ENGL/AAAS 4582 - Studies in African American Literature

GROWING UP BLACK:
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMING-OF-AGE NARRATIVES

This course examines how African American authors depict adolescent identity formation. How do matters of race, gender, sexuality, class and religion influence the process of growing up? Ranging from the 1940s to the contemporary moment, the selected narratives—including fiction, memoir, autobiography, poetry, film, and music—invite us to note how and why writers focus on black youth and young adults. Keeping in mind that each work we will encounter is created by an adult who is reflecting back on childhood experiences or creating fictional ones, we will examine the importance of memory, characterization, and narrative voice in each text.

In this course you will...

• develop strategies of close reading, argumentative writing and research;
• utilize interdisciplinary scholarship (critical race theory, gender studies, psychology) to frame analyses of African American literature;
• hone oral communication skills by engaging in full class discussions and small group presentations.

TEXTS
I encourage you to purchase the specific editions that I recommend for the course. We frequently will refer to reading passages by page number, and you need to be able to locate those passages expediently.

Richard Wright, Black Boy (Harper Perennial – 0061443085)
Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye (Vintage – 9780307278449)
Gwendolyn Brooks, Selected Poems (P.S.) (Harper Perennial – 0060882964)
Alice Childress, A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ But a Sandwich (Puffin – 0698118545)
Andrea Lee, Sarah Phillips (Northeastern – 9781555531584)
Tayari Jones, Leaving Atlanta (Grand Central – 9780446690898)
Barack Obama, Dreams from My Father (Three Rivers – 1400082773)
Edwidge Danticat, Breath, Eyes, Memory (Random – 9780375705045)
Film viewing: Eve’s Bayou, director Kasi Lemmons

Additional texts and scholarship available on CARMEN

REQUIREMENTS

1. Participation and Attendance: Read all assigned class materials before coming to class. This is a discussion-based class, so be prepared to ask pertinent questions, share your interpretations, and respectfully engage other people’s ideas. Please note that I often call on students by name to respond to questions or read aloud. Your participation grade will be based on your verbal
contribution and attendance. However, even if you have perfect attendance, if you do not speak up in class regularly, you can receive no higher grade than B+ for participation. See the following page for additional attendance policies.

2. Discussion posts: You will submit at least eight posts to the online discussion board: in four posts, begin a new discussion thread of your responses to material we cover in class or to relevant sources that you identify on your own. In four additional posts, reply to discussion threads initiated by other students. A well-formulated response will be at least 200 words long, adhere to standard conventions of spelling and punctuation, and reflect your critical thinking. Please insert the text of your post directly into the space provided. You must submit the first two of your discussion posts by Thursday, September 13; complete the others incrementally throughout the semester as designated on the schedule.

Use your posts as a space to extend our classroom discussions. You also may find that your posts help you to think through ideas for your essays. Be creative. For example, for one entry, you might compare two children in a novel we’re reading. For another post, you may want to offer an impromptu review of the recent film Beasts of the Southern Wild or some other film with a young black protagonist. In these posts, you are welcome to analyze relevant news clips, cartoons, comic strips, blogs, or other forms of literary and popular culture, but be sure to ground your comments in the theories and concepts we discuss in class. I also may occasionally offer discussion prompts for you to address.

3. Critical Essays: You will complete two critical essays (6-8 pages each). These essays must include a thesis statement and references to the primary text(s) you are analyzing. In addition, incorporate at least two scholarly, secondary sources to help support your own ideas. Feel free to confer with me as you determine your essay topic.

Your essays should be submitted electronically using the CARMEN digital dropbox; do not forward assignments to my OSU email address. Please type your essays using Microsoft Word or a comparable program (note: convert Apple documents as necessary). As I evaluate your essays, I will use the Track Changes and Insert Comment features to integrate my questions and comments into the body of your document. Assignments should be double-spaced and typed in 11- or 12-point Times New Roman font, allowing one-inch margins. Indicate your name, the date, and your essay’s original title at the top of the first page; no title page is necessary. Your essay must include proper MLA or Chicago style citation.

4. Oral presentation: Once during the quarter, your assigned small group of two to three students will lead class discussion for 20 minutes. I will provide general topics from which you can select. Your presentation, judged both for content and delivery, should help initiate class debate, raise provocative questions, or provide background information about the literary and historical contexts of the works we read. If you plan to use multimedia for your presentation, please notify me so that I can make any necessary arrangements.

EVALUATION
Participation 15%
Discussion Posts 20%
Critical Essays 50% (first essay 20%; second essay 30%)
In calculating grades, I use the following grading scheme:
E 0 (if you do not submit an assignment)  B- 80
E 50 (if you submit a complete, but failing assignment)  B  83
D 60  B+ 87
D+ 67  A- 90
C+ 77  A  93
C 73
C- 70

COURSE POLICIES
Timely, consistent attendance is required. Two tardies or early departures count as an absence. After two absences, each additional absence will lower your participation grade by one-third of a letter grade. Please notify me in the case of documented extenuating circumstances (family emergency, illness, religious observances). Be apprised, however, that whether excused or unexcused, four or more absences may result in a failing grade for the course. You are responsible for completing readings and assignments missed during your absence by the next class period when you return to class.

In the event that class is canceled due to an emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a notice be posted on the classroom door. Check CARMEN for additional updates about schedule changes.

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the dates specified. A late assignment (submitted 10 min into class period, after class, etc) is penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day it is late (e.g., from B+ to B- for two days late). I will not accept assignments turned in more than two days after the due date.

You are responsible for avoiding plagiarism by properly citing all direct quotations, paraphrases, and ideas that derive from sources you consult. If you have questions about MLA or Chicago style documentation, please confer with me or seek help at the Writing Center. The University maintains the following plagiarism policy:

"It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term ‘academic misconduct’ includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487).” For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct available at http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html.

Please note that this policy applies to all suspected cases of plagiarism, whether intentional or not. The committee’s investigation of alleged academic misconduct may result in an E for the course or other severe sanctions.
OFFICE HOURS AND RESOURCES
During my office hours—listed on page one of this syllabus—I would be glad to help you address concerns about your reading, writing, and progress in the course. If you have a scheduling conflict with my designated office hours, you may request an appointment during another time.

Our CARMEN course site will be a primary means of communication throughout the course. You are responsible for noting any assignments or updates posted to the site; you can also access useful external links, handouts, and other resources. Visit CARMEN as you prepare for each class period.

The Writing Center offers free, ungraded assistance with assignments and writing concerns. Even strong writers can benefit from this service, and I encourage you to schedule an appointment with a trained tutor. For more information about available services, call 614-688-4291 or explore the website at http://cstw.osu.edu/writingcenter/.

The Office for Disability Services (ODS), located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers assistance for students with documented disabilities. For more information, call 614-292-3307 or view the website at http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/. After registering with ODS, you may confer with me during office hours to discuss possible accommodations for this course.

SCHEDULE:

**Growing Up Down Home: Black Youth and the South**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading/Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Aug 28</td>
<td>Richard Wright, <em>Black Boy</em>, Ch 1-3 (pp. 1-101)</td>
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<td>Th</td>
<td>Aug 30</td>
<td><em>Black Boy</em>, Ch 4-8 (pp. 102-178)</td>
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| T   | Sept 4 | *Black Boy*, Ch 9-14 (pp. 179-257)  
Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues” (C) |
| Th  | Sept 6 | Film Viewing: *Eve’s Bayou* |
| T   | Sept 11 | *Eve’s Bayou*  
D. Soyini Madison, from “Oedipus Rex at Eve’s Bayou” (C) |

**Growing Up Into Womanhood**

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| Th  | Sept 13 | Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 1-58)  
At least two CARMEN posts must be complete |

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*I reserve the right to amend the schedule at any point during the quarter. In the event of changes, a revised syllabus will be posted to CARMEN.  
C= available on CARMEN*
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<th>Day</th>
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| T   | Sept 18 | *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 59-131)  
Debra Werrlein, “Not So Fast, Dick and Jane” (C) |
| Th  | Sept 20 | *The Bluest Eye* (pp. 132-216) |
| T   | Sept 25 | Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems*: from *Annie Allen*  
“Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood” (pp. 33-37)  
“The Anniad” (pp. 38-49)  
“The Womanhood” I&II (pp. 52-55) |

**Growing Up in the City**

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| Th  | Sept 27 | Brooks, *Selected Poems*  
“a song in the front yard” (p. 6)  
“The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith” (pp. 12-18)  
“we real cool” (p. 73)  
“The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock” (p. 87-89) |
| T   | Oct 2 | Alice Childress, *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’* (pp. 9-126)  
**At least four CARMEN posts must be complete** |
| Th  | Oct 4 | *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’* |
| T   | Oct 9 | Toni Cade Bambara, “Gorilla, My Love,” “The Lesson,” “Raymond’s Run” (C) |
| Th  | Oct 11 | Tayari Jones, *Leaving Atlanta* (pp. 1-82) |
| T   | Oct 16 | *Leaving Atlanta* (pp. 83-178)  
Eric Gary Anderson, from “Black Atlanta: An Ecosocial Approach” (C) |
| Th  | Oct 18 | *Leaving Atlanta* (pp. 178-255) |
| T   | Oct 23 | Jay-Z, from *Decoded* (C)  
Slick Rick, “Children’s Story” (C)  
**Essay #1 due** |

**Growing Up Boojie: Middle-Class Identity and Black “Authenticity”**

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<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Oct 25</td>
<td>Touré, “Shut up, Touré! You Ain’t Black!” (C)</td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Oct 30</td>
<td>Andrea Lee, <em>Sarah Phillips</em> (pp. 1-66)</td>
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<td>Th</td>
<td>Nov 1</td>
<td><em>Sarah Phillips</em> (pp. 67-end)</td>
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### Growing Uprooted: Migration and Coming-of-Age

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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Assignment</th>
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| T   | Nov 6  | Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (pp. 1-85)  
At least six CARMEN posts must be complete |
| Th  | Nov 8  | *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (pp. 86-157)  
Carol Boyce Davies, from “Migratory Subjectivities” |
| T   | Nov 13 | *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (pp. 158-234) |
| Th  | Nov 15 | Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father* (pp. vii-112) |
| T   | Nov 20 | *Dreams from My Father* (pp. 113-206)  
Tara T. Green, from *A Fatherless Child* (C) |
| Th  | Nov 22 | NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING |
| T   | Nov 27 | *Dreams from My Father* (pp. 207-295) |
| Th  | Nov 29 | *Dreams from My Father* (pp. 296-366)  
**All CARMEN posts must be complete** |
| T   | Dec 4  | *Dreams from My Father* (pp. 367-457)  
Review |
| M   | Dec 10 | **Essay #2 due** in CARMEN dropbox by 6 p.m. |