

MAJOR AUTHORS: OCTAVIA BUTLER

ENGL 5340-27439

2:00-2:50 pm in Irby 304

Spring 2023

DR. KATHERINE E. CONLEY

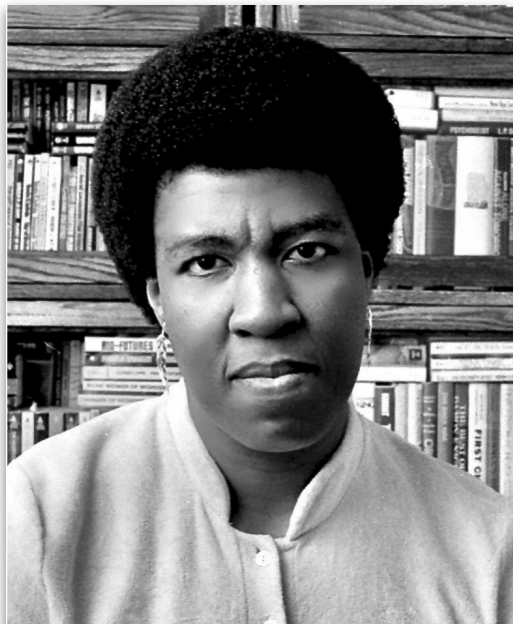


Photo: courtesy of: The Octavia E. Butler Estate

"I began writing about power
because I had so little."

— Octavia E. Butler

Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) is an award-winning and internationally acclaimed writer of speculative fiction, and she pursued this career at a time when few African American writers (let alone women African American writers) were working in the genre. She won the prestigious Hugo Award and Nebula Award multiple times, and she was the first science fiction writer ever to receive a MacArthur Genius grant. Her life's work was honored with a PEN Lifetime Achievement Award. A Mars rover landing site, an asteroid, and a mountain on one of Pluto's moons have been named after her.

Despite these achievements, you might be surprised how many sci-fi fans and lovers of literature have never heard of her or read one of her works. If you find yourself in that position, this course will provide the remedy!

Butler's legacy is partly the result of the captivating worlds she creates and futures she envisions. But it's also because of the fearless way that she tackles difficult and uncomfortable questions. How we define what it means to be human and to have the full experience of humanity is the undercurrent in all her fiction. And what gets included and excluded in those definitions touches on issues of race and ethnicity, power dynamics, environmental injustice, age and generational divides, disability, bodily autonomy, and gender, sex, and sexuality.

In this course, we will read some of her most exciting and challenging works, including short stories and books that feature dystopian and post-apocalyptic worlds, time travel, and alien lifeforms. We'll also explore different angles of literary criticism and refine our skills in literary analysis.

Along the way, you'll strengthen your communication and critical thinking skills. Regardless of what type of career you plan to pursue, reading literature of all kinds is an excellent way to enrich

yourself as a human being and live a better life. In other words, this class should be fun, but it will also have practical benefits for you. Interpreting stories is an enjoyable way to gain empathy and learn about other perspectives, to strengthen your critical reading and writing skills, and to practice creative and imaginative thinking.

Course objectives:

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- have a richer understanding of the development of Butler's writing over time and her place in the literary canon
- think empathetically and critically through a diverse range of perspectives on the complexity of the human experience
- communicate effectively at an advanced level in both oral and written form
- facilitate collaborative discussion at a professional level
- articulate an original argument, supported with research and literary analysis appropriate to the graduate level

Required materials:

The **books listed below must be purchased/rented**. Any format and any edition is fine. Any other required materials will be made freely available in class and/or online.

- *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995/2005)
- *Clay's Ark* (1984)
- *Patternmaster* (1976)
- *Kindred* (1979)
- *Dawn* (1987)
- *Parable of the Sower* (1993)

Major assignments:

20% Participation: Don't be just a face in a seat or a name on a roster. We are a community of learners, and participation requires more than merely being present. Because this is a heavily discussion-based course, your success as an individual in this group depends upon your active, substantive, and regular engagement in our conversations and activities. In other words, be a team player and share in the collaborative workload. See the guide and rubric for more info.

- 20% Leading discussion:** Once this semester, you will be responsible for leading class for 20-25 minutes without my intervention. We will sign up in the first week for assigned dates. Prior to your assigned date, you will be responsible for scheduling a meeting with me to discuss your plans and go over any questions/concerns you have. The goal is not for you to lecture or dispense knowledge, but rather to facilitate a rich conversation about the day's material. You should prepare questions you wish to use to prompt discussion, as well as plan on a couple key passages and/or key issues in the selection that you want the group to focus on. See the assignment guide and rubric for more info.
- 20% Article annotations and questions:** Most Mondays, we'll be reading and discussing scholarly articles on Butler's works. For this assignment, you will be responsible for annotating one of those articles and providing discussion questions for other students to respond to. Your annotations should help us track with the article's main idea and supporting ideas/information. Your discussion questions should help us further digest the full complexity of the article. See the assignment guide and rubric for more info.
- 15% Workshop:** This workshop will help you prepare for the final research paper. You will set up an appointment to meet with me one-on-one (you will be responsible for initiating the scheduling). At that meeting, you will bring a draft of your thesis statement/intro paragraph for us to discuss. The grade for the workshop will be based on your level of preparation and your productive and proactive engagement in conversation and in receiving feedback. See the assignment guide and rubric for more info.
- 25% Final:** Your final is a traditional graduate-level English literature research paper (15-20 pages not including the works cited page in MLA formatting). It should advance an original claim about one of Butler's works. That claim should be situated as a new contribution within the existing scholarly conversation, and should be thoroughly supported with textual analysis and scholarly research. Your paper should demonstrate sophisticated understanding of primary and secondary sources, advanced research skills, adeptness with literary criticism and theory, and polish in style and argumentation. See the assignment guide and rubric for more info.

Schedule:

WEEKLY OVERVIEW: Throughout the semester, we'll follow this basic pattern each week (with a few exceptions, which are noted in the schedule below).

- **MONDAYS:** Online discussion of scholarly articles and secondary material on Butler (reading responses posted by 2 pm; replies by midnight).
- **WEDNESDAYS & FRIDAYS:** In-person discussion of the reading in Irby 304 at 2:00-2:50 pm.

SCHEDULE CHANGES: The pattern of how each section meets will stay consistent. However, **the readings for each day listed below may need to be adjusted.** The pacing for each group of students is different, and I want to do what best suits the needs of the class as a whole. Any changes I make will work to your benefit (for example, less work or extended deadlines). I will notify everyone of any changes with advanced notice through **online announcements/email**.

Fri. Jan. 13	Welcome and opening activities
Mon. Jan. 16	No classes — Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
Wed. Jan. 18	"Bloodchild" (in <i>Bloodchild and Other Stories</i>)
Fri. Jan. 20	"Amnesty" (in <i>Bloodchild and Other Stories</i>)
Mon. Jan. 23	Online discussion in Perusall: "'Would You Really Rather Die Than Bear My Young?': The Construction of Gender, Race, and Species in Octavia E. Butler's 'Bloodchild'" by Elyce Rae Helford
Wed. Jan. 25	"The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (in <i>Bloodchild and Other Stories</i>)
Fri. Jan. 27	"Speech Sounds" (in <i>Bloodchild and Other Stories</i>)
Mon. Jan. 30	Online discussion in Perusall: "Positive Obsession"
Wed. Feb. 1	<i>Clay's Ark</i> part 1 (up through and including "present 8")
Fri. Feb. 3	<i>Clay's Ark</i> part 1 ("past 9" - end) and part 2
Mon. Feb. 6	Online discussion in Perusall: "Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, and the Language of Black Speculative Literature" by Hope Wabuke
Wed. Feb. 8	<i>Clay's Ark</i> parts 3-4
Fri. Feb. 10	<i>Clay's Ark</i> part 5
Mon. Feb. 13	Online discussion in Perusall: "Becoming Other: Animals, Kinship, and Butler's 'Clay's Ark'" by Sherryl Vint
Wed. Feb. 15	<i>Patternmaster</i> prologue - ch. 2
Fri. Feb. 17	<i>Patternmaster</i> ch. 3-5
Mon. Feb. 20	Online discussion in Perusall: "Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler" by Maria Aline Ferreira
Wed. Feb. 22	<i>Patternmaster</i> ch. 6-7
Fri. Feb. 24	<i>Patternmaster</i> ch. 8-9
Mon. Feb. 27	Online discussion in Perusall: "Diversity, Change, Violence: Octavia Butler's Pedagogical Philosophy" by Sarah Outtersen
Wed. March 1	<i>Kindred</i> — prologue, "The River," and "The Fire"
Fri. March 3	<i>Kindred</i> — "The Fall"
Mon. March 6	Online discussion in Perusall: "Saying 'YES': Textual Traumas in Octavia Butler's <i>Kindred</i> " by Marisa Parham
Wed. March 8	<i>Kindred</i> — "The Fight" (up through and including ch. 7)

Fri. March 10	<i>Kindred</i> — “The Fight” (ch. 8 - end)
Mon. March 13	Online discussion in Perusall: “Power and Repetition: Philosophies of (Literary) History in Octavia E. Butler’s <i>Kindred</i> ” by Christine Levecq
Wed. March 15	<i>Kindred</i> — “The Storm”
Fri. March 17	<i>Kindred</i> — “The Rope” and epilogue
SPRING BREAK	
Mon. March 27	Online discussion in Perusall: interview with Octavia Butler (TBD)
Wed. March 29	<i>Dawn</i> part 1
Fri. March 31	<i>Dawn</i> part 2
Mon. April 3	Online discussion in Perusall: “Blood, Genes, and Gender in Octavia Butler’s <i>Kindred</i> and <i>Dawn</i> ,” Nancy Jesser
Wed. April 5	<i>Dawn</i> part 3
Fri. April 7	<i>Dawn</i> part 4
Mon. April 10	Online discussion in Perusall: “We Get to Live, and So Do They: Octavia Butler’s Contact Zones” by Thomas Foster
Wed. April 12	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> ch. 1-7
Fri. April 14	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> ch. 8-15
Mon. April 17	Online discussion in Perusall: “Genre and Environmentalism: Octavia Butler’s <i>Parable of the Sower</i> , Speculative Fiction, and the African American Slave Narrative” by Sylvia Mayer
Wed. April 19	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> ch. 16-20
Fri. April 21	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> ch. 21-end
Mon. April 24	No class — workshops
Wed. April 26	No class — workshops
Fri. April 28	No classes — Study Day
Fri. May 5	Final research paper due in Blackboard by 2:00 pm

MY POLICIES FOR THIS COURSE:

How to get in touch with me:

Email: kconley@uca.edu (See the email policy section below in “My Policies for this Course”)

Schedule a time to meet with me: To set up a meeting with me, [use my Google Calendar](#) and choose an in-person time or a Zoom meeting:

- in person/Zoom: MWF 12-2 pm
- Zoom only: T/Th 11:30 am - 12:30 pm

Office location (Irby 317D): My office is Irby 317D. Go up to the third floor. If you’ve used the elevator, turn left and you’ll see the English Dept. main office. If you’ve taken the stairs, use the staircase on the same end of the building as the elevator. At the top of the stairs, turn right. Inside the English Dept. main office, go to the third door on the right.

Phone number (office): 501-470-7597

Email policy:

All of your communications with me should be professional in nature. **I only respond to emails that follow basic etiquette: a salutation, clear communication of your questions/concerns, and a signature line.**

I will respond to your email within 24 hours. If you do not hear from me in that time window, contact me again.

Philosophy of Text and Topic Selection:

The UCA Department of English shares the [University’s commitment](#) to cultivating learning environments that center diversity, belonging, inclusion, and equity for all of our students. Throughout students’ coursework, they will read texts that represent the breadth and depth of human experience, which may include violence, grief, trauma, hatred, joy, love, success, and triumph. Some content, regardless of how one categorizes it, may prove unsettling to read.

We approach our classes knowing that reactions to any individual text are not universal, and that what sparks discomfort for one person might resonate with another. We believe engaging with diverse viewpoints is one of the most beneficial approaches to any kind of literary analysis. We also believe that open dialogue strengthens the community within our department.

To these ends, faculty choose texts of literary, historical, cultural, and linguistic significance. Our faculty select texts and topics that will:

- Facilitate our students' development of sophisticated skills for reading, writing, research, and critical thinking.
- Broaden and deepen our students' knowledge and cultural awareness about literature, language, culture, and history.
- Strengthen our students' ability to communicate effectively and with cultural humility and agility.

If you have questions about the assigned texts in this course, I welcome you to reach out to me to initiate a conversation.

Student conduct:

You are responsible for your conduct. I expect you to conduct yourself professionally and courteously in the classroom (both in person and online), in meetings and communications with me, and in your work overall. If your behavior seriously disrupts the learning experience of other students or my ability to teach, I will ask you to leave the classroom (either in person or online).

Expectations for a hybrid course:

This is a hybrid course. That means that the following are expected of you:

- Follow all of the university's **guidelines on public safety**, including any guidance on masking, social distancing, etc.
- **Know your schedule.** The info is laid out clearly in the syllabus and in Blackboard. You're responsible for keeping track of when you need to be in person and when you're online.
- **Physically attend the scheduled in-person classes except for excused absences.** Zooming in to class will only be possible in very limited circumstances. See the Attendance and Drop Policy section below.
- For online sessions, engage at the **same level as you would be for an in-person class.** This means completing work on time, fully engaging with the material, genuinely listening to your peers, and making substantial contributions to build organic and vibrant conversations.
- If the university directs us to move to online/remote instruction (for example, due to health protocols or weather events), I will communicate with you as soon as possible via Blackboard announcement/email:
 - In-person classes will continue at their regular scheduled time via Zoom. (See the Participation Guide posted in Blackboard for guidelines and expectations regarding your participation in a Zoom class).
 - Assignments: All assignment guides, rubrics, and other course materials will continue to be posted in Blackboard as usual. All assignments will continue to be submitted through Blackboard as usual.
 - Meeting with me: My Zoom hours will continue as normal. The in-person times will move to Zoom as well.
 - Contacting me: You can always email me at any point with questions and concerns.

Attendance and drop policy:

Your attendance and active participation throughout the semester is the foundation of your whole grade in this course.

As the Attendance section of the Student Handbook explains, “A student's official program is regarded as his or her obligation to the institution, full performance of which requires regular and punctual class attendance and active participation. A student is responsible for coming to class prepared, completing any missed work, and knowing the dates and places of required course examinations.”

Zooming in to class: Students may attend class remotely via Zoom in only four specific circumstances, and *documentation is required in every circumstance*:

- you test positive for covid (documentation required)
- you are placed in quarantine for covid (documentation required)
- you are otherwise ill (documentation required)
- you have an approved absence for university athletics/student organizations (documentation required)

In each case, I need **advanced notice of at least 12 hours** in order to set up the Zoom session. See the Participation Guide (posted in Blackboard) for guidelines and expectations about participating in class via Zoom.

Excused reasons include (but are not limited to): official university-sanctioned athletic or organizational events (requires appropriate documentation), severe illness, death of a family member, court appearances, jury duty. For such excused reasons, late work will be accepted for full credit according to the extended deadline we discuss and arrange. However, be aware that some in-class activities may not be possible to make up.

Unexcused reasons include (but are not limited to): computer/prINTER malfunctions, traffic problems, family vacations/travel, or forgetfulness. For such unexcused reasons, I may be able to accept early work or accept late work for partial credit, but you must discuss it with me first. The standard deduction for late work is $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade off per day.

***I reserve the right at any point in the semester to drop students who have three or more unexcused absences.*

Grading policies:

If you are unable to submit work on time due to an excused reason, it is your responsibility to contact me as soon as possible to document your reason and to make timely alternative arrangements. See the Attendance and Drop Policy above for distinctions between excused and unexcused reasons.

As the Student Handbook specifies in the section on Attendance, “Make-up examinations and assignments are required only for valid absences as determined by the faculty member. Students who miss an examination or assignment without a valid excuse may receive a failing grade for that exam or assignment.”

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

As a general rule, you should know the policies described in the Student Handbook. The Sexual Harassment Policy and Academic Policies are especially important. You can find the current edition of the [Student Handbook online here](#).

Covid-19: All students are expected to know and comply with university policy related to Covid-19. For information and resources, see <https://uca.edu/coronavirus/>.

Academic Integrity: 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.

Title IX Statement: In furtherance of its core values— academic vitality, integrity, and diversity—UCA is dedicated to promoting a campus community free from discrimination. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 requires all educational institutions to address gender-based discrimination on campus, and UCA implements these Federal requirements through a fair, consistent, and appropriate process of investigation and adjudication. Please see UCA's Title IX website (<https://uca.edu/titleix/>) for the university's policy, relevant forms, training opportunities, and related information.

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Central Arkansas adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this Act due to a disability, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS), 501-450-3613.

Building Emergency Plan: An Emergency Procedures Summary (EPS) for the building in which this class is held will be discussed during the first week of this course. EPS and Building Emergency Plan (BEP) documents for most buildings on campus are available at <https://uca.edu/go/bep-library>. Every student should be familiar with emergency procedures for any campus building in which he/she spends time for classes or other purposes.

Course Experience Survey: The Student Course Experience Survey is a crucial element in helping faculty achieve excellence in the classroom and the institution in demonstrating that students are gaining knowledge. Students may complete surveys for courses they are taking starting on Nov. 21 through Dec. 18 by logging in to myUCA and clicking on the Course Evaluations task.