

ENGL: 4381/5381 Toni Morrison

Course: 4381/5381 [CRN: 16931/16935]

Class Meetings: Monday from 6 – 9 p.m. in Irby Hall 313

Instructor: Dr. Isiah Lavender, III

Office: 401 Irby Hall

Office Hours: MW 9-10; TTh 9-12 and by appointment

Phone, E-mail & **Facebook**: (501) 450-5118; lavender@uca.edu

REQUIRED BOOKS: Available at UCA Bookstore

Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved, Jazz, Playing in the Dark, Paradise, Love, and A Mercy*

Recommended Books:

Toni Morrison: What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction. Edited by Carolyn C. Denard

Course Description: Toni Morrison is a luminary of the contemporary scene in American literature. More importantly, she represents the apex of the continually expanding talent of black literary artists who provided a dynamic response to the social upheaval of the sixties and beyond. With a literary career spanning forty years or more, Morrison has expanded the limits of American culture, enriching it with black vernacular, black myths, and the rhythms of black life. Put another way, her aesthetic creations have inspired people across the world to tear down the walls of oppression. Beginning with her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, we will consider the historical, cultural, and literary contexts of what it means to be “black” in America by investigating the subject of “race.” The focus of this course is to interrogate and perhaps destabilize what color means to us as American citizens.

Expectations: My expectations are very high, and you should demand the same from me, and especially from one another: if you come to class prepared to fully engage with the material, you should expect the same from everyone in the room. Every absence or withheld participation is palpable; I therefore expect regular attendance, consistent preparation, and active participation. Finally, I expect all of us to have fun because learning should be and can be fun. For my part, I will try to cultivate a lively discussion for each class.

Responsibilities and Behavior: A seminar should not resemble a typical college class. Unfortunately, experience has taught me that an attendance policy is necessary for all students. One class period is one week of class. More than **two absences** means you are out of my Monday night class with a **WF** without question. If you find that you must miss class due to serious illness or emergency, PLEASE let me know immediately and be prepared to present documentation. You need to be here as well as your texts. *Late arrival* makes you ineligible for the class period’s participation point. Repeated failure to bring the appropriate text(s) for discussion will also invalidate you for the day’s participation point. If you cannot attend regularly and arrive on time at 6 p.m., please do both of us a favor and enroll in a course which has more lenient attendance expectations. As we are all adults here, and this is a university campus, it should be understood that respect for the instructor, fellow students, and the material itself is required.

Academic Misconduct: Avoid even the appearance of possible impropriety during an exam or quiz; leave books and notebooks closed and out of sight; do not let your eyes stray to another’s paper; do not leave the room while the exam is in progress; speak only to the instructor or the exam proctor. A grade of zero will be assigned to any quiz or exam the integrity of which has been opened to question in any way.

Late work: Outside work is due at the start of the specified period; I DO NOT ACCEPT late work.

GRADING: Course requirements for **undergraduates** include: active participation in discussion, weekly questions, 4 reader responses, an 8-10 page research paper, and a mock conference presentation. Course requirements for **graduate students** include: active participation, weekly questions, one reader response per novel, a 12-15 page research paper, 1 teaching session, and a mock conference presentation. All formal writing assignments must be typed in a **12 point Times New Roman font and also be uniformly double-spaced with 1-inch margins in addition to having a title.** Any assignment that does not meet these specific requirements **in addition to length obligations** will receive an X grade and no feedback; an X grade garners zero credit at the end of the semester unless you redo it to my satisfaction. You and you

alone are responsible for the condition and submission of your assignments. DO NOT rely on spell check alone. PROOFREAD your papers and save them. However, I encourage you to seek me out and discuss your ideas or lack thereof and to bring drafts to me. Keep all graded assignments easily available for consultation until after the final grade has been recorded, both so that you may compute your average at any point in the semester, and so that any dispute over the final grade's computation may be efficiently resolved. Failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in an F for the semester. There are **100 points** for the semester.

Participation – This class is discussion oriented which makes your energetic participation essential in having a successful and productive semester. Thus, it is your obligation to read and prepare the assigned readings for class as well as to routinely bring the appropriate text(s) to class. I strongly encourage you to express your pleasure in as well as your frustration with the readings because this will stimulate and inspire discussion in the classroom. Attendance is crucial. If you don't feel you can be an active participant in this class, please drop now. **(1 point per class meeting) ***Graduate students are expected to orally participate each class period.**

Weekly Reaction Questions – Each student is responsible for supplying at least one question per week for the class to consider about our reading. Questions may concern whatever fascinates, arouses, disturbs, or confuses you about a text, character, situation, cultural moment, or something else entirely. I am keenly interested in addressing your questions as opposed to my own. Questions may be submitted in legible handwriting at the beginning of class or via email the night before class. **(1 point per class; ½ point for Grads)**

Reader Responses – Ideally, these response papers will aid in your developing awareness of yourself as a critical reader throughout the semester. You can write on any material covered in class. For example, you could explain how and why a particular passage or line provokes a response from you or why the reading assignment is torturous to complete. I am interested in your response to the readings, but keep in mind that reading only succeeds if you gain “meaning,” and the meaning(s) that you gain are transmitted in your interpretations. This approach necessarily entails “close reading” of the material. The possibilities are seemingly endless. These papers should be based on your own reactions to the literature; it is **NOT** a research paper. Each response paper should be **no less than 2 full pages in length and no more than 3 pages.** You are responsible for 4 responses. **(5 points each) ***Graduate students will write an RR for EACH text. (ten responses 3 points each)**

Research Paper – Choose a work (story, poem, or play) in either of the anthologies we are using that particularly appeals to you. Next, think about why you liked this piece, and let that perception guide you through the generation of a paper topic which is narrow in scope. For example: Does the way the author presents character intrigue you? If so, you could let that be your focus. Setting, point of view, tone, style, -- all these are possibilities as well. Your discussion will necessarily involve a consideration of other aspects of the text such as symbolism, imagery, irony, or humor, for some or all of these and other elements may contribute to your particular topic. Be careful, however; don't stray too far from your focus as you illustrate subsidiary elements. Don't for instance, begin talking about how humor plays a role in the formation of the central character's personalities, and somehow wind up talking only about *humor*, when your real subject is character. Your particular focus, however, must be approved.

It is extremely important that you selected a focus for your paper before you begin your research. Papers that attempt to address every aspect of a text invariably become superficial. Once you've selected the topic, reread the work yet again, jotting down/underlining key passages, images, symbols, and so on that relate to your focus. You now have a clear idea of how you'll want the paper to develop, and you can proceed to the next step, critical research.

This component of the essay requires you to engage in dialogue with other critics who have examined the work in question. Torreyson Library has 74 books on its own that deal with Toni Morrison in some way or another in addition to further resources at Hendrix College's Bailey Library. This research project means a bit of legwork. Starting your search for books, essays, and articles on the internet is fine, but internet sources are strictly prohibited (*F for the assignment*). You will discover that journal articles tend to be more specific in their interests than books. You may desire to use sources that have nothing to do with your writer; for instance, if sections dealing with science, religion, racial interactions, philosophy, feminism, or some other subject of interest to you, you might want to focus on the author's consideration of this area, utilizing appropriate studies. In any event you will need at least EIGHT outside sources. Remember, however, that the main voice in your paper must be yours. Don't in effect say “Critic A says this, critic B says otherwise, while critic C says thus-and-so. I agree with Critic B.” Instead, use the “experts” to support or contrast with your views. Don't fail to ask a reference librarian for help if you run into difficulty. The length requirement for this essay is **8 full pages to**

10 pages excluding the bibliography. The undergrad paper is due at 6 p.m. on **Monday, November 21, 2011**. Any paper that does not meet the length requirement will receive a letter grade deduction or worse. (25 points)

*****Graduate students will write a longer version of the term paper (12-15 pages) due on December 5, 2011.**

Plagiarism -- the act of passing off the ideas or words of another as your own without crediting the source -- is not acceptable and will be severely penalized, meaning an F for the course. Of course, you can use outside sources as long as you cite them properly using MLA style. Please do not hesitate to ask whether something should be cited if you are unsure.

Teaching – Each graduate member of the class will serve as teacher, lecturer, or facilitator during at least one of the class sessions. As the teacher you will begin and lead class discussions, presumably on topics of your particular interest or previous knowledge in relation to Morrison. While the assigned readings determine the basic ground for our discussions, I also hope that the discussion leaders will move the class in directions I have not planned or anticipated. I will be glad to meet with discussion leaders prior to the class session they will lead if desired. (11 points)

Mock Conference Presentation – In lieu of a final exam, we will be attending the fictional Morrison conference right here at UCA, where each student will submit a 100 word abstract on the paper they will present by **November 14th (7 points)**. Each person will be placed on a three or four person panel based on the theme of their paper and will present their 4-5 page conference paper (a condensed version of your term paper) in 10 minutes. After each panelist gives their paper, we will then field questions for 20 to thirty minutes. (20 points)

Plagiarism--the act of passing off the ideas or words of another as your own without crediting the source -- is not acceptable and will be severely penalized, meaning an F for the course. Of course, you can use outside sources in as long as you cite them properly using MLA style. Please do not hesitate to ask whether something should be cited if you are unsure.

Final Exam – The final exam format will be announced.

Grade Scale: A 91 and above; B 90-80; C 79-70; D 69-60; F 59 and Below

	<u>U</u>	<u>G</u>
Participation: 14 classes (1 point)	14	X
Weekly Questions: 14 (1 point; ½ point)	14	7
Reader Responses: 4x5; 10x3	20	30
Teaching:	X	11
Essay:	25	25
Mock Con Abstract:	7	7
Mock Con Presentation:	20	20
Total:	100	100

UNIVERSITY POLICIES: If you have questions about the university's academic policies, guidelines regarding sexual harassment, or any other matters, please consult the relevant sections of the UCA Student Handbook. UCA adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the UCA Office of Disability Services at 450-3135.

The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university's Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, **a failing grade in the course**, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student's acceptance of this university policy.

THIS SYLLABUS IS A TENTATIVE OUTLINE—IT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Week by Week Reading Schedule

M 8/29: "Recitatif"

M 9/5: No Class Labor Day

M 9/12: *The Bluest Eye*

M 9/19: *Sula*

M 9/26: *Song of Solomon* pp. xi-186

M 10/3: *Song of Solomon* pp. 187-337

M 10/10: *Tar Baby*

M 10/17: *Beloved*

M 10/24: film screening of *Beloved*

M 10/31: *Jazz*

M 11/7: *Playing in the Dark*

M 11/14: *Paradise* pp. 3-182; Abstract due

M 11/21: *Paradise* pp. 185-318; Undergrad Essay due

M 11/28: *Love*

M 12/5: *A Mercy*; Grad Essay Due

M 12/12: Mock Conference