

**ENG 479/579 Toni Morrison**

CRN 32076/32084, Spring 2021

Tuesday/Thursday 2:15-3:45pm

Remote via Zoom at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/93384320995>

Professor Thorsson [thorsson@uoregon.edu](mailto:thorsson@uoregon.edu)

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

**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 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.

This course counts as upper-division coursework in the English Minor and as upper-division coursework for the English Major in these categories: C-Literature 1789-Present, and G-Empire/Race/Ethnicity.

**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 479/579 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](mailto: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](https://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/](https://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](https://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**

The required books for this course are below. Please get a hardcopy of the assigned edition of each of our required texts. You can use the ISBNs below to search for and make sure you are purchasing the correct edition. Having the same physical, print edition of each book is necessary

for the work we will do together in class. If you have difficulties getting our books for any reason, including cost, please let me know.

- *Sula* (1973) ISBN: 978-1400033430
- *Song of Solomon* (1977) ISBN: 978-1400033423
- *Beloved* (1987) ISBN: 978-1400033416
- *A Mercy* (2009) ISBN: 978-0307276766

Our syllabus, handouts, and a variety of secondary sources 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. 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. Given the circumstances this term, I will not penalize students for missed classes. 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.

### **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 may email me to make an appointment in advance or you may 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](mailto:thorsson@uoregon.edu)). I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours during the week. When you email me about any matter, please include your full name and that you are an ENG 479/579 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 (3-4 pages)	15%
Secondary Source Presentation (10 minutes)	15%
Paper Proposal (2-3 pages)	10%
Final Paper (10-15 pages)	40%

**Graduate Students**, you will complete the above assignments and should see me in office hours for additional readings and to discuss plans for a final paper or project that advances your research agenda.

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 your work 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 feedback on your work in Canvas.

**Close Reading Exercise (3-4 pages) - Due Thursday 4/29 to Canvas by 2:15pm**

Your close reading exercise will analyze a short passage of your choice from any of the texts on our syllabus. Close readings must observe and analyze both the form and content of your chosen text. Your close reading should include observation and analysis. It may or may not include an interpretive argument. It may or may not use one or more secondary sources. 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). I encourage you to use this as opportunity to explore a text you are considering working with for your final paper. 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. The purpose of this assignment is for you to practice close reading, which is a fundamental skill of literary analysis that you will use in your final paper for this class.

**Secondary Source Presentation (10 minutes) – Due in class on a day you sign up for**

You will give one in-class presentation to further our discussion of one part of one of our assigned novels. Choose a secondary source such as a scholarly book or article, author interview, book review, work of journalism, documentary film, or other source that is about one of our readings or that helps you more deeply understand of one or more of our readings. You may choose one of the works that I have posted in the Files section of our Canvas site or you may select a different secondary source. Your presentation should be about 10 minutes. In your presentation, please 1) describe and explain your secondary source, 2) explain what it helps you understand about our reading for that day, and 3) ask one question for discussion. Use your question to help us move from your presentation to discussion of the text. If you are presenting on the same day as a classmate, please consult with that person to coordinate or collaborate as you choose. The purpose of this assignment is for you to practice engaging the ideas of other thinkers, both the author of your secondary source and your classmates. Engaging secondary sources is a skill of literary analysis that you will use in your final paper for this class.

**Paper Proposal (2-3 pages) - Due Tuesday 5/25 to Canvas by 2:15pm**

The proposal for your final paper should include a draft introduction, a detailed outline, a preliminary works cited page in MLA format with both primary and secondary sources, and a passage or passages from one or more of our readings that you intend to close read in support of your argument. Your detailed outline should show how you plan to use each of your close readings and each of your secondary sources to support your argument, make a transition, define a term, raise a counter argument, or otherwise do work to make your paper persuasive. The purpose of this assignment is for you to develop a plan for your final paper and to make it possible for your classmates and I to offer feedback on that plan.

**Final Paper (10-12 pages) - Due Tuesday 6/8 to Canvas by 5pm**

Your final paper will use close reading and secondary sources to make and support a specific interpretive argument about one or more of the texts on our syllabus or another text or texts selected in consultation with me. You may choose to revise your close reading exercise and/or your secondary source presentation as part of your final paper. The purpose of this assignment is

for you to bring together the skills and content you have learned in this class to make an argument you care about in a way that deepens our understanding of a text or texts that you think deserves our attention.

## Schedule

### Week One

T 3/30 Introduction  
Syllabus

Th 4/1 *Sula* (1973) pages xi-48

### Week Two

T 4/6 *Sula* (1973) pages 49-111  
Close Reading Handout

Th 4/8 *Sula* (1973) pages 112-174

### Week Three

T 4/13 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages xi-55

Th 4/15 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 56-112

### Week Four

T 4/20 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 113-172

Th 4/22 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 173-216

### Week Five

T 4/27 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 217-258

Th 4/29 *Song of Solomon* (1977) pages 259-337  
**Close Reading Exercise (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 2:15pm**

### Week Six

T 5/4 *Beloved* (1987) pages xv-59

Th 5/6 *Beloved* (1987) pages 60-124

### Week Seven

T 5/11 *Beloved* (1987) pages 125-186

Th 5/13      *Beloved* (1987) pages 187-247

**Week Eight**

T 5/18      *Beloved* (1987) pages 248-324

Th 5/20      *A Mercy* (2009) pages 3-77

**Week Nine**

T 5/25      **Paper Proposal (2-3 pages) Due to Canvas by 2:15pm**  
Paper proposal workshop

Th 5/27      *A Mercy* (2009) pages 78-135

**Week Ten**

T 6/1      *A Mercy* (2009) pages 136-196

Th 6/3      Conclusion

**Exam Week**

T 6/8      **Final Paper (10-12 pages) Due to Canvas by 5pm**