

COURSE SYLLABUS  
ENG 337W  
African-American Literature  
3 Credits  
EV 258 T/Th 9:30-10:50  
Spring 2008

Prof. Shemak  
Office: Evans 411  
Office phone: 4-1432, please note: I do not have the ability  
to make long-distance calls on  
my office phone.  
Office Hours: T/Th 11-12:30 and by appt.  
Email: [aas004@shsu.edu](mailto:aas004@shsu.edu)

Required Texts

*The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature*  
Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course will examine the tradition of African-American literature from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century to the present. We will consider oral and print forms of storytelling found in slave narratives, blues, folklore, poetry, short stories, non-fiction essays, and novels.

Questions we will consider:

- What kinds of perceptions or beliefs do you have about race and ethnicity? Where did they come from? How does reading literature change or enhance those perceptions?
- How have African-American communities been defined historically? Who has had the power of defining these identities? What is the role of literature in intervening in these representations?
- How do African-American writers represent their communities?
- What is the role of language and genre in representing these communities?
- How does literature explore the relationship between African-Americans and other racial or ethnic groups and the larger society?

Objectives include:

- Developing critical thinking skills by analyzing literary themes, characterization, plot, etc.
- Developing writing skills through a variety of forms of writing including in-class writing and formal written papers.
- Developing an appreciation for the various forms and traditions of African-American literature.

## **ASSIGNMENTS and GRADING**

**ATTENDANCE** is required. You will receive 2 unexcused absences. Once they're gone, that's it. SAVE these and use them for when you are ill, must travel, attend a funeral, care for a sick family member, study for an exam in another class, or oversleep. Students who miss more than 2 classes, even for very compelling reasons (and I've heard them all!), will have a very hard time keeping up with the course assignments and at that point, I would suggest that you drop/withdraw from the class. Your grade will be lowered for absences over 2.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:** This is not a lecture course. Class Participation is a part of your daily responsibility in the course. Participation does not mean simply showing up to class, but instead includes active, engaged discussion of the day's readings. Other forms of class participation include any in-class or homework exercises (small group or individual) that I assign. In order to be fully engaged in class, you must TURN OFF ALL CELLPHONES, BEEPERS, HEADPHONES BEFORE CLASS BEGINS. I do not allow the use of laptops or recording devices in my classes (except in the case of a specific documented disability). Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Behavior that **will not be tolerated:**

- Text-messaging
- Answering cellphone calls
- Listening to headphones
- Sleeping
- reading the newspaper
- doing homework for another class
- talking out of turn
- inappropriate remarks to or about me or other students

There are myriad other behaviors other than those listed above that may be considered disruptive. Students who exhibit disruptive behavior will be asked to leave and possibly reported to both the department chair and the dean.

Thus, engaging in said activities during class will have a negative impact on your grade in the course. Additionally, while it is encouraged that you will raise pertinent questions about what we are reading/discussing, your comments should be made in the spirit of fairminded academic discussion. Class begins promptly on the hour. It is disrespectful to me and to your classmates to arrive late. Arriving late on a regular basis will have a negative impact on your grade.

NOTE: Please sign your name when sending an email. Otherwise, I may not respond.

**READING:** Some weeks our reading will be heavy (100-150 pages). Other weeks the reading will be minimal (10-30 pages). In order to do well in the course, you must keep up with the readings. We will discuss as much as possible in class, but there will be times when we don't get to cover everything. However, you will still be responsible for all of the readings.

**BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION LIST POSTINGS.** You are required to post to the discussion list by 5:00 pm every Friday. Your postings should be at least 75 words. You can choose to continue a thread of a discussion we have had in class, to pose a question to the list about something that you don't understand about the readings, answer someone's questions about the readings, or start a new topic related to the readings and issues covered in the course. This discussion list is meant to be your forum—I may interject from time to time, but will not comment regularly. Any inappropriate comments or discussions (i.e. unrelated to the course) will not be tolerated and will negatively effect your grade.

**QUIZZES:** From time to time, there will be quizzes on the readings. These will usually be announced, but if I suspect that people have not done the readings, I may give a pop quiz. Quizzes will be figured as part of your class participation grade.

**EXAMS:** There will be two exams that will include identification of passages, short answer, and essay questions.

**PAPERS:**

3 Short Analysis Papers. Topics TBA. All papers must be submitted in both hard copy AND electronically. If I suspect that a paper has been plagiarized, I will submit it to the turnitin.com database.

1 FINAL CRITICAL ANALYSIS PAPER. 7-8 pages. In this paper, you will be asked to construct a literary analysis of a text or texts. This is a more extensive assignment than the short papers as you will be building an argument around your interpretation of the text(s).

All papers must be submitted in both hard copy AND on blackboard. If I suspect that a paper has been plagiarized, I will submit it to the turnitin.com database.

I urge you to make use of the Writing Center available on campus for assistance with student writing. Phone: (936) 294-3680. E-mail: wctr@shsu.edu

**GRADING:**

Weekly Blackboard Discussion List Postings			10%
A 90-100			
Paper 1	10%	B	80-89.9
Paper 2	10%	C	70-79.9
Paper 3	10%		
Participation		D	60-
69.9			
Midterm Exam		F	below
60			
Exam 2	10%		
Final Paper			<u>20%</u>
TOTAL	100%		

### **COURSE POLICIES**

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. Any students found cheating on exams, or plagiarizing papers (which would include not using proper citation, appropriating someone else's ideas as your own, or pasting pieces of written texts from other sources into your paper without indicating that the words and ideas are not your own) will FAIL the course.

The statements on academic dishonesty that are listed below are taken from the SHSU Code of Conduct.

<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>

5.31 "Cheating" includes, but is not limited to:

(1) Copying from another student's test paper, a laboratory report, other report, or computer files, data listings, and/or programs.

(2) Using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test.

(3) Collaborating, without authorization, with another person during an examination or in preparing academic work.

(4) Knowingly, and without authorization, using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, soliciting, copying, or possessing, in whole or in part, the contents of an unadministered test.

(5) Substituting for another student; permitting any other person; or otherwise assisting any other person to substitute for oneself or for another student in the taking of an examination or test or the preparation of academic work to be submitted for academic credit.

(6) Bribing another person to obtain an unadministered test or information about an unadministered test.

(7) Purchasing, or other wise acquiring and submitting as one's own work any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm. This section does not apply to the typing of the rough and/or final versions of an assignment by a professional typist.

5.32 "Plagiarism" means the appropriation and the unacknowledged incorporation of another's work or idea into one's own work offered for credit.

**VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:** Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

It is the policy of SHSU that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with me so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

Note: All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential.

Note: No accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. The counseling center is located across from the Lee Drain Building, next to the Farrington Building.

Phone: 936.294.1720

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS:** Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). This request must be made in the first fifteen days of the semester. The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

**INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS:** Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**NOTE: You are responsible for any and all changes to the syllabus.**

Thurs. 1/17 Introduction

Tues. 1/22 "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom" 151-162  
Olaudah Equiano 187-213

Th. 1/24 Olaudah Equiano

T 1/29 Olaudah Equiano  
Phyllis Wheatley, 213-215  
"Preface" 216-217  
"To Maenenas" 217-218"  
"On Being Brought From Africa to America" 219

Th 1/31 "The Vernacular Tradition" 3-10  
Spirituals 10-19  
Sojourner Truth, 245-249

T 2/5 Harriet Jacobs, 279-314  
Th 2/7 Harriet Jacobs

Paper 1

T 2/12 Frederick Douglass, 385-452  
Th 2/14 Frederick Douglass, "What to a Slave is the Fourth of July" 462-473

T 2/19 p. 130-132 "Folktales"  
p. 132 "All God's Chillun Had Wings"  
p. 142 "Brer Rabbit Tricks Brer Fox Again"  
p. 144-49 "The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story" "How Mr. Rabbit Was too Sharp For Mr. Fox" "The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf" "What the Rabbit Learned"

Th 2/21 "Literature of Reconstruction and the New Negro Renaissance" 541-554  
Charles Chestnutt, 602-603  
"The Goophered Grapevine" 604-612

T 2/26 Charles Chestnutt "The Wife of His Youth" 624-631  
Th 2/28 W.E.B. DuBois "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" 693-708  
Booker T. Washington  
Paul Laurence Dunbar 905-907  
"We Wear the Mask" 918  
"Sympathy" 922  
"Ode to Ethiopia" 907-08

T 3/4 MIDTERM

Th 3/6 No Class (I will be at a conference)

T Spring Break  
TH Spring Break

T 3/18 Harlem Renaissance 953-962  
Alain Locke "The New Negro" 983-993  
Marcus Garvey "Africa for the Africans" "The Future as I See It"  
p. 995-1003

Claude McKay 1003-1110  
Zora Neale Hurston "Sweat" 1019-1029  
Gwendolyn Bennett 1266-1269

Th 3/20 Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"  
"Mother to Son" 1288-1292  
"I Too" 1295  
"Red Silk Stockings" "Song for a Dark Girl" 1298-1299  
"Ballad of the Landlord" 1302-1303  
"Harlem" 1308-1309  
"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" 1311-

1314

Paper 2

T 3/25 Richard Wright 1399-1402  
 "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" 1411-1419,  
*Black Boy* (excerpt) 1471-1487

Th 3/27 Ralph Ellison *Invisible Man* (excerpt), 1535, 1548-1570

T 4/1 James Baldwin "Going to Meet the Man" 1696-99, 1750-1761  
 "Strange Fruit" 45

Th 4/3 "The Black Arts Era: 1960-75" 1831-1850

T 4/8 Audre Lorde 1919-1926

Th 4/10 *Beloved*, Francis Harper

T 4/15 *Beloved*

Th 4/17 *Beloved*  
 Paper 3

T 4/22 *Beloved*

Th 4/24 EXAM 2

T 4/29 Carroll Parrot Blue "Houston" (e-reserve)  
<http://indepheights.rice.edu/index.htm>

Article on Houston's Freedmen's Town:  
<http://www.houstonpress.com/2004-08-12/news/hitting-the-bricks/1>

Juneteenth  
<http://www.ritesofpassage.org/ds95-4.htm>

Th 5/1 TBA

T 5/6 Carroll Parrot Blue

Th 5/8 Final Thoughts  
 Last Day Classes

Final Paper due on the date of the final exam.