

ENG 241 Introduction to African American Literature

CRN 32040, 4 credits, Spring 2021

Tuesday/Thursday 12:15-1:45pm

Remote via Zoom at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/95406652924>

Professor Thorsson thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 10-11:30am at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/92096675315>

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, sexuality, and class and how these texts both use and defy conventions of various genres. 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 U.S. Difference, Inequality, Agency.

This 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 in both verbal and written forms.

Remote Learning Plan

In this class, we will work together to meet our learning objectives and to find inspiration, provocation, intellectual challenges, laughter, and solace in literature. We will not be in the same physical space, but we are in this together! We will be patient and flexible with each other as we build our remote learning community.

We will meet live via Zoom during our scheduled class time. I will use Canvas to post course materials, send announcements, collect assignments, comment on assignments, and post grades.

I will not record our class meetings. You do not have permission from me or from each of your classmates to record our class meetings. Our collaborative task, just as it would be in an in-

person classroom, is to make ENG 241 a space for rigorous, respectful study and discussion of challenging material. This work is by us and for us, not for recording or sharing.

In the case of the current pandemic 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.

As we navigate our work to learn remotely during a pandemic, I understand that each of us has and will continue to face a variety of losses, challenges, and changes in our lives. I am here to support your learning however I can. Please do not hesitate to drop in on my office hours (Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11:30am via Zoom at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/92096675315>) or email me (thorsson@uoregon.edu) about any obstacles to your learning that come up this term.

UO Resources

The UO Basic Needs Resource Guide (<https://blogs.uoregon.edu/basicneeds/>) is the place to go for help with basic needs such as food security, housing security, healthcare, and access to technology.

The UO Counseling Center (<https://counseling.uoregon.edu/>) offers support for well-being and mental health of students via telehealth and in-person appointments, drop-in hours, and availability of mental health professionals at any time via phone at 541-346-3227.

SAFE (safe.uoregon.edu) is a resource for members of the UO community who experience sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call the 24-hour hotline 541-346-SAFE to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options and get support.

Please let me know about any accommodations that will help make this class accessible to you. If applicable, please request that the Accessible Education Center (aec.uoregon.edu/) send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations. An AEC letter helps me implement accessible course design, but I do not require documentation to make accommodations.

Online tutoring is available through UO's Online Writing Lab (OWL), a free service that allows UO students to submit work via an online portal and receive detailed feedback within 24 hours. Log in at <https://owl.uoregon.edu/>.

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.

Required Texts

There is one required book for this course, the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, third edition, **volumes one and two** (2014). You can use the ISBN 978-0393911558 to search for and make you are purchasing the correct 2-volume, third edition of the *Norton*, which is

available through the UO Bookstore, [Norton](#), [Amazon](#), and other online retailers. If you have difficulties getting our book for any reason, including cost, please let me know.

Any other course materials on the schedule below, such as handouts, are in the files section of the Canvas website for our class.

Reading, Participation, and Attendance

You will spend much 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 do not know or that the author is using in a surprising way. This applies whether our assigned text is printed, audio, visual, or any other media. Have the assigned readings with you at each class meeting and be prepared to discuss them.

You will earn your participation grade by taking part in discussions, group work, in-class writing, reading aloud from a text, and other activities that will take place during our class meetings on Zoom. I will offer you a variety of ways to contribute to our learning community and am confident that each of you will earn full credit for participation.

If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to keep up with the readings, get notes for that day from a classmate, and then see me in office hours if you have questions about the material you missed. Please be aware that it will be difficult to learn the material or do your best work in this class if you miss more than two class meetings. Given the circumstances this term, I will not record attendance and will not penalize students for missed classes.

Office Hours and Email

I am available in office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays 10-11:30am via Zoom at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/92096675315> to talk with you about our readings, assignments, or anything else. These office hours are for you and I encourage you to use them! You can make an appointment in advance or drop in. Please be aware that you may need to wait in the Zoom waiting room if I am with another student.

I am also available via email (thorsson@uoregon.edu). I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and will take longer to respond on the weekend. When you email me about any matter, please include your full name and that you are an ENG 241 student.

Class Content and Respectful Discussion

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 racist 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

Participation	20%
Close Reading #1 (2-3 pages)	25%
Close Reading #2 (3-4 pages)	35%
My Chosen Text (2 pages)	20%

100 = A+ = 4.3	77-79 = C+ = 2.3
93-99 = A = 4.0	73-76 = C = 2.0
90-92 = A- = 3.7	70-72 = C- = 1.7
87-89 = B+ = 3.3	67-69 = D+ = 1.3
83-86 = B = 3.0	65-66 = D = 1.0
80-82 = B- = 2.7	65 or below = F = 0

Assignments

We will discuss each assignment in detail as it approaches and practice the skills needed for each assignment in class before that assignment is due. Assignments must be submitted via Canvas as a Microsoft Word document or PDF by the beginning of class on the due dates listed below. Each assignment will open for submission on Canvas one week before it is due and close one week after it is due. I will mark late assignments down by 1/3 of a letter grade (B becomes a B-) for each day they are late.

Please format assignments according to current MLA guidelines, including 1 inch margins, correct citation and quotation, and a works cited page. For help with correct MLA format, consult me, the examples on your close reading handout, a research librarian, the *MLA Handbook*, or [Purdue University's Online Writing Lab](#).

I am happy to meet with you in office hours to talk through your plans for any of our assignments and to recommend readings that pertain to your specific research interests. I will offer feedback to the class as a whole verbally at the end of a class meeting, usually one week after an assignment is due. This is a chance for us to identify specific skills that many of you are doing well or that many of you are working to improve as readers, thinkers, and writers. I will provide individual comments and grades on assignments, usually one week after they are due. Please be sure to read my assignment comments on your work in Canvas.

Close Reading #1 (2-3 pages) Due to Canvas by 12:15pm on Thursday 4/22

Your close reading #1 will analyze a short passage of your choice from any of the texts on our syllabus. Observe and analyze both the form and content of your chosen passage. Close Reading #1 may or may not include an interpretive argument and/or use a secondary source. The passage you are analyzing should appear in your close reading, either at the top of the assignment or in the body of your text (see examples on close reading handout). As you write your close reading, look at the handout with examples and your notes from our collaborative close reading work in class. Offer your own insights rather than simply rehashing what we have said in class. If you get stuck or find you have little to say about your chosen passage, reread the passage, list new observations, and analyze those observations. If your passage doesn't give you enough to work with, choose another one. This purpose of this assignment is for you to practice close reading, which is a fundamental skill of literary analysis.

Close Reading #2 (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 12:15pm on Thursday 5/13

Your close reading #2 will analyze a short passage of your choice from any of the texts on our syllabus. Observe and analyze both the form and content of your chosen text. Close reading #2 must include an interpretive argument about your chosen passage or the text it comes from. It may or may not use a secondary source. The passage you are analyzing should appear in your close reading, either at the top of the assignment or in the body of your text (see examples on close reading handout). As you write your close reading, look at the handout with examples and your notes from our collaborative close reading work in class. Offer your own insights rather than simply rehashing what we have said in class. If you get stuck or find you have little to say about your chosen passage, reread the passage, list new observations, and analyze those observations. If your passage doesn't give you enough to work with, choose another one. This purpose of this assignment is for you to practice close reading, which is a fundamental skill of literary analysis.

My Chosen Text (2 pages) Due to Canvas by 12:15pm on Tuesday 6/1

Choose any one text from either volume of our *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* that does not appear on the syllabus. Read your chosen text carefully. Your My Chosen Text assignment should say why you chose the text you did, describe the text you chose, and say whether or not you think it should be on our ENG 241 syllabus and why. The purpose of this assignment is for you to apply what you have learned about the African American literary tradition to a text of your choice and for each of you and your colleagues to offer one another informed recommendations for further reading. **Come to class on Tuesday 6/1 prepared to tell your classmates about your chosen text.**

Schedule

Week One

- T 3/30 Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773) (Vol 1, p 143-144)
Syllabus
- Th 4/1 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Vol 1, p 330-362)

Week Two

- T 4/6 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) (Vol 1, p 362-393)
Close Reading Handout
- Th 4/8 Frances Harper, all poems (1853-1900) (Vol 1, p 448-459)
Meter Handout
Optional: watch PBS 5-minute video about Frances Ellen Watkins Harper here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fmN7RHhEPk>

Week Three

- T 4/13 W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Forethought," and "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (Vol 1, p 687-693)
 Passive Voice Handout
 Optional: watch Prof. Shawn Leigh Alexander history lecture, "End of Slavery to Segregation" (66 minutes): <https://www.c-span.org/video/?310916-1/aftermath-slavery-reconstruction>
- Th 4/15 Paul Laurence Dunbar, all poems (1893-1903) (Vol 1, p 896-915)
 Optional: watch Prof. Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow and the Convict Under-Caste" lecture at Riverside Church (2011) (53 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BSwEYyFu2E>
 and/or Prof. Michelle Alexander, "The Future of Race in America," TEDx Columbus talk (2013) (23 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6H-Mz6hgw>

Week Four

- T 4/20 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) (Vol 1, p 1080-1110)
- Th 4/22 Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929) (Vol 1, p 1110-1141)
Close Reading #1 (2-3 pages) Due to Canvas by 12:15pm

Week Five

- T 4/27 Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1960) (Vol 2, p 326-343)
 Optional: listen to Gwendolyn Brooks reading "We Real Cool" (1960) here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaVfLwZ6jes>
- Th 4/29 Gwendolyn Brooks, all poems (1945-1960) (Vol 2, p 326-343)

Week Six

- T 5/4 James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1957) (Vol 2, p 413-435)
 Optional: watch James Baldwin and William F. Buckley Debate at Cambridge Union Hall (1964) (60 minutes) here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w>
- Th 5/6 Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement" (1968) (Vol 2, p 784-787)
 Amiri Baraka, "Black Art" (1969) (Vol 2, p 703-704)
 Jayne Cortez, "How Long Has Trane Been Gone" (1969) (Vol 2, p 771-773)

Week Seven

- T 5/11 Toni Cade Bambara, "Gorilla, My Love" (1972) (Vol 2, p 842-846)
 Alice Walker, "Everyday Use" (1973) (Vol 2, p 1188-1194)

- Th 5/13 Audre Lorde, "Power" (1976) (Vol 2, p 642-643)
 June Jordan, "Poem about Police Violence" (1978) (Vol 2, p 764-765) and "Poem about My Rights" (1980) (Vol 2, p 766-769)
 Optional: listen to June Jordan reading "Poem about My Rights" here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XUSTxhYu7-4>
 Optional: watch "June Jordan at the Brockport Writers Forum" (1981) here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ii4y8MKcrwk>
Close Reading #2 (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 12:15pm

Week Eight

- T 5/18 Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984) (Vol 2, p 1067-1071)
 Optional: watch Toni Morrison on *60 Minutes* here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7vXnbEd8z4>
 Optional: watch *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* (2019), which is available to online through the UO library and various streaming services.
- Th 5/20 Colson Whitehead, from *John Henry Days* (2009) (Vol 2, p 1491-1507)

Week Nine

- T 5/25 Evie Shockley, "*from* The Lost Letters of Frederick Douglass" (2011)
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55667/from-the-lost-letters-of-frederick-douglass>
 Evie Shockley, "what's not to liken?" (2017)
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147034/what39s-not-to-liken>
- Th 5/27 Danielle Evans, "Boys Go to Jupiter" (2017)
 PDF in files section of our Canvas site here:
<https://canvas.uoregon.edu/courses/176928/files?preview=10808386>
 Optional: watch Danielle Evans interview on *UO Today* (2018) here:
<https://media.uoregon.edu/channel/archives/12661>

Week Ten

- T 6/1 Discussion of Your Chosen Texts
My Chosen Text (2 pages) Post Due to Canvas by 12:15pm
- Th 6/3 Conclusion