ENG 2705-001: African-American Literature

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Course Description:
This course is designed as a general survey into African American Literature and literary traditions, with special emphasis on slave narratives, resistance movements, and representations of marginalization through constructions of identity. Students will engage in multi-genred readings, writing, and discussion through poetry, memoir, fiction, biography, and mass media. We will also highlight the history and evolution of African oral traditions, folklore, and music in order to gain a critical understanding and context for the commodification of African/African American culture.

Learning Goals:
(1) To develop an understanding of African American literary tradition as an artistic form.

(2) To understand the critical uses of the narrative forms of oral traditions, signifying, folklore, and music in African American literature.

(3) To examine the critical connections between historical eras and events and the formation of narrative.

(4) To understand how African/African Americans have resisted and struggled to recreate their own cultural identities in relation to each other and dominant white groups, leading to both conflict and community empowerment.

(5) To develop and sharpen critical communication skills through the facilitation of discussions and writing skills through essay assignments, creative projects, and academic research.

Required Texts:
* Purple Hibiscus, Adichie

*Handouts will be distributed throughout the semester. In addition to reading these, you will also be required to print and read articles that are uploaded to D2L.

Special Needs:
Students with documented disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services (581.6583) as soon as possible so we can work out appropriate accommodations.
Cell Phones:
Please put your cell phone on silent or vibrate during class time.

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 assignments of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

The Student Success Center:
Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

The Writing Center:
I encourage you to use EIU’s Writing Center located at 3110 Coleman Hall. This free service provides one-to-one conferences with writing center consultants who can help you with brainstorming, organizing, developing support, and documenting your papers.

The writing center is open to help any student from any major at any stage of his or her writing process, and its system of one-to-one conferences demonstrates value and respect for individual writers, all of whom can benefit from feedback about their works in progress.

To schedule an appointment, you can drop by the center (3110 Coleman Hall) or you can call 581-5929. The writing center is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. On Friday hours of operation are 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Course Guidelines and Expectations:
1. As this is an interactive course, participation is required. You help create this atmosphere by making an effort to answer and ask questions during class discussion and group work, and by responding thoughtfully AND respectfully to other people’s comments and responses. Disrespect of me and/or your fellow classmates, along with coming to class unprepared will not be tolerated. You will be asked to leave AND marked absent for the class period. Participation is worth 25 points of your grade and includes self-directed discussion, questions posed during class, ability to answer questions indicative of close textual reading, and being alert during class sessions (i.e., no cell phone activity, sleeping, disruptive conversations, or use of laptops/lpads/tablets, etc for anything other than work for my class). Points will be deducted for behaviors indicative of anything other than full participation. This is a collaborative learning experience, so constructive criticism and open discussion is encouraged. When essays, journals, and in-class assignments are considered together you will be doing some kind of writing assignment every week. Be prepared to spend much time carefully reading, considering, discussing,
and writing about the texts in the course. If you cannot devote the time necessary to keep up with the assignments, and to do so in a critical manner, you will not do well in this class and may want to consider if this is the right class for you. Attendance is obviously a prerequisite for participation, so if you have more than three (3) un-excused absences, you will lose 5 points per class session you miss.

2. Absences will only be excused when the following conditions are met: a) Circumstances that can be documented on paper (illness, police accident report, university events, etc) b) I receive notification PRIOR to the class that you will be unable to attend. If there is an assignment due the day you will be absent, please email it to me Prior to the start of class. In the same manner, I expect each student to be on time to class. If you happen to be tardy, please do not disrupt the class. If you are over 10 minutes late to class with no prior notification, you will be marked absent.

3. You are expected to have ALL assignments prepared to turn in on the due date. All assignments should be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. font and citations should use current MLA format. Please proofread and edit all papers. NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS ACCEPTED OR MAKE-UP WORK PROVIDED unless you are in compliance with the extreme circumstances section above. Do not put extra space between paragraphs. Student information (name, class title, assignment) is single-spaced, in the top left-hand corner of your paper. Additionally, you are expected to bring the proper supplies with you to class each session, including the text we’re reading.

Caveat:
In the event that class participation begins to fade, I reserve the right to distribute a pop quiz over the readings and/or class lectures. The quiz will be worth 10 points and will be taken from the final project.

Assignments:
*Please be prepared for possible changes.
**Homework (reading and writing) is distributed at my discretion and its completion is a requirement for the next class session.

1. Reading Reflections (3points a piece/30 points total) As this is a discussion-centered course, for the first 10 weeks of the semester, you will need to submit a Full 1 page typed paper. The purpose of these brief papers is twofold: to make critical connections with the readings and for me to ensure that you are keeping up with the assignments. These papers will also help to make our conversations more lively and informed. Each paper should include the following: a reflection on the main theses/themes of the texts, 3-4 central questions that you have about the texts, and most importantly, connections that you are seeing between the texts and your growing awareness of AfAm Literature. Most often, these papers will be due every Monday for the first 10 weeks and will be used to generate lively discussion throughout the week. I will inform you each time a paper is due. Remember, participation is a large portion of your grade, so you will be called upon to facilitate the discussion of your questions.
2. **Critical Essays (50 points total)** As we journey together through the texts, I will provide you with a writing prompt based on the questions, comments, and critiques derived from our discussions. This prompt will be the foundation of your 5-7 page essays. Please note that each of the two (2) essays must be grounded in theory and supported by textual evidence. I highly encourage writing from personal narrative in order to form and further your position(s). **Essay One Due: September 30th** **Essay Two Due: November 6th**

3. **African American Literature and Literacies (30 points)** Gee’s (1989) conception of Discourse v. discourse is rooted in the social construction of literacy. Discourses are “ways of being in the world” while discourses are the “connected stretches of language that make sense.” (p.6). Thus, discourses are always part of Discourses. Gee argues that literacy is “the mastery of or fluent control over secondary Discourses. Therefore, literacy is always plural: literacies (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses)” (p. 9). The notion of multiple literacies “implies that meaning making occurs in multimodal settings where written information is part of spatial, audio, and visual patterns of meaning.” (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009, p. 156). As such, your assignment is to engage multimodalities with African American literature in a critical and creative format. Essentially, you will take your understanding of the literature beyond the texts to create new ways for AfAm lit to come alive. Specific guidelines for this assignment will be provided throughout the semester. **DUE**

4. **Reflexive Journal (20 points)** Reflexivity involves thinking about what has happened so far in order to plan for the next step. It is a means of systematizing your thoughts to improve practice. As such, your task is to journal about the process of reading, writing, and discussing the beauty and complexities of African American Literature. Focus should center on the following questions: 1) What personal connections am I making through class discussions, readings, and/or research that has or will enhance my understanding of this genre of literature? 2) What areas of my critical reading, writing, and/or thinking need additional work? 3) What am I learning about oppression, power, and privilege and how will this knowledge best serve me and those around me? You do not have to stick to these questions for each entry. They are merely meant to help guide your thinking. You will, however, need to write throughout the course (during/after reading and writing, class discussions, etc), sharing your journal at times with peers for their evaluation and feedback. **Minimum of 15 entries. DUE November 18th**

5. **Final Project (45 points)** In lieu of a final exam, you will produce a final project—an extension of the reflexive journal. Specific details of this assignment will be distributed during the semester. **DUE December 11th**

**Tentative Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**
*I want you all to get the most out of these readings. Thus, I am flexible with altering the schedule as long as you are keeping up with the material and actively participating in small and large group discussions.*
Homework (reading and writing) is distributed at my discretion and its completion is a requirement for the next class session.

**Week One:** Introduction to course and one another/The Oral Tradition
- “The Vernacular Tradition, Part 1,” pgs 3-10
- Negro Spirituals, Signifying
- Handouts to further our understanding

Week Two: Vernacular Tradition, cont.
- Blues and Folklore
- Begin “The Literature of Slavery and Freedom:

Week Three: Slavery, cont.
- 9/7 Labor Day—NO SCHOOL
- Lucy Terry, Olaudah Equiano

Week Four: Grounding ourselves in slave narratives
- Phyllis Wheatley, Solomohn Northrup, Frederick Douglass, Frances E.W. Harper
- Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Jacobs
- Begin discussion of Critical Essay #1

Week Five: Slave narratives, cont.
- Complete Jacobs
- Small and large group discussions
- Begin discussion of AfAm Lit and Literacies Project

Week Six: Literature of the Reconstruction to the New Negro Renaissance
- Booker T. Washington, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. DuBois
- 9/30 Critical Essay #1 DUE
- James Weldon Johnson and Paul Laurence Dunbar

**Week Seven:** Harlem Renaissance
- “How it Feels to Be Colored Me” (Hurston)
- Watch “Their Eyes Were Watching God”

Week Eight: Harlem Renaissance, cont.
- Alain Locke, The New Negro
- 10/16 Fall Break—NO SCHOOL

Week Nine: Harlem Renaissance finale
- Locke, cont.
- Begin discussion of Critical Essay #2
- Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Marita Bonner, Paul Robeson, Nella Larsen
- Discussion of AfAm Lit and Literacies Project, Part 2
Week Ten: The Black Arts Movement
- Read “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- Watch “A Raisin In The Sun”

Week Eleven: Black Arts Movement, cont.
- Complete “A Raisin In the Sun”
- Audre Lorde, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, June Jordan
- 11/6 Critical Essay #2 DUE
- Begin presentations of AfAm Lit and Literacies

Week Twelve: Music for the Movements
- Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder
- Gil Scott-Heron, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Eric B. & Rakim, Jay Z, Jean Grae, Nas, Kendrick Lamar
- Spoken Word
- Presentations, cont.
- Discussion of Final Project

Week Thirteen: Contemporary Period/The Black Body
- Gayl Jones, “From Corregidora”
- “The Venus Hottentot” Alice Walker
- Pop culture
- Excerpts from Between The World And Me

Week Fourteen: Thanksgiving Break

Week Fifteen: Conferences with Dr. Smith

Week Sixteen: Final Review of Semester
- Final questions/class discussions
- Final projects DUE December 11th

Evaluation:
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<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Essays</td>
<td>50 points (total)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AfAm Lit and Literacies</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflexive Journal</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Grading:
190-200=A  189-180=B  179-170=C  169-160=D  160 or below=F

**Dr. Smith’s Advice**
If at any point throughout the semester you are confused or unclear about the expectations of the course, course material, a grade you’ve received, or any other matters, I strongly encourage you to come talk with me during office hours. It is my hope that all students succeed in this course, but I can only help if I’m aware of a problem.