

ENG 316 Black Women's Novels

CRN 12349, 4 credits, Fall 2021

Monday/Wednesday 2-3:20pm, 195 Anstett Hall

Professor Thorsson thorsson@uoregon.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday 10am-1pm via Zoom <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/97948555325>

Course Description

In this course, we will study novels by Black American women. Using close reading and historical context, we will consider how these novels construct race, class, and gender; the possibilities and limits of the novel form; whether and how these texts engage with Black Nationalism, Civil Rights, Black Power, Feminism, and other political movements; how these novels envision home, community, and nation; and, finally, whether these novels are part of a distinct tradition of African American women's writing. 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 satisfies the Core Education requirement in U.S. Difference, Inequality, Agency.

This course counts as upper-division coursework in the English Minor and as upper-division coursework for the English Major in these categories: F-Gender/Ability/Queer Studies/Sexuality, 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.

Required Texts

The required books for this course are listed 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.

- Toni Cade Bambara *The Salt Eaters* (1980): 978-0679740766
- Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997) ISBN: 978-0804169882
- Tayari Jones, *Leaving Atlanta* (2002) ISBN: 978-0446690898
- Danzy Senna, *New People* (2017) ISBN: 978-0399573149

Other assigned readings on the schedule below, such as handouts, are in the files section of the Canvas website for our class.

The secondary sources folder in the files section of our Canvas site contains scholarly writings about our primary texts. These readings are optional and you may choose to use them in your secondary source exercise and/or your final paper.

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, in hardcopy if possible, 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. 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. I will not record attendance and will not penalize students for missed classes, but please be aware that it will be very difficult for you 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 10am-1pm via Zoom at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/97948555325> 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 during office hours. 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). Please use email rather than Canvas messages to communicate with me. 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 316 student.

Learning During a Pandemic

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 be patient and flexible with each other as we build our learning community.

I will use Canvas to post course materials, send announcements, collect assignments, comment on assignments, and post grades. To contact me directly, please use email rather than Canvas messages.

Whether we meet in person, online, or both, 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 is to make ENG 316 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 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 see me in office hours Tuesdays 10am-1pm via Zoom at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/97948555325> or email me (thorsson@uoregon.edu) about any obstacles to your learning that come up this term.

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.

UO Resources

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/>

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Grading

Participation	10%
Close Reading (2-3 pages)	20%
Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pages)	20%
Paper Proposal (2-3 pages)	10%
Final paper (7-8 pages)	40%

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. We will 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, numbered pages, 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](http://www.purdue.edu/onlinewritinglab/).

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 verbal feedback about each assignment to the whole class at the end of a class meeting, usually one week after an assignment is due. This is a chance for us to identify common strengths and areas where you are working to improve as readers, thinkers, and writers. I will also provide brief individual comments and grades on each assignment, usually one week after it is due. Please be sure to read my assignment comments on your work in Canvas.

Close Reading (2-3 pgs) Due to Canvas by 2pm on Wednesday, October 13th

Your close reading 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 must 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 an 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, a skill you will use in your final paper for this class, and a form of critical thinking.

Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pgs) Due to Canvas by 2pm on Wednesday, November 3rd

Choose a secondary source that is about one or more of our assigned readings or that helps you better understand one or more of our assigned readings. You may choose one of the scholarly articles I have posted in the secondary sources folder in the files section of our Canvas site or you may consult with me to select a different secondary source that pertains to your research interests. Carefully choose and quote a couple of sentences or one idea from your secondary source. Explain the text you quote. Clearly state your own interpretive argument about the primary text in relationship to that of the writer you quote. You might, for example, fully or partly agree or disagree with the author of your secondary source or you might use a key term and its definition from your secondary source and apply it as part of your own interpretive argument about one or more of our readings. Fully explain your argument and use close reading to support your argument. The purpose of this assignment is for you to practice engaging the ideas of other scholars and articulating your own arguments in relation to those ideas. These are fundamental skills of literary analysis and skills you will use in your final paper for this class, and skills necessary for clear, persuasive, written communication.

Paper Proposal (2-3 pgs) Due to Canvas by 2pm on Wednesday, November 17th

Please have a copy of your proposal on hand for use in workshop during class.

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 and where 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 (7-8 pgs) - Due to Canvas by 2pm on Monday, December 6th

Your final paper will make an argument about one or more of the primary texts on our syllabus or about another novel by a Black woman writer that you have chosen in consultation with me.

You will support that argument using close reading as evidence. You must use at least one secondary source in your final paper. This is not an occasion to make broad, general claims about the state of the world, all literature, or all people of a given time period, race, class, or gender. Rather, your goal is to make a specific interpretive argument about a text. The more specific you are about the who, what, when and where of your claims, the more persuasive your paper will be. Make an argument and offer evidence from your chosen text to support that argument. This means that you will quote from the text, observe and analyze both formal and thematic aspects of those quotations, and use your analysis to support a concrete argument. You may choose to revise your close reading assignment and/or your secondary source exercise from earlier in the term 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 a clear, persuasive written argument that you care about in a way that deepens our understanding of a text that you think deserves our attention.

Schedule

Week One

M 9/27

Introduction
Syllabus

W 9/29

Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (1980), pages 1-63

Week Two

M 10/4

Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (1980), pages 64-137
Close Reading Handout

W 10/6

Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (1980), pages 138-190

Week Three

M 10/11

Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (1980), pages 191-249
Passive Voice Handout

W 10/13

Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (1980), pages 250-295
Close Reading (2-3 pages) Due

Week Four

M 10/18

Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997), pages xi-49

W 10/20

Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997), pages 50-138

Week Five

M 10/25

Toni Morrison, *Paradise* (1997), pages 139-182

W 10/27	Toni Morrison, <i>Paradise</i> (1997), pages 183-266
Week Six	
M 11/1	Toni Morrison, <i>Paradise</i> (1997), pages 267-318
W 11/3	Tayari Jones, <i>Leaving Atlanta</i> (2002), pages 1-82 Secondary Source Exercise (2-3 pages) Due
Week Seven	
M 11/8	Tayari Jones, <i>Leaving Atlanta</i> (2002), pages 83-140
W 11/10	Tayari Jones, <i>Leaving Atlanta</i> (2002), pages 141-191
Week Eight	
M 11/15	Tayari Jones, <i>Leaving Atlanta</i> (2002), pages 191-255
W 11/17	Paper Proposal Workshop Paper Proposal with Bibliography (2-3 pages) Due
Week Nine	
M 11/22	Danzy Senna, <i>New People</i> (2017), pages 1-78
W 11/24	Danzy Senna, <i>New People</i> (2017), pages 79-150
Week Ten	
M 11/29	Danzy Senna, <i>New People</i> (2017), pages 151-229
W 12/1	Conclusion
Exam Week	
M 12/6	Final paper (7-8 pages) Due to Canvas by 2pm