

LIT112: AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

THIS COURSE DOES NOT REQUIRE A FINAL EXAM

SYLLABUS

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS NOW!

Keep work organized by week, clearly labeled and typed or copy/paste onto your syllabus. Math and hand done projects: photograph, scan or screenshot and copy/paste to your syllabus. Keep images small so your file isn't too large to submit or save work as a PDF. Go to "Student Services" online for any issues with this course. If you need Microsoft Word, request an email from Student Services and follow the steps given to you.

SUBMITTING WORK: YOU MUST SUBMIT ALL WEEKS AT ONCE on one file. Your syllabus may be submitted separately if you chose not to add your work to it. Go to the website and select "Submit Work", complete the form and attach your work. You may also share a public link such as Gdocs. You have two attempts at receiving a passing grade of "C" or better so submit your full effort original work. Do not mail work. You will receive a reply in about 5 business days. Do not call or email asking for us to verify your work. All components of your course must be completed by the end of the 8th week from the time of your registration; 12 weeks for a 2 credit class. If you have a medical emergency or disability preventing you from completing your class, contact "Student Services" and send an email to request up to a 2-week extension

Week 1

READ: Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass

(with your downloads)

Give details and support using the text

1. Why do you think it was important for slave owners to keep slaves ignorant about their birthdays and parentage? Douglass opens his story by telling us that he is troubled by not knowing when he was born. Why is this fact so important to him?
2. List the turning points in Douglass' life. To what extent did his "take-charge" attitude create these turning points?
3. Douglass presents much of his narrative in a factual tone and avoids personal opinions, yet the story is full of emotion. How is this possible? Where do you find evidence of emotion?
4. What kind of hero is Douglass? Does his heroism come from his physical or mental state? Or does it come from both? Of the two types of heroes (physical or mental), which would he consider himself?
5. In Chapter II, Douglass expresses his belief that education will set him free. What does he mean by this? Is this essentially an optimistic view? If he could visit us today, do you think he would still hold this view?
6. Examine the films *Roots* and *Glory*, as well as music videos of Public Enemy; how do they portray slavery and black-white relationships in nineteenth-century America? Discuss the films and videos in terms of Douglass' *Narrative*.

7. Compare Douglass' depiction of the struggle of African Americans in white America with the narratives of such black writers as Maya Angelou, bell hooks, Alex Haley, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison. In what ways can Douglass' influence be seen in the works of later black writers?
8. Douglass' marriage to his white secretary in the later part of his life caused considerable discomfort among his white and black friends and acquaintances. Douglass had this to say about his marriage: "They would have no objections to my marrying a person much darker in complexion than myself, but to marry someone much lighter, and of the complexion of my father rather than my mother, was, in the popular eye, a shocking offense." To what extent have attitudes regarding interracial marriage changed? From his *Narrative*, what can you discern about his opinions regarding interracial marriage and/or procreation?
9. The interracial concerns and problems Douglass expressed still affect us today. How will these problems diminish? Consider a disunited and disenfranchised African-American population, alcoholism/drug addiction among African-Americans, and the matter of whites fearing that minorities will take their jobs away.
10. Various critics have placed Douglass' *Narrative* within the genres of Romanticism and also that of Realism. Does it belong to either category? Justify your claims.
11. The underlying assumption and philosophy of Douglass' *Narrative* is that humans can (and must) create their destiny. Comment on Douglass' philosophy, citing examples and illustrations.
12. Several times in his *Narrative*, Douglass expresses his view that slavery is bad for both whites and blacks. In what ways is slavery detrimental to the South?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Download and Read, William Miller, *A Sermon on the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1810) PDF*

- 1.) Note the opening paragraph and William Miller's references to African identity. Why does Miller prefer to refer to Africans rather than Americans?
- 2.) Almost as a first matter Miller emphasizes "the idea of our being acknowledged men." He links this questioning of black masculinity to white contempt for black intelligence. Why does he use this as the opening theme of a sermon?
- 3.) What, if any, contradictions are there in Miller's view of Africa, and how does he resolve them?
- 4.) How does Miller express pride in his African heritage?
- 5.) Miller uses Isaiah 19:2 to depict the transatlantic slave trade as the consequence of an African civil war. He also uses Isaiah 59:1 – "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened..." – to suggest that African iniquity of Africans rendered them subject to captivity, and salvation could be had upon appeal to God. Why did Miller use the Bible in this fashion?

- 6.) What does Miller's blame of Africans mean for his judgment of "the oppressors of Africa," who he says are not "less culpable for their savage treatment to the unoffending Africans"? Note the phrase "unoffending Africans" suggests that Africans who are not guilty must suffer as part of the judgment on the continent. How do you respond to that view, and how might Miller's audience respond?
- 7.) How does the nation-state both create the problem of slavery and promise to solve it?
- 8.) What was the Sereleon (Sierra Leone) colonization project? Based on the sermon, what was Miller's attitude towards this project?
- 9.) The sermon concludes with calls for a church militant (14), evangelical conversions, piety and virtue, and three citations of Isaiah (6:3, 9:2, 11:14) promising divine reward for the righteous. How does Miller identify Christian evangelization and the anti-slavery cause?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

DOWNLOAD AND READ: Willie Lynch- Making of a Slave

- 1.) What is your impression of the Willie Lynch speech? Do you find it realistic? How does this information enlighten you? Considering there is much debate over its authenticity, does it matter if this is fact or fiction? If this is fiction, does this take away from the document? Explain
- 2.) How does one, "make a slave"?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

DOWNLOAD AND READ: Death of the Willie Lynch Speech

- 1.) What is Prof. Manu Ampim's position in regards to the Willie Lynch speech being of value? What impact (from this speech) is identified by the Professor?
- 2.) What is the Professor's emotional plea? Why? Is he justified? Has he convinced you? Give defining evidence or lack of it?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Week 2

Harlem Renaissance, a blossoming (c. 1918–37) of African American culture, particularly in the creative arts, and the most influential movement in African American literary history. Embracing literary, musical, theatrical, and visual arts, participants sought to reconceptualize "the Negro" apart

from the white stereotypes that had influenced black peoples' relationship to their heritage and to each other. They also sought to break free of Victorian moral values and bourgeois shame about aspects of their lives that might, as seen by whites, reinforce racist beliefs. Never dominated by a particular school of thought but rather characterized by intense debate, the movement laid the groundwork for all later African American literature and had an enormous impact on subsequent black literature and consciousness worldwide. While the renaissance was not confined to the Harlem district of New York City, Harlem attracted a remarkable concentration of intellect and talent and served as the symbolic capital of this cultural awakening.

READINGS: with downloads "Harlem_Ren"

For support also read articles at <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/harlem/harlem.html>

VIDEOS: <http://www.history.com/topics/harlem-renaissance/videos#the-harlem-renaissance>

http://www.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=231518

<http://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/harlem-renaissance>

ASSIGNMENT: Using the materials provided and additional research respond to...

1. What types of adversity did African Americans face in the South in the 1920's?
2. What problems did those who moved to Harlem find at the time?
3. What were some of the creative endeavors that came out of Harlem during the time?
4. What were some of the difficulties faced in Harlem?
5. How does the idea of speaking out and expressing your real feelings relate to the creation of the Harlem Renaissance?
6. In light of what you viewed in the video segment, describe ways that freedom of expression can have both positive and negative effects.
7. Although the Harlem Renaissance was a time of positive change in many ways, the right to say what you thought was not a right shared by all people at that time. Why might this be so?

"THANK YOU M'AM" - FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

Read "Thank you M'am" by Langston Hughes (with your downloads). The neighborhood of Harlem in New York City is the likely setting of "Thank You M'am," and it is also the place Hughes considered to be his home.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a few paragraphs discussing how the poet's love of this neighborhood and its people comes through in "Thank You M'am."

Review and Assess Thinking about the Selection

1. Respond: Do you think Mrs. Jones is wise or foolish to trust Roger? Why?
2. (a) Recall: What does Mrs. Jones do when Roger tries to steal her purse? (b) Interpret: What can you tell about her character from this action? (c) Connect: How are her actions connected to her past experiences?
3. (a) Recall: What does Roger do when Mrs. Jones leaves him alone with her purse? (b) Infer: Why does he do this? (c) Compare and Contrast: How have Roger's behavior and attitude changed?
4. (a) Recall: What do Mrs. Jones and Roger talk about during their meal? (b) Draw Conclusions: Why doesn't Mrs. Jones ask Roger any personal questions?
5. (a) Recall: What does Roger say when he leaves the apartment? (b) Infer: What more does he want to say? (c) Interpret: Why can't he say more?
6. (a) Predict: What effect will Mrs. Jones's actions have on Roger's future? (b) Make a Judgment: Does Mrs. Jones make good choices about how to treat Roger?
7. Take a Position: What do you think is the most effective treatment for criminals? Explain.

ADD RESPONSE/S/ HERE

LANGSTON HUGHES POEMS

Download and use the PDF: Langston Hughes

AND Download and use the PDF: Literary Devices

AND Download and use the PDF: 55 Types of Poetry Forms

- 1.) POETRY: Identify the form of poetry and interpret your choice of 20 separate poems.

Give the: **A.) Title of the poem B.) Type of poem it is C.) Your interpretive meaning**, and your reasoning on why you feel the poems mean what you state. Make a connection to society or your own personal experiences. Include terminology from your glossary of "Literary Devices" and use your "55 Types of Poetry Forms" PDF for support. Do this individually for each of 20 poems you select from the reading.

- 2.) Identify at least **ONE EACH** of the following Literary Poetic Devices from poems you choose: alliteration, assonance, consonance, euphony, onomatopoeia, simile, allegory, understatement, metaphor, synecdoche, and metonymy. List the title of the poem, the literary device, and the direct quotation that supports the device you have chosen. Use your PDF of Literary Devices for support.

ADD RESPONSE/S/ HERE

WEEK 3

CONTEMPORARY

DOWNLOAD: Contemporary African American Writers

1. Look through the PDF Contemporary African American Writers and select FIVE writers
2. Research and write a one-page biography on each writer's life and works **(for 5 pages total)**

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

READ: THE COMPLETE POEMS OF MAYA ANGELOU

- 1.) POETRY: Identify the form of poetry and interpret your choice of 10 separate poems.

Give the: **A.) Title of the poem B.) Type of poem it is C.) Your interpretive meaning**, and your reasoning on why you feel the poems mean what you state. Make a connection to society or your own personal experiences. Include terminology from your glossary of "Literary Devices" and use your "55 Types of Poetry Forms" PDF for support. Do this individually for each of 20 poems you select from the reading.

- 2.) Identify at least **ONE EACH** of the following Literary Poetic Devices from poems you choose: alliteration, assonance, consonance, euphony, onomatopoeia, simile and allegory. List the title of the poem, the literary device, and the direct quotation that supports the device you have chosen. Use your PDF of Literary Devices for support.

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Tupac Shakur

TEXT WITH DOWNLOADS: 23 Incredible Tupac Shakur Poems

Give details and support using the texts/links provided

Assignment:

1. Select a poem in which poems does he give insight into the struggles of his family in his early childhood? What is the title of the poem? What are his perceptions of his upbringing? Share direct quotes to support your response
2. Select a poem in which poems does he express his hopes and dreams? What is the title of the

poem? What are they? What is his impression on his ability to achieve?

3. Select a poem in which poems does he give insight into the struggles his adult life? What is the title of the poem? What words does he use that illicit strong imagery?
4. Select a poem that may mirror similar experiences in your own life. What is the title of the poem? What passages in the poem remind you of experiences in your own life? Explain how those passages connect to your life?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

WEEK 4

READ: THINGS FALL APART by Chinua Achebe (a tragedy – with your downloads)

First published in 1958, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is easily the most recognizable and widely taught African novel in the U.S. It has been translated into at least 50 languages, and sold over 10 million copies worldwide, and has appeared on many "greatest books of all times" lists around the world. But why? What is it about this classic story of transformation and tragedy that makes this book so attractive to students and educators? In some ways, the book has come to represent Africa as a continent: it serves as a symbol of the injustices of colonization and the internal forces that helped lead to the complete take-over of Nigeria by the British colonialists. But it has also become a symbol of postcolonial possibility, and the important task the African writer takes up when attempting to reclaim or rewrite the stories of his or her people.

While it offers a certain perspective on colonial history, *Things Fall Apart* is not a strictly historical novel. Historical novels, by definition, fictionalize historic events and bring them to life with invented details, characters, dialogue, etc. And while *Things Fall Apart* does situate itself within a specific historical context (Nigeria at the moment of colonization), it does not attempt to recreate actual events or re-characterize real historical figures. In other words, while it is engaged with the historical theme of colonialism in Nigeria and Igbo culture, it is wholly fiction, and should be understood and taught as such. In addition, it is very important to keep in mind the historicity of the novel itself: the book is set in the 1890s, but was first published in 1958, 2 years before Nigeria was granted full independence from British rule. This means that we are bringing a postcolonial sensibility and perspective to the text and should bear in mind the many ways in which Nigerian politics, culture and attitudes have changed in the last 50 years. So the novel is not wholly historical, nor wholly contemporary, as much as it can help us learn about both the past and understand themes of value to the present.

ASSIGNMENT:

1.) What does "diversity" mean in Nigeria as compared to the US? • What are stereotypes? How do certain words promote a negative impression of Africa or Africans? What is problematic about the following terms: tribe, hut, savage, primitive, backward, timeless, primordial, (etc)? Why are these terms problematic? Why might some people find them offensive or disparaging?

2.) Who are the Igbo people? Where do they live? What is their life like? How have their customs and traditions changed since the 1880s? Since the 1950s? What do they believe?

Describe their religious system and the hierarchy of Igbo cosmology. What is the concept of “ogbanje” and how is it important to the novel? • What other cultural concepts in the book are unique to Igbo people? Why do you think Achebe includes these? What do they tell us about Igbo people and their beliefs in the novel?

3.) How does Okonkwo’s relationship with male and female characters differ? Why? • What role to women play in this novel? What is life like for Okonkwo’s wives? • Some female characters in the book don’t seem to fit the mold according to Okonkwo’s view? Who are they and why are they important to the text? Think about the character Ezinma. Of Ezinma, Okonkwo thinks: "She should have been a boy" . Why is it necessary to the story that Okonkwo's most favored child be a girl? What does it mean that she has all of the characteristics that her father finds more valuable in a son?

4.) What is the significance of the child Ikemefuna to the novel? Why does Okonkwo kill him? What can be learned from this episode?

5.) Think about the character of Nwoye. Why does he convert to Christianity? Discuss the factors that led to his transformation, and how they relate to his relationship with his father.

6.) What is a hero? Is Okonkwo a hero?

7.) How do the missionaries set the stage for colonial control? Who are the first converts, and why do these people find Christianity so appealing? • What is Okonkwo’s view on the missionaries? On colonial education? Why do some people convert to Christianity in the book and others do not? Use evidence to support your view.

8.) Discuss how chi relates to the ideas of “destiny” and “fate” • Propose a model or strategy for discussing this theme in the book by asking the starting question, “Is Okonkwo responsible for his fate in this text, or is it determined by outside forces?” • Is Okonkwo at odds with, or at peace with, his chi? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

9.) Think about the ending of the novel, and Okonkwo’s death. In the end, after all his efforts to be the opposite of his father, he dies a very similarly shameful death. What does this ending mean to the larger theme of destiny? Was this the inevitable end determined by Okonkwo’s chi? What is the role of the missionaries in the novel?

10.) What are the advantages and disadvantages of colonial education? (What does Okonkwo’s death mean? Why do things fall apart? Who/what is to blame for Okonkwo’s death? Does Okonkwo die a hero or a victim? Do you think Okonkwo dies in vain? Why or why not?)

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Week 5-6

TEXT: The Autobiography of Malcolm X – One of Your PDF Downloads

Also at <http://www.wenovel.com/book/208.html>

The Autobiography of Malcolm X: Study Guide

Give details and support using the texts/links provided

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Nightmare - Describe Malcolm's family with regard to his step and full siblings. Describe the physical appearances of his parents. How does skin color and hair texture impact their behavior and determine who are favored in Malcolm's family? What major impact did Rev. Little's death have on Malcolm? Discuss why Malcolm named this chapter, "Nightmare".

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 2: Mascot - Discuss the meaning of, "mascot" as it applies to Malcolm's perception of himself, other's perception of him and why he feels the Whites in his childhood regarded him as a mascot?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 3: Homeboy - Malcolm describes the Roxbury Negroes and the "successful" ones in Lansing with contempt, yet finds an attraction to another type of "man". Explain this using what you already know of Malcolm's character along with your own opinions. Discuss the "grooming" of Malcolm's character along with the changing of his outer appearance. What are Malcolm's ambitions at this point?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 4: Laura - Describe Laura's in contrast to Sophia. What is Malcolm's impression of both women; how does he interact with each?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 5: Harlemite - Discuss Malcolm's employment, mental state as he worked, his political views and impression of others around him, the draft, and University "Negroes", the Communist Party, and why he was fired. What does Malcolm learn when he returns to Lansing that sends him into a new opportunity?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapters 6-12 – As a whole: Discuss the major occurrences in Malcom's life. What happens that shapes his character? How does he change? What behaviors shows this change? How does he view himself? What plans does he lay in place? How do the events impact his current state?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 13: Minister Malcolm X - Discuss Malcolm's transformation. Describe Malcolm's commitment to and preparation for becoming a minister. Explain Malcolm's method of motivating blacks to listen to him. How does Malcolm prove himself a dedicated Muslim?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 14: Black Muslims - Malcolm X criticizes and regards with contempt the “modern, twentieth century Uncle Toms.” Who are the “black parrots”? Why does Malcolm criticize them? How do Malcolm and Muhammad distinguish between “segregation” and “separation”?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 15: Icarus - Discuss what measures Malcolm feels must be taken to gain full rights as opposed to the non-violent protests such as the March on Washington.

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 16: Out - What led to negative publicity surrounding Malcolm and the Muslim movement? Discuss how Malcolm responds to this; include his response to the discovery of Elijah Muhammad’s immoral behavior.

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 17: Mecca - Discuss how Malcolm experiences a profound change during his pilgrimage and what causes him to alter key Muslim views he once held. Explain what is meant by the statement of Mahmoud Youssef Shawarbi, “No man has believed perfectly until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 18: El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz - In addressing America’s problem, What does Malcolm think is the American black leader’s most critical problem and what does he identify as “the single worst mistake of the American black organizations and their leaders”?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

Chapter 19: 1965 - Time for Action and reflection - Explain why you agree or disagree with Malcolm’s exclamation, “I am for violence if non-violence means we continue postponing a solution to the American black man’s problem—just to avoid violence. If it must take violence to get the black man his human rights in this country, I’m for violence . . .”

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE

1. Discuss the difference between "segregation" and "separatism." Would you call Malcolm a racist? How would you defend your answer?

2. Discuss the various names Malcolm X used in his lifetime. Create a list of the names Malcolm X used, along with the period in his life that he used these names. Give details on his specific character traits during the time he used that particular name. What major life change did he experience that may have led to the changing of his name? Why would a person take a name, either legally or casually, other than his or her birth name? What do names tell us about a person?

ADD RESPONSE/S HERE