ENG 2705-051: Introduction to African American Literature: Coming of age narratives

Tim Engles
Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_summer2005

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_summer2005/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2005 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Summer 2005 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
Introduction to African American Literature: Coming of Age Narratives
English 2705—Summer, 2005

Instructor: Tim Engles
Office: CH 3138
Instructor’s e-dress: cftde@eiu.edu
Phone: 581-6316
Office hours: 12:30-1:30, MW and by appointment

Required Texts:

*Not Without Laughter*, Langston Hughes (1930)
*Bombingham*, Anthony Grooms (2001)
*Leaving Atlanta*, Tayari Jones (2002)

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Bildungsroman: A novel that recounts the development (psychological and sometimes spiritual) of an individual from childhood to maturity, to the point at which the protagonist recognizes his or her place in the world.
—Ross Murfin

The Black experience cannot be limited or defined by parochial frames of reference and value that are derived from traditions (White and European) from which Black people have been largely excluded.
—Geta Leseur

(read the following sections carefully! these words constitute our contract, and I will request your written agreement to them)

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS: two primary goals of this course are to enhance your skills in the art of textual analysis (skills that any university student should fully develop), and to introduce you to important African American authors and their literature’s themes, techniques, and subject matter. As a way to provide a themed coherence for our course, we will read, discuss, and write about works that foreground issues of growing up and coming to understand—or misunderstand—the world and one’s place in it. As the quotations above suggest, the standard form for fictionalized accounts of this process, the *bildungsroman* (also known as the “novel of development”), is based on the experiences of people who are not African American. Thus, we will question just how appropriate the term *bildungsroman* is for novels about young African Americans, and how such stories differ from that genre’s standard methods and expectations. We will take a sociological approach to our material, considering along the way such relevant factors as race, class, gender, and sexuality, and how these factors function differently in varied societal contexts. Issues and ideas that some consider touchy and off limits are likely to arise in our readings and discussions, so you will need to approach this course and its material with an open mind and a willingness to seriously consider viewpoints that differ from your own. This course will require *dedicated* daily work (reading and class participation), quizzes (meant to be easy if
you do the reading, which you must do daily to succeed in, or even pass, this course), a formal essay, and two examinations.

REGARDING READING: Again, a primary purpose of this course is to help you develop your skills in the art of textual analysis. Consequently, you must give the readings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down right before class, set aside enough time to read carefully—decide for yourself, before coming to class, what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. Also, to ensure that your final grade reflects your reading effort, I will give frequent “pop” quizzes at the beginning of class on required readings. These quizzes will not be announced and they cannot be made up.

GRADES: Your final course grade will be determined in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal essay (6-7 pages)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/quizzes/attendance</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REGARDING WRITING: When the formal essay is turned in, it MUST be accompanied by all notes and drafts written towards it, with the final copy of the essay on top of this material. I will use these materials to gauge and offer comments on your writing process. I WILL NOT GRADE an essay that is not accompanied by material that clearly demonstrates several earlier stages leading up to the final draft, so be sure to save all such materials (if you do most or all of your writing on a computer, print out occasional drafts to include with your final copy). Essays unaccompanied by materials that clearly demonstrate several stages of development toward the final copy will receive an automatic ZERO. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not (it's okay to turn in papers earlier). Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late. Finally, be mindful of the dire consequences of plagiarism, as described below.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: I will take attendance, and I expect you to attend class every day, on time, and prepared to discuss the material listed for that day on the “daily schedule.” More than two missed classes will lower your class participation grade (which is 20% of your final grade) to an F. Missing class frequently will also harm your grade on the reading quizzes. Keep in mind as well that coming to class “prepared” means coming to class with that day’s assigned reading—anyone who does not have a copy of the day’s assigned reading with them may be considered absent. Regarding tardiness: this is a small class, so late arrivals are disruptive—if for some bizarre reason you wish to get on my bad side, you can easily do so by developing the habit of arriving late for class. If you will not be able to arrive for this class on time because of other commitments, drop it and take another course. Finally, you are responsible for all assignments, whether you attend class or not. Exchange phone numbers with one or two other students in class, or get in touch with me, so you can find out about missed assignments before you come to class.

MISSED QUIZZES AND EXAMS; LATE PAPERS: Again, because the answers to unannounced quizzes come up in class after they are taken, quizzes cannot be made up (even if you come to class late). These quizzes are one way to reward those who attend class regularly and on time. At the end of the semester, the average grade on these quizzes will constitute a
major portion of your class participation grade (in order to account for the possibility that a day will arise when you must be absent, I will drop your lowest quiz score before figuring the average grade). There will be no makeup exams in this course; if a student misses an exam, it will be replaced by an eight-page formal essay assignment on a topic of the professor’s choice (in addition, of course, to the other required formal essay). The formal essay will be due at the beginning of class on the due date whether the student is in class or not. Late papers will be penalized fifteen points each day they are late.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: I expect you to act honestly and do your own work in this class, and so does Eastern Illinois University. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the English Department’s policy on plagiarism: “Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—‘The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work’ (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.”

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT: In class, I expect all of you to participate in discussions (class participation will be figured into your final grade). BE SURE to bring the day’s reading assignment with you, and be ready to talk about it. The best way to do well in this course and to demonstrate that you are an active, interested reader is by contributing regularly to class discussions, and by paying close, respectful attention to what everyone else has to say. Many sensitive issues tend to arise within a course of this sort, so we must respect the opinions of others—at times it will help to respond to ideas rather than to the person stating them. If you have questions, no matter how simple or complicated, go ahead and ask me, either in class or via e-mail—chances are that other people have the same question. I do not plan to lecture in this class; I want us to contribute together to a positive, challenging, interesting learning environment. (Also, please do not chew gum or eat food during class, activities which can be distracting to others—drinking beverages is okay. Finally, no caps, please, because they’re anti-social in a classroom setting. If you must wear one, turn it backwards so we can see your eyes.)

E-MAIL ACTIVITY: Enrollment in this class requires an e-mail account, and you must check it frequently, preferably every day, for messages pertaining to the course. You already have a free EIU e-mail account, which I would prefer that you use, but others are okay. E-mail is also the quickest, easiest way to reach me if I am not in my office; I welcome any and all questions and comments. Getting an e-mail account AND CHECKING IT REGULARLY is crucial for this course—if you do not send me an e-mail message at the above address by Thursday, May 19 at 5:00 p.m. to confirm that you have established an account, I will assume that you have chosen against fully participating in the course, and I may therefore drop you. In your message, describe yourself in whatever ways you choose (including your major), and also write a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with these course policies and procedures.
ENGLISH 2705: DAILY SCHEDULE
(this schedule may be subject to change)

M MAY 16 Introduction to the course; discussion of race, gender, and identity formation


T MAY 17 Hughes, *Not Without Laughter*

W MAY 18 *Not Without Laughter*

R MAY 19 *Not Without Laughter*

- 5 p.m.: deadline for sending an e-mail message to Dr. Engles (cftde@eiu.edu) that (1) describes yourself in whatever ways you choose as an introduction to yourself, and also (2) includes a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the above course policies and procedures. BE SURE to include your name in your message.

F MAY 20 *Not Without Laughter*; begin Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

M MAY 23 *The Bluest Eye*

- in-class film screening: *Two Lies* (Pam Tom, 1990)

T MAY 24 *The Bluest Eye*

W MAY 25 *The Bluest Eye*

R MAY 26 In-class film screening: *Fresh* (Boaz Yakin, 1994)

F MAY 27 Discussion of *Fresh*; midterm exam

M MAY 30 MEMORIAL DAY—NO CLASS

T MAY 31 Grooms, *Bombingham*

M JUNE 1 *Bombingham*

- T JUNE 2 ALSO! read handout received on Monday: “What Is Good Writing?” “The Writing Process” and subsequent sections, and sample student essay
- Before class, write briefly about two particularly strong qualities of the sample student essay; what did this writer do especially well?

W JUNE 3 *Bombingham*

R JUNE 4 *Bombingham*
F JUNE 5  Jones, *Leaving Atlanta*

M JUNE 8  *Leaving Atlanta*

T JUNE 9  *Leaving Atlanta*

- Formal essay due at the beginning of class, in a folder, along with all notes and earlier drafts

W JUNE 10  Last day of class—Final Exam
ENGLISH 2705: DAILY SCHEDULE
(this schedule may be subject to change)

M MAY 16 Introduction to the course; discussion of race, gender, and identity formation
  • in-class film screening: The Smell of Burning Ants (Jay Rosenblatt, 1994)

T MAY 17 Hughes, Not Without Laughter

W MAY 18 Not Without Laughter

R MAY 19 Not Without Laughter
  • 5 p.m.: deadline for sending an e-mail message to Dr. Engles (cftde@eiu.edu) that
    (1) describes yourself in whatever ways you choose as an introduction to yourself, and
    also (2) includes a statement to the effect that you have read and agree with the above
    course policies and procedures. BE SURE to include your name in your message.

F MAY 20 Not Without Laughter; begin Morrison, The Bluest Eye

M MAY 23 The Bluest Eye
  • Handout in class: Lois-Ann Yamanaka, “When Asian Eyes Are Smiling” (1997)
  • in-class film screening: Two Lies (Pam Tom, 1990)

T MAY 24 The Bluest Eye

W MAY 25 The Bluest Eye

R MAY 26 In-class film screening: Fresh (Boaz Yakin, 1994)

F MAY 27 Discussion of Fresh; midterm exam

M MAY 30 MEMORIAL DAY—NO CLASS

T MAY 31 Grooms, Bombingham

W JUNE 1 Bombingham

R JUNE 2 Bombingham
  • ALSO! read handout received on Monday: “What Is Good Writing?” “The Writing
    Process” and subsequent sections, and sample student essay
  • Before class, write briefly about two particularly strong qualities of the sample student
    essay; what did this writer do especially well?

F JUNE 3 Bombingham
M JUNE 6  *Bombingham; begin Jones, Leaving Atlanta*

T JUNE 7  *Leaving Atlanta*

W JUNE 8  *Leaving Atlanta*

R JUNE 9  *Leaving Atlanta*

- Formal essay due at the beginning of class, in a folder, along with all notes and earlier drafts

F JUNE 10  Last day of class—Final Exam