quiz

Week Three
M 4/13  Watch PBS 5-minute video about Frances Ellen Watkins Harper here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fmN7RhhEPk
Read Frances Harper, all poems (1853-1900) (Vol 1, p 448-459)

W 4/15  Read Meter Handout available in the files section on Canvas.
Watch 6-minute video about poetic meter here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj6NrUHHxHk
Post 2-3 sentences describing one aspect of rhyme or meter in one Frances Harper poem to the "Rhyme and Meter in Frances Harper's Poetry" discussion.
Read posts to the "Rhyme and Meter in Frances Harper's Poetry" discussion.
Week Four  

W 4/22  Post One sentence from the Du Bois reading that you find useful, confusing, persuasive, or otherwise worth special attention and 2-3 sentences saying why you chose that quotation and what you think about it to *The Souls of Black Folk* discussion thread.

Read your colleagues' posts to the *Souls of Black Folk* discussion thread.

Week Five  
M 4/27  Read Paul Laurence Dunbar, all poems (1893-1903) (Vol 1, p 896-915)  
Post one stanza from one Dunbar poem and two textual traits you observe in that stanza. Use your Close Reading Handout to think about the various kinds of textual traits you might observe. This post should go in the Paul Laurence Dunbar stanza and observation thread.

W 4/29  Read your colleagues' posts to the Paul Laurence Dunbar stanza and observation thread.

Watch Kenyon College 12-minute video "An Invisible Legacy: The Life and Work of Paul Laurence Dunbar" here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgym5OEFUk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgym5OEFUk)

Post one thing you learned from video in the discussion thread "An Invisible Legacy: The Life and Work of Paul Laurence Dunbar" video.

Read your colleagues' posts to "An Invisible Legacy: The Life and Work of Paul Laurence Dunbar" video discussion.

Week Six  
M 5/4  Read Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1960) (Vol 2, p 326-343)

W 5/6  Listen to Gwendolyn Brooks reading "We Real Cool" (1960) here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaVfLwZ6jes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaVfLwZ6jes)

Complete Quiz Gwendolyn Brooks, Reading Comprehension Quiz

Week Seven  
M 5/11  Read Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" (1973) (Vol 2, p 1188-1194)  
Complete Quiz: "Everyday Use," Reading Comprehension Quiz

Listen to June Jordan reading "Poem about My Rights" here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUSTxhYu7-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUSTxhYu7-4)

Watch "June Jordan at the Brockport Writers Forum" (1981) here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ii4y8MKcrwk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ii4y8MKcrwk)

**Week Eight**

**M 5/18**


**Watch** Toni Morrison on *60 Minutes* here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7vXnbEd8z4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7vXnbEd8z4)

**Post** one question or observation about the first half of the novel to the *Sula* thread **by noon**.

**Post** one reply to a one classmate's question or observation about the first half of the novel to the *Sula* thread **by 5pm**.

**Read** your classmates' posts and replies on the *Sula* thread.

**W 5/20**


**Post** one question or observation about the second half of the novel to the *Sula* thread **by noon**.

**Post** one reply to a classmate's question or observation about the second half of the novel to the *Sula* thread **by 5pm**.

**Read** your classmates' posts on the *Sula* thread.

**Week Nine**

**M 5/25**

Memorial Day – No Class

**W 5/27**

**Start reading** any one text that you want to from either volume of our *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* that does not appear on the syllabus.

**Week Ten**

**M 6/1**

**Finish reading** any one text that you want to from either volume of our *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* that does not appear on the syllabus.

**Post** 2-3 paragraphs saying why you chose the text you did, describing the text to your colleagues, and saying whether or not you recommend that they read it and why. Please post this to the My Chosen Text discussion thread.

**Read** your colleagues' posts in the My Chosen Text discussion thread.

**W 6/3**

**Concluding Reflection Due (2-3 pages)**

Please write 2-3 pages of concluding reflection on our study African American literature this term. You may approach this assignment any way you wish. You
might identify one or two characteristics of African American literature you have observed in our readings and explain how those characteristics work in two or three of our readings. You might write about all or part of one text you read this term that you think is especially useful, beautiful, or important. You might use our Close Reading Handout to offer observation, analysis, and argument about a passage of text from any of our readings. You might write about what has been difficult, useful, annoying, or inspiring about studying African American literature during this particular term. This is a written assignment that you will turn in via Canvas to me. Unlike our discussion posts, which the whole class will see, this assignment is one that only I will see.