

## **ENG 360 African American Writers: Black Feminist Literature**

CRN 16893, 4 credits, Fall 2020

Tuesday/Thursday 10:15-11:45am

<https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/91965958324?pwd=aWltS2IyMINuYXY2anZNakRNMkZWUT09>

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

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 12pm-1:30pm <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/95175649553>

### **Course Description**

In this course, we will study works from the vast body of Black feminist literature. Our texts will be by African American women writers, activists, teachers, and intellectuals and will span the late-nineteenth century to the present. Our readings will be diverse in form and genre, including poetry, fiction, anthologies, manifestos, and scholarly essays from a variety of disciplines. What will unite our readings is their shared investment in Black women's liberation. Authors whose works we may read include Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells-Barnett, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, Audre Lorde, Michele Wallace, Ntozake Shange, June Jordan, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Angela Davis. We will read these women's works closely, studying the formal and thematic traits of every text we encounter. We will examine implicit and explicit theories in our readings of the role of literature in the work of liberation. 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: C-Literature 1789-Present, 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.

### **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 Black feminist 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. We will communicate via email and Canvas. 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 360 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 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.

As we navigate our work to learn remotely during a pandemic, a just global uprising against racist violence, and an economic crisis, 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 Zoom office hours (Tuesday/Thursday 12pm-1:30pm at <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/95175649553>) or email me about any obstacles to your learning that come up this 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/](http://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](http://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 for help with basic needs such as food security, housing security, healthcare, and access to technology.

SAFE ([safe.uoregon.edu](http://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.

### **Required Texts**

There are two required books for this course. These books are available at the UO Bookstore, from online retailers, and at the Knight Library in both print and e-book formats. Please use the assigned edition of our required texts so that we have the same page numbers for use in class discussion.

- Toni Cade Bambara, ed. *The Black Woman* (1970), ISBN: 9780743476973
- Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), ISBN: 0312541244

All other assigned readings on the schedule below are in the files section of the Canvas website for our class. Videos on the schedule below are available in the files section of the Canvas website or available online through the UO library and various streaming services.

### **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 don't 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 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 from 12pm-1:30pm on Zoom (<https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/95175649553>) 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](mailto:thorsson@uoregon.edu)). I will usually respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and take a longer to respond on the weekend. When you email me about any matter, please include your full name and that you are an ENG 360 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	10%
Close Reading (3-4 pages)	20%
Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages)	20%
Paper Proposal (2-3 pages)	10%
Final paper (8-10 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 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. I will not accept assignments more than one week after they are due.

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, 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

typically provide comments and grades on assignments a week after they are due. Please be sure to read my feedback on your work in Canvas. I will typically offer feedback to the class as a whole verbally during a class meeting a week after an assignment is due. This is a chance for us to identify specific skills that many of you are doing well or working to improve on as readers, thinkers, and writers.

**Close Reading (3-4 pages) – Due Thursday 10/22 to Canvas by 10:15am**

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 should include observation and analysis and may or may not include an interpretive argument. 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. This purpose of this assignment is for you to practice close reading, which is the most fundamental skill of literary analysis and a skill you will use in your final paper for this class.

**Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages) – Due Thursday 11/12 to Canvas by 10:15am**

Choose a secondary source that is about one or more of our assigned readings or that helps you more deeply understand of one or more of our assigned readings. You may choose one of the works that I have posted in the Secondary Sources folder in the Files section of our Canvas site or you may select a different secondary source as long as you have discussed with me in office hours. 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 interpretive argument about one or more of our readings. Fully explain your interpretive argument and give evidence for your argument from one or more of the readings on our syllabus. This evidence may take the form of close reading. 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.

**Paper Proposal with Bibliography (2-3 pages) – Due to Tuesday 11/24 to Canvas by 10:15am. 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 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 (8-10 pages) – Due Tuesday 12/8 to Canvas by 5pm**

Your final paper will make an argument about one or more of the primary texts on our syllabus and 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 an argument about a specific text or texts, literary strategy, formal device, genre, form, character, and/or idea. 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(s) to support that argument. This means that you will quote from the text(s), observe and analyze both formal and thematic aspects of those quotations, and use your analysis to support a concrete argument in dialogue with the argument(s) of other scholars. You may choose to revise your close reading 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 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**

Tuesday 9/29

Introduction  
Syllabus

Thursday 10/1

Frances E. W. Harper, "Woman's Political Future" (1893)  
Frances E. W. Harper, "The Slave Mother" (1854), "Vashti"  
(1857), "A Double Standard" (1895)

#### **Week Two**

Tuesday 10/6

Ida Wells-Barnett, "Lynch Law in America" (1900)  
Close Reading Handout

Thursday 10/8

Gwendolyn Brooks, "Sadie and Maud" (1945), "A Bronzeville  
Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother  
Burns Bacon" (1960)

#### **Week Three**

Tuesday 10/13

*The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), pages xi-73

Thursday 10/15

*The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), pages 74-154

**Week Four**

Tuesday 10/20

*The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), pages 155-237

Thursday 10/22

*The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), pages 238-327  
**Close Reading (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 10:15 am****Week Five**

Tuesday 10/27

Combahee River Collective, "Black Feminist Statement" (1977)

Thursday 10/29

Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), pages 1-66**Week Six**

Tuesday 11/3

Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), pages 67-140

Thursday 11/5

In lieu of today's class, please attend Prof. Matt Sandler's talk about and discussion of book, *The Black Romantic Revolution: Abolitionist Poets at the End of Slavery* (2020)  
12pm- 2pm <https://uoregon.zoom.us/j/95909826273>**Week Seven**

Tuesday 11/10

Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo* (1982), pages 141-207

Thursday 11/12

"Black Women Writers" (1989) episode of *The Phil Donahue Show* available to watch in the Files section of our Canvas site  
**Secondary Source Exercise (3-4 pages) Due to Canvas by 10:15am****Week Eight**

Tuesday 11/17

Barbara Christian, "Diminishing Returns: Can Black Feminism(s) Survive the Academy?" (1994)

Thursday 11/19

Farah Griffin, "That the Mothers May Soar and the Daughters May Know Their Names" (2007)

**Week Nine**

Tuesday 11/24

Paper Proposal Workshop

**Paper Proposal (2-3 pages) Due to Canvas by 10:15am**

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

Thursday 11/26

Thanksgiving, no class

**Week Ten**

Tuesday 12/1

*Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am* (2019) documentary available to watch online through UO's library and various streaming services

Thursday 12/3

Conclusion

**Exam Week**

Tuesday 12/8

**Final paper (8-10 pages) Due to Canvas by 5pm**