

**English 282.1**  
**Spring 2008**

TTh 3:35-4:50pm  
CCC 234

Dr. Rachael Barnett  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
Office: CCC 431  
Phone: 346-4332  
email: rbarnett@uwsp.edu

---

## **English 282: Black Literature: African American Literature**

### **Course Description**

Welcome to English 282: Black Literature: African American Literature. This class is a survey of African American literature meant to provide English majors and non-majors alike with a comprehensive background in the important authors, works, and themes of African American literature. Since we have such a large period of time and such an expansive body of literature to cover during the semester, you can expect two things from this class: one, you will be expected to do **a lot of reading**, and two, there will necessarily be omissions in our attempts to cover over two-hundred years of history. Our readings have been carefully selected to provide you with an operating knowledge of the major figures and texts of this historical epoch as well as with some understanding of lesser known authors and texts from the same period.

African American literature of the United States begins in the 17th century with the oral tradition and continues to the present. This is a diverse and demanding literary history, one that requires a certain dedication. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to African American literature and to help you understand its content, form, and aesthetic development so that when you encounter contemporary African American literature or literature that we have not studied in class, you will have a basis for understanding it, growing through it, and enjoying it. Students will emerge from this class with a solid background in African American literature and an understanding of the intricate interactions between literature and social, historical, economic, and political forces.

I am excited about the literature we will be studying during the course of this class and am committed to the study of literature as the means by which we can more fully understand our nation's history and culture. I hope that you will come to share some of this passion by the end of our time together. **At the very least, I expect students to complete all readings prior to our class discussions, to participate actively and thoughtfully in our discussions, and to pay close attention to the many themes we will encounter in our time together.**

### **Course Goals**

This course will:

1. Provide an overview of the major concerns of African American Literature in the United States.
2. Increase your familiarity with important African American authors.
3. Provide the historical context for this literature.
4. Give you an opportunity to read and interpret a variety of texts including essays, fiction, and poetry.
5. Ask you to use your writing to analyze and reflect on the texts.

## Required Materials

*The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (textbook rental)  
*Praisesong for the Widow*, Paule Marshall (textbook purchase)  
*A Lesson Before Dying*, Ernest Gaines (textbook purchase)

## Be Forewarned

Please know that we will be discussing painful and fraught issues. We must always be sensitive and self-reflective in our discussions. However, such investigations are the quintessence of a university education: thinking analytically about what is to you unfamiliar, new, or even previously rejected builds a capacity for communal understanding. Our examination of such issues never demands your endorsement of or adherence to a particular position but rather demands your intellectual engagement and respect.

## Course Requirements

### *Participation*

This class will be a mix of lecture and discussion. Lectures will provide historical background and context with suggestions for further reading. When we turn to the readings, your thoughtful and consistent contribution is expected. Indeed the class will be more rewarding, lively, and interesting if we throw ourselves into the material and think of our discussions as a place for discovery. If you find shyness gets the best of you, come see me (sooner rather than later) and we will see what we can do. You *will* need to participate aloud in the course. Class participation is graded on a pass/fail basis and consistent, thoughtful contributions are required to receive a passing grade. “Consistent” means every other class period; “thoughtful” (which does not mean “correct”) means contributions in which you venture an idea or interpretation. Although class participation is graded on a pass/fail basis, particularly sharp and engaged contributions could raise your final course grade if it is on a borderline. Failing the class participation requirement will lower your final grade up to one full letter.

I recognize that participation depends on your comfort and confidence in the class and with the course material. Your contribution to discussion need not be a fully formulated or “brilliant” insight by any means. If you feel shaky in your understanding of a specific text, for example, you might pose a *question* rather than an “answer.” You should come to class with questions and/or comments about every reading if you are preparing rigorously enough. As these readings are part of a tradition, there are connections among them. Commenting when you recognize such connections is a great place to start or further discussions.

### *Attendance*

Attendance is mandatory. If there is an emergency or a legitimate special circumstance that should force you to miss a class, I ask you notify me *beforehand*. This notification is a courtesy that I appreciate, but it does not necessarily excuse your absence. If you miss class, it is *your responsibility* to inform me of what is going on and to work to resolve the problem (ask me for handouts, consult classmates for notes, and make an office appointment to review what you missed if you so desire). I’ll forgive two absences over the course of the semester. *Three or more absences run the risk of a lowered final grade for the course. If you miss four classes, you cannot pass the course.* Exceptions to the attendance policy are made only in the case of grave emergencies and may require documentation.

### *Short Essays*

During the course of the semester, you will be completing two short essays of a **minimum** length of 2 single-spaced pages. You may choose to write on any readings we have already completed for your analysis. I will pass out specific assignment sheets as we go along. While short, these should be considered formal essays and I will grade them as such. Be sure to save all of your work, and keep multiple copies of your essays. Completion of all papers is required to satisfactorily complete this course.

#### Papers must:

- Have one-inch margins on all sides.
- Be in an easily legible 10- or 12-point font (Times or Times New Roman are standard).
- Be single-spaced.
- Be stapled in the upper left-hand corner.
- Have your last name followed by the page number in the upper right-hand corner of each page.
- Have the student's name, the course name and number, the instructor's name, the assignment name or number, and the date in the upper left-hand corner. The title for the paper should appear centered at the top of the first page, below the heading. No separate title page is necessary.
- Be turned in at the beginning of class on the date due. If you are late to class when a paper is due, your paper will be counted as late and penalties will accrue.

Papers that do not meet all of these requirements will not be accepted and will cause your paper to be considered late. Late papers for any draft will cause your final grade for that paper to be lowered one grade level (i.e. from an A- to a B+) for each day (including weekends and holidays) that it is late.

### *Reading Quizzes*

There will be reading quizzes on many of the readings in this course. These quizzes will test your reading and often serve as prompts for our discussion. These quizzes will be in-class and, for the most part, fairly brief.

### *Midterm Exam*

There will be a midterm exam for this class. This will be an n-class midterm and will consist of short answers, identification, and longer essay questions. There is no final exam for this class.

### *Final Essay*

You will write a final essay of 8-10 double-spaced pages that will blend reflection and analysis as you examine at least three readings from the semester. I will provide a more detailed handout midway through the semester.

### **Grading**

Short Essays (2)	30%
Quizzes	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Essay	30%

Participation/Attendance	P/F	F = Minus One Letter Grade
<hr/>		
Total	100%	

### Office Hours

While my office hours are by appointment, please do not hesitate to make an appointment to discuss the readings, reading strategies, or for help with your essays.

### Statement on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

As you well know, plagiarism, or the representation of another's work as your own, is a serious violation of university policy and is unacceptable in the academic community. When you draw upon ideas or language of other writers, you need to clearly indicate your sources. As English Majors, I assume you already understand and have made second nature the accepted procedures for giving credit to sources that are quoted, paraphrased, or summarized. If you have further questions about how to give credit to your sources, or are unsure whether or not you are plagiarizing, please contact me before the assignment is due. Please see <http://www.uwsp.edu/centers/rights/RRBOOKLET8-2005-06.pdf> for further information about your responsibilities and rights as a student.

### Special Needs

Please let me know if you need special assistance or have special considerations that need to be accommodated. I will do all that I can to help you succeed in this course. The Office of Disability Services can also assist students with special needs (x3365, voice or x3362, TDD).

### Tips for Success

- Participate early and often. Start raising questions and posing ideas today, and make yourself speak every day during the first two weeks to create a habit. If you are generally quiet in class, take advantage of the newness of the situation and try something new.
- Turn off your cell phone.
- Come to class every day, prepared, and take responsibility for making the discussion useful to you.
- Ask questions—of me, your classmates—whenever you are confused or unsure. Come by my office hours, schedule an appointment, or email me to discuss concerns about your writing, the readings, or the class. No matter the quality of your teachers, your education at this level is what you make of it; don't be shy about seeking the help and advice you need.
- **Read carefully and take notes. Write in your books; or, in the case of text rental, take careful notes in a dedicated notebook. Be sure to keep track of dates, page numbers, and even paragraph numbers or stanzas (for poetry) in your notes. Expect to read difficult readings at least twice. Read materials again before attempting to write about them. For poetry, read the work aloud.** If you find yourself disliking a writer or a text, investigate why: Is it the writer's tone? The writing itself? The writer's assumptions? His or her argument? Readings have been selected for their range—don't expect to "like" every piece; do expect, however, to learn something from everything you read and try to figure out each work's importance.

---

English 282 — Spring 2008  
Subject to Change

---

**Week 1: 1746-1865 Literature of Slavery and Freedom**

T	1/22	Introduction to Course
Th	1/24	Lecture: Historical and Literary Background

**Week 2**

T	1/29	Phillis Wheatley pg 213-226
Th	1/31	Olaudah Equiano, from <i>The Interesting Narrative . . .</i> pg 187-212

**Week 3:**

T	2/5	David Walker, from <i>David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles . . .</i> pg 227-238
Th	2/7	James Whitfield, "America" pg 483-486; Sojourner Truth "Ar'n't I a Woman?" pg 245-248

**Week 4:**

T	2/12	Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life . . .</i> pg 385-451
Th	2/14	Harriet Jacobs, from <i>Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl</i> pg 279-314

**Week 5 1865-1919 Literature of the Reconstruction**

T	2/19	Frances Harper, "Ethiopia," "The Slave Mother," "Vashti," "Bury Me in a Free Land," "Learning to Read" pg 491-502; <b>Essay #1 due</b>
---	------	---

Th 2/21 Lecture: Historical and Literary Background

**Week 6:**

T 2/26 Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Speech" pg 570-572, 594-601; Paul Lawrence Dunbar, "A Negro Love Song," "We Wear the Mask," "Sympathy" pg 905-922

Th 2/28 Charles Chesnutt, "The Goophered Grapevine" and "The Wife of His Youth" pg 602-631

**Week 7:**

T 3/4 Anna Julia Cooper, "Womanhood, A Vital Element . . ." pg 635-650

## Revised Schedule as of 3/25/08

T            3/25        W.E.B. Dubois, from *The Souls of Black Folk* pg 686-786

### Week 9: 1919-1940 The Harlem Renaissance.

Th            3/27        Alain Locke, "The New Negro" pg 983-992; Claude McKay "If We  
Must Die," "Harlem Runs Wild" pg 1003-1018

### Week 10

T            4/1         Jessie Redmon Fauset, from *Plum Bun: A Novel Without A Moral* pg  
975-982; Zora Neale Hurston, "How it Feels to be Colored Me" pg  
1019-1030

Th            4/3         Countee Cullen, "Heritage," "Incident" pg 1339-1351; Langston  
Hughes 1288-1336

### Week 11 1940-1960 Realism, Naturalism, Modernism

T            4/8         **Midterm Exam**

Th            4/10        Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" pg 1399-1419;  
Robert Hayden, "Runagate, Runagate" pg 1516-1528

### Week 12

T            4/15        Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Children of the Poor," "We Real Cool" pg  
1623-1638; James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" pg 1696-1750

**1960-1970 The Black Arts Movement/ Literature since 1970**

Th 4/17 Hoyt Fuller, "Towards a Black Aesthetic" pg 1852-1858; Larry Neale, "The Black Arts Movement" pg 2038-2051

**Week 13**

T 4/22 Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken . . ." pg 2210-2214, 2299-2321; Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" pg 2425-2437

Th 4/24 Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*

**Week 14**

T 4/29 Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*; **Essay #2 Due**

Th 5/1 Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*; Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*

**Week 15**

T 5/6 Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*

Th 5/8 Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*

**Final Essay Due at Scheduled Final Exam, Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup> 5-7pm**