

ENG 479/579 Major Authors: Toni Morrison, Spring 2018, CRN 35991

M/W 2-3:20pm, 195 Anstett

Professor Thorsson (thorsson@uoregon.edu)

Office Hours: M/W 12-1:30pm, 521 PLC

Course Description

In this course, we will study selected writings of Toni Morrison in their historical, political, and literary contexts. In addition to Morrison's work as a novelist, we will consider her work as a literary scholar, editor, and advocate for and representative of contemporary African American literature. We will work to contextualize her fiction and non-fiction writings in relationship to the writings of her contemporaries, Black Feminism, the increased visibility of African American women writers in the late-twentieth century, and the long African American literary tradition. 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.

Required Texts

Books on the schedule below are at the UO Bookstore and on reserve at Knight Library. Items with an asterisk are in the files section of the Canvas website for ENG 479/579.

Course Requirements and Policies

Reading, participation, and 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 B-) for each absence beyond the two permitted. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. If you will miss more than two classes due to a university obligation (such as athletics) or due to religious observation, please see me as soon as possible in office hours with relevant documentation if applicable. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to keep up with the reading and get notes for that day from a classmate.

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches. Please print and consult the assignment sheet posted in the files section of the Canvas website for ENG 479/579.

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, including 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.

If you anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please meet with me soon. 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 experience gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff trained to support survivors in navigating campus life including accessing health and counseling services, academic and housing accommodations, legal protective orders, and 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. 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 range of 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. 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 help you select a suitable course.

Grading for Undergraduate Students:

Participation	10%
Close Reading Exercise (3-4 pages)	15%
Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages)	15%
Paper Proposal (2-3 pages)	10%
Final Paper (10-15 pages)	50%

Grading for Graduate Students:

Participation	10%
Close Reading Exercise (4-5 pages)	15%
Secondary Source Exercise (4-5 pages)	15%
Project Proposal (3-4 pages)	10%
Final Project	50%

Week One

M 4/2 Introduction
Syllabus*

W 4/4 *Sula* (1973) pages xi-48
Assignment Sheet*

Week Two

M 4/9 *Sula* (1973) pages 49-111
Close Reading Handout*

W 4/11 *Sula* (1973) pages 112-174

Week Three

M 4/16 No Class

W 4/18 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages xi-112

Week Four

M 4/23 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 113-216
Robert Stepto, "'Intimate Things in Place': A Conversation with Toni Morrison,"
The Massachusetts Review (1977)*

W 4/25 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 217-258
Dana A. Williams, "To Make a Humanist Black: Toni Wofford's Howard Years,"
Toni Morrison: Memory and Meaning, edited by Adrienne Lanier Seward and
Justine Tally (2014)*

Week Five

M 4/30 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 259-337
Margo Jefferson, "Black Gold," *Newsweek* (1977)*

W 5/2 *Beloved* (1987) pages xv-59
Close Reading Exercise Due

Week Six

M 5/7 *Beloved* (1987) pages 60-146
Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," *Black Women Writers,
1950-1980*, edited by Mari Evans (1984)*

W 5/9 *Beloved* (1987) pages 147-195

Week Seven

M 5/14 *Beloved* (1987) pages 196-324
Houston Baker, June Jordan, et al "Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison,"
New York Times (1988)*

W 5/16 *Love* (2003) pages ix-68
Secondary Source Exercise Due

Week Eight

M 5/21 *Love* (2003) pages 69-141
Hilton Als, "Ghosts in the House: How Toni Morrison Fostered A Generation of Black Writers," *The New Yorker* (2003)*

W 5/23 *Love* (2003) pages 142-202

Week Nine

M 5/28 Memorial Day – No Class

W 5/30 **Paper Proposal Due - bring 2 copies to class**
Paper proposal workshop

Week Ten

M 6/4 *A Mercy* (2009) pages 3-118

W 6/6 *A Mercy* (2009) pages 119-196
Conclusion

Exam Week

M 6/11 **Final paper (undergrads) or final project (grads) due to my office (521 PLC) by 5pm**