

AML 3605 / AFA 3930
Fall 2017
Office: 4352 Turlington
Class: M 3rd - 5* periods

Professor: Dr. King
Office Hours: 6-8* period
Dept. Phone: 392-6650
Email: dwking@ufl.edu

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE PART I

DESCRIPTION: African American writers from 1746 to the present have written in all genres, leaving none unchanged by the appropriation. It is a literature that not only intertextualizes elements of the vernacular tradition (spirituals, folktales and the blues) and its own immediate past, but is a regenerative force of conscious construction and literary beauty within the history of American literature. The goal of this course is to investigate the transformational power of black imagination and artistic genius within social and political contexts. Students will gain an understanding of and appreciation for the creative dexterity and conventions of this literature. The period covered begins with Lucy Terry's 1746 "Bars Fight" and ends with the Harlem Renaissance. Although chronology is obscured by a focus on genre, readings are arranged so that students can trace the development of various genres and various styles, themes, images, and structures across time and within individual authors' works. In this way, the course emphasizes the creative process, intertextuality, and literary history.

FORMAT: Class sessions include lectures but are discussion based primarily. The three-hour block of class time, Mondays, represents three class sessions. Participation in discussion is an important part of your grade. You should listen carefully to others, ask questions of me and other students, and share your ideas. I expect all students to create an environment that encourages the participation of everyone. If you feel uncomfortable with discussion-based classes or feel you cannot contribute successfully, you should drop this course immediately.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

- *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* 3rd Edition, Vol. 1
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Pack of 3x5 index cards

All papers and short essay quizzes are evaluated on content, originality, creativity, connections to course objectives, and form (grammar, spelling, bibliography, etc.). Grades will be calculated in terms of possible score percentages with no curve. You are guaranteed an A or A- if you earn 450 points or more out of 500 possible points (90 %+).

435 to 449 (87% +)	B+	385 to 399 (77 % +)	C+	335 to 363 (67 %+)	D+
415 to 434 (83% +)	B	365 to 384 (73 %+)	C	315 to 334 (63 %+)	D
400 to 414 (80 %+)	B-	350 to 364 (70 %+)	c-	300 to 314 (60 %+)	D-

GRADING CRITERIA

Assignments will be graded on how proficiently submissions meet expectations in the key areas of content, organization, and grammar/mechanics.

STRONG CONTENT INCLUDES:

- A clearly delineated and/ or interpreted topic
- A strong, clear, and logically developed thesis that is supported by fully developed ideas in the form of relevant textual evidence and research
- Ideas that show evidence of independent thinking

- Commentary that explains how the concrete details support the thesis. Commentary may include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection.
- Research supporting materials (note: Google searches are fine for starters, but please use academic journals and books for strong research effort)

STRONG ORGANIZATION INCLUDES:

- The effective arrangement of points that reveals itself in very good incorporation of evidence (use of summary, paraphrase) and the sparing and judicious use of quotations
- Rounded and well-connected paragraphs
- The use of appropriate transitions

STRONG GRAMMAR, MECHANICS, AND PROSE STYLE IS CHARACTERIZED BY:

- Mature sentence structure, syntax, and diction
- Strong audience awareness as evidenced in the use of appropriate style, register, tone, and vocabulary
- Little to no errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation,
- The formatting of document in keeping with prescribed guidelines
- No more than assignment permissible "fatal errors" (see description of these errors below)

RUBRIC

1. The "A" submission of any assignment has strong content, strong organization, AND strong grammar/mechanics. To receive an "A," work needs to offer support in the form of textual evidence and secondary research materials (using direct quotes and paraphrase), present original insight in argumentation, and be organized clearly and logically.
2. The "B" submission is notably weak in ONE of the above key areas.
3. The "C" submission, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.
4. The "D" submission is significantly weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

COURSE POLICIES

- 1) "FATAL ERRORS" POLICY: Students must meet high standards in writing. To this end, all written assignments must meet minimal presentation criteria to be acceptable. These standards address spelling, punctuation, format and basic grammar. The term *Fatal Errors* (FE) refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number:

- ~~4~~ 1. Each different word misspelled,
- ~~4~~ 2. Each sentence fragment,
- ~~4~~ 3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice,
- ~~4~~ 4. Each mistake in capitalization,
- ~~4~~ 5. Each serious error in punctuation that obscures meaning, including errors in the use or failure to use italics and quotation marks,
- ~~4~~ 6. Each error in verb tense or subject/verb agreement,
- ~~4~~ 7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition,
- ~~4~~ 8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed
- ~~4~~ 9. Each misuse of words (*ivho* for *that* or unwarranted use of clichés and informal language, for instance),
- ~~4~~ 10. Poor Paragraphing or lack of paragraphing,
- ~~4~~ 11. Lack of conformity with assignment format.

Papers with more than **three (3) fatal errors on any one page** or more than **seven (7) for the entire document** will be returned to the student and will suffer a half letter grade deduction. Only one resubmission is allowed. Penalties for final course assignments (where there is no time for a resubmission) will be based on the relative importance of the assignment to the determination of the final course grade. This policy applies to all assignments, excluding entrance cards.

- 2) CELL PHONES AND COMPUTERS: Cell phones must be muted or turned off during the class session. If an emergency occurs and you have to respond to calls or texts, please leave the classroom. Computers (iPads or other electronics) are allowed for note taking, access to eBooks, and presentations only. Anyone using a computer for any other purpose will be asked to deliver the device to me for retrieval after class. You may record the class (presentations, for instance) with my permission only.
- 3) PAPERS / PORTFOLIO FORMAT: Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2x11 page layouts with one-inch margins all around. Use Courier or New York Times font at 12-point size. Documentation and form should follow the MLA style manual. Number all pages after the first within the upper right margin. Submit papers to me via Canvas. Late submissions, if allowed, will suffer a half letter grade reduction. No exceptions! Include the Assignment title in the header information.
- 4) PAPER MAINTENANCE RESPONSIBILITIES: Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers; it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.
- 5) GRADE DISPUTES: Questions about assigned grades are acceptable during my office hours only. If my written responses do not address your concerns, I will explain why a grade was earned. With the exception of miscalculation or posting error, I will not consider grade changes. **Please do not ask.**
- 6) ASSESSMENTS: Individual grades are available on Canvas immediately after grading.
- 7) MISSED CLASS SESSIONS: Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for missed work submission deadlines within this time frame.
- 8) ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT #1—JOURNAL—SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: This assignment **must be submitted electronically no later than Monday, November 20th (via Canvas) by 1:30 p.m. on this date.** Late submissions will not be accepted.
- 9) ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT #2—RESPONSE PAPER—SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: This assignment **must be submitted electronically.** Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. **Submit your project by 1:30 p.m. on Monday, December 4th.** Late submissions will not be accepted.
- 10) "Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the online catalog at: [fittys: catalog.jog.ufl.edu/grad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx](http://catalog.jog.ufl.edu/grad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx)."

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

DISABILITY SERVICES: The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. It is your responsibility to contact the school administration regarding any disability you may have,

and to inform me so we can make any necessary arrangements. For more information, see:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Honor Code. “We, the members of die University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.” This oadi represents UF’s commitment to academic honesty and integrity. “Cheating, plagiarism, bribery, misrepresentation, conspiracy and fabrication” are violations of die Honor Code. Violators will suffer the consequences. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unautorized collaboration, see:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

HARASSMENT: UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

COURSE EVALUATIONS: “Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in diis course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during die last two or diree weeks of die semester, but students will be given specific times when diey are open. Summary results of diese assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.”

ASSIGNMENTS

You have a choice of submitting a reading response journal or completing a study journal for this course. Bodi are considered major projects and both are worth 250 points. Pay attention to die due dates of each. I will not accept projects after die assigned due date. **PLEASE NOTE:** You may come to my office to discuss your progress at any time prior to your selected project’s due date. To ensure your place, please arrange an appointment with me. I will honor appointments before drop-ins. During diis meeting, we will review only one assignment entry and no grade will be recorded.

ASSIGNMENT #1—AUTHOR JOURNAL—250 PTS— 50%

You should keep a journal highlighting one audior whose work represents several genres. We will follow the work of diree such writers during our in-class discussions (their names are highlighted in die course calendar). Tisted below are odiers. You may select your author from diis list or choose your own. **Since we are not reading all works by each author, unassigned reading and research is required.** Scan the biographical sections of die anthology and decide if your favorite audior is an appropriate journal subject. For instance, Frances E. Harper is an essayist, a poet, a short story writer and a novelist. You might want to read *loia Lemy*, her 1892 novel, and compare it widi Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* (1859) or Pauline E. Hopkins’s *Contending Forces* (1900)—an excerpt of Hopkins’s novel is available in die andiology. Other possibilities for primary audior selections include Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Wallace Thurman, Arna Bontemps, and W. E. B. Du Bois. **Include a bibliography listing all published works written by your selected author.** After selecting die author you wish to highlight and becoming familiar with tides he or she published during or before 1940, consider yourself ready to begin.

I expect evidence of growth in understanding as well as depdi of insight and creativity in your entries. A potentially excellent journal diat shows no growdi in understanding or demonstrates minimal effort will not earn an “A.” Do your best work at all times and challenge yourself as you go along. Do not wait until the last minute to do diis assignment. Begin now.

Here are some pointers and **expectations** to stimulate your diinking and direct your writing. Decide what qualities or features make a particular work the author’s signature piece. Discuss how die audior departs from or contours to Anglo-American, European, Asian, Native American or other approaches to various

genres. Explore how his or her work departs from that of others we are reading. Identify similarities among writers or among selected works written by your primary author. Compare, for example, Dunbar's dialect poetry (folk poetry) with his lyric poetry and sonnets with Hughes' urban folk poetry. Discuss how the author draws upon the vernacular or the commonplace and traditional elements of African American Culture. Read the "Folktales" section of the anthology. Seek and discuss intertextual elements of the author's works, identifying folkloric elements, including calls and responses across space, class, gender, and era. Bring to your discussion and comparison authors, works, and genres studied in other classes. Research your author and compare the commentary of critics and scholars with your own insights. **Be creative in at least one of the journal entries. This is a requirement.** Write a poem or short story in response to an author's work or write a letter to the author, publisher, critics or public. Completed journals are due Monday, **November 20th**.

Journal Requirements: Summary

- 1) Highlight one author whose work represents several genres.
- 2) Unassigned reading and research is required.
- 3) Include a bibliography listing all published works by your selected authors.
- 4) Read and become familiar with titles your author(s) published during or before 1940.
- 5) Provide evidence of growth in understanding as well as depth of insight.
- 6) Decide what qualities or features make a particular work the author's signature piece.
- 7) Be creative in at least one of the journal entries.
- 8) Produce **five (5)** entries of **no less than** 250 words each.
- 9) Do not exceed 6 pages, **excluding** the list of authors' works and bibliographical materials
- 10) Submit completed journals, via Canvas, Monday, **November 20th** by 1:30 p.m.

ALTERNATE ASSIGNMENT—RESPONSE JOURNAL—250 PTS— 50%

This is a cumulative assignment due on December 4th. By this, I mean you should write each entry (five are required) as we read assigned texts. Each entry should present your thoughts concerning the reading material within a minimum of 250 words (no more than 350). Number each of the five (5) entries in the upper left corner of the entry's first page and **date it**. This is not the place for self-evaluation and life meditations. Here you demonstrate your knowledge and engage the text—the more original your contemplations and assessments, the better your grade. Research the text and share your thoughts. **You must include comments reflecting at least two (2) of the categories listed below and include outside research in at least two (2) entries.**

1. **FIRST IMPRESSIONS:** Write freely about what you are experiencing as you read. What does it bring to your thoughts about issues relevant to the course?
2. **KEYWORDS:** You may wish to record any terms, concepts or *repeated* phrases that appear to be necessary for a complete and competent understanding of the reading. These are words new to you, concepts you consider difficult or perhaps words you recognize as essential to an understanding of African American Literature. Also record familiar words and phrases that assume special meaning in the text. Include abbreviated (but useful) definitions in your own words or the author's. Please do not record dictionary definitions and leave it at that. Be more specific and faithful to the term's meaning of diachronic development as presented in the reading material.
3. **CATCH PHRASES:** Terse argumentative statements (from a single phrase or image to complete sentences) that make a substantial, memorable, or interesting point in the reading. Discuss briefly why the phrase, image, or sentence is noteworthy.

4. *CRITICAL EXPLICATIONS*: Examples in die text that demystify dominating or surface meanings. What have diese examples clarified for you diat would have odierwise remained hidden? What did you learn that you did not know or anticipate? Explore die value of die material’s main points and concerns. How does the audior make clear what is important for you, as her or his reader, to take from die text?
5. I AGREE.. .I DISAGREE: Build a case against what you have read or offer supporting evidence of central points (other audiors, other ideas, odier texts). You may also ask provocative questions, questions diat problematize die central points or deepen dieir creative, intellectual or critical trajectory.
6. *LINKS*: Examine the critical relationship between die text presendy under survey and previous material examined in the class (bodi fiction and nonfiction) or researched texts about the assigned reading. How does the new information enhance your knowledge or understanding? What does it tell us about die development of your selected course focus? What does it tell us about die development of our course focus and learning objectives? The point here is to gadier assertions diat assist you in understanding the course focus as a critical project.

OTHER EXPECTATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS—250 PTS 50%

Attendance: Discussions cannot be replicated so if you miss a day of class, you will have missed die lesson for diat day. Therefore, I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every day on time. You are allowed **up to two** unexcused absences. Your grade will automatically drop a half letter grade after die diird unexcused absence. **If you reach nine absences (three full class sessions) you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class or you will receive an “E” for the semester.** Remember diat diis class meets once a week, representing diree class sessions. That is three absences—if die entire class is missed. No INCOMPLETES are given for diis course.

Caveat: Excused absences are permitted if you provide a typewritten letter documenting an illness, a family crisis, or participation in a university sponsored event. All students should consult with me to make up material missed during an absence. Unfortunately, given the nature of the course, if you miss more than three weeks of class (equaling nine sessions) you will automatically fail and receive an E. For additional information, please see our University guidelines as indicated in the “Course Policies” section of this syllabus.

Entrance Passes (see preparation pts. schedule): Purchase a pack of 3x5 index cards. These cards are your entrance passes and will be used to inform me of your attendance and during in-class debates (see “Preparation” below for details). Bring one with you every class session. Widiout an entrance pass you will be considered absent so be sure to put your name on diem. Tardy attendees’ cards will be collected at the end of class. Tardiness will be recorded and considered during grading. Consistent tardiness will result in a final letter grade reduction.

Preparation: All readings, entrance passes and take-home assignments must be prepared and ready for each class session. Write a comment on your entrance pass cards demonstrating your preparation for the day’s session. Poorly constructed, irrelevant or perfunctory comments will result in point reductions in diis area of grading. I do not want you to tell me you liked a particular reading, for instance. Your response to assigned readings must be intelligent, thoughtful and scholarly. Identify why the material is valuable to our class discussion (or objectives) or how die material engages the genre being studied. Consider the categories

listed above for those doing the response paper assignment—this may help you think about what you want to write. **Your work on these cards will be graded during assigned impromptu discussions**, so do your best work at all times. Even if I do not ask you to enter into a discussion, your entrance cards are required. Be prepared at all times.

Weekly IMPROMPTU Discussions

Beginning on September 11th I will select several students each week (during class) to enter into discussions guided by issues raised in your entrance cards. You must bring depth to the idea on the floor for discussion as well as offer your own card remarks for consideration. Discussions will proceed as follows:

1st Speaker—offers entry card commentary on the assigned reading

2nd Speaker—responds with reflections on the opening statement

You may agree with the opening speaker or disagree, but you must discuss why.

1st Speaker—responds to the reflections of speaker #2 with depth of insight

2nd Speaker—adds additional information from his or her own entry card

1st Speaker—responds to the additional information

You may agree with the opening speaker or disagree, but you must discuss why.

2nd Speaker—responds to the reflections of speaker #2 with depth of insight

Speaker #2—concluding statements

Speaker #1—concluding statements

Speaker #3—Summary of the issues raised

Summary participants review **the main points** of what was argued or discussed and offer insights overlooked or not fully considered. The selected 3rd speaker must not only summarize but also introduce related information from additional texts read that week, from texts read in previous weeks, or from his/her own entry pass and open the floor for class discussion.

Open Class Discussion—volunteers from the class and professor offer insights

This pattern will repeat with new speakers. I hope to have at least six (6) assigned participants in discussions such as this each week. Be prepared for participation without prior notice. Please note: this assignment is worth a minimum of 25pts per assigned impromptu discussion.

Participation: Students should complete all readings prior to the class meeting and participate fully in class discussions. Assessment is made in the areas of attendance, impromptu discussions, engagement, leadership, teamwork, and originality.

STRONG PARTICIPATION INCLUDES:

1. only excused absences with no recorded tardiness
2. adherence to course policies and guidelines
3. entrance pass evidence that readings are completed and ready for class discussions
4. outside research done and shared with class on multiple occasions
5. clear and respectful exchanges with other students and the professor
6. volunteering to enter or begin discussions (brief presentations included)
7. leadership within small group activities noted by reporting out for the group or taking a guiding role
8. an understanding of teamwork and ones responsibility to advancing positive class or group dynamics
9. originality in thought, discussion and entrance card information and sharing
10. encouraging others' ability to enter or sustain participation in discussions
11. engaging questions from the professor or other students without hesitation or persuasion

RUBRIC

- 4- “A” level participation is strong in all key areas and earns 110-99 points.
- 4- “B” level participation, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO key areas and earns from 98-77 points.
- 4- “C” level participation is notably weak in THREE key areas and earns from 76-45 points.
- 4- “D” level participation is significantly weak in THREE or more of die key areas and earns from 44-1 points

Exams, Quizzes and Other assignments (100 pts): There will be a mid-term debate exam and several pop quizzes—no makeup quizzes. Your performance during class, progress evaluations (tests and quizzes) and in-class discussions will determine whedier a final exam is necessary. I will inform you of my decision.

Extra Credit (5 bonus points): *This is an optional assignment.* You may give a fifteen-minute oral report to the class on an issue or audior under discussion. These reports must be approved prior to presentation. Submit a short proposal describing what you plan to do. The assignment will earn scores ranging from 1/2 to 5 points (added to your overall course score). PowerPoint presentations must follow die 5-1-1 rule. By diat, I mean no more dian five words per slide widi one image used one time.

COURSE CALENDAR

WK 1: 8/21 INTRODUCTION

Preface: “Talking Books” pages xxxv-xlvii

WHAT IS “NEGRO” LITERATURE?

WK 2: 8/28 READING ASSIGNMENT:

James Weldon Johnson, “The Book of American Negro Poetry—Preface,” (1921) pages 871-893

Alain Tocke, “The New Negro,” (1925) pages 973-981

WK3: 9/4 NO CTASS LABOR DAY

WK 4: 9/11 READINGS (BE PREPARED FOR IMPROMPTU DISCUSSIONS)

George Samuel Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” (1926) pages 1219-22

Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” (1926) pages 1267-71

Zora Neale Hurston, “How It Feels to be Colored Me,” (1928) 1040-42

W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” (1928) pages 771-778

Zora Neale Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” (1934) pages 1050-62

POETRY

WK 5: 9/18

BATTAD

- Lucy Terry, "Bars Fight," page 111
- Langston Hughes**, "Ballad of the Landlord," page 1315

LYRIC

- Phyllis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," page 143
- James Weldon Johnson**, "O Black and Unknown Bards," "Lift Every Voice and Sing," page 769, 783
- Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask," page 906

SONNET:

- Countee Cullen, "Vet Do I Marvel," p. 1347
- Helene Johnson, "Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem," "Invocation," pages 1371-1372
- Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Sympathy," page 910.

WK 6: 9/2.5 FOLK POETRY (JAZZ / BLUES / DIALECT POETRY)

- Paul Laurence Dunbar, "When Malindy Sings," "Philosophy," pages 904, 913
- Langston Hughes**, "The Weary Blues," & "Dream Boogie," pages 1307,1318

FREE VERSE:

- Langston Hughes**, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Mother to Son," "I Too," pages 1304, 1308,1305
- James Weldon Johnson**, "The Creation," page 790

AUTOBIOGRAPHY / CULTURAL POLITICS

WK 7: 10/2 ANTEBELLUM SLAVE NARRATIVE

- Olaudah Equiano, *The Ufe of Olandab Equiano* (1789), pages 112-137
- Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Ufe of Fre driek Douglass* (1845), excerpts pages 330-393
- Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), excerpts pages 186-198

WK 8: 10/9 POSTBELLUM SLAVE NARRATIVE

- Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Ufe of a Slave Girl* (1861), excerpts pages 224-261
- Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901), excerpt pages 548-579

CULTURAL POLITICS

WK 9: 10/16

- Ida B. Well-Barnett, "A Red Record," excerpt pages 670-679

W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, excerpt pages 687-760

Marcus Garvey, "Africa for the Africans," pages 986-992

WK 10: 10/29

Sojourner Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman?" pages 178-180

Frances E. W. Harper, "Our Greatest Want," "Woman's Political Future," pages 466-468, 470-472

W. E. B. DuBois, "The Damnation of Women," pages 760-771

Marita Bonner, "On Being Young—a Woman—and Colored," pages 1266-1269

Anna Julia Cooper, "Womanhood a Vital Element in die Regeneration and Progress of a Race," page 619

WK 11: 10/90 CULTURAL POLITICS DEBATE PREP - GROUP WORK

WK 12: 11/6 EXAMIOEBATE)

FICTION

WK 19: 11/19 FICTIONALIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig* (1859), excerpt pages 441-458

WK 14: 11/20 NOVEL

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, (1912) pages 777-861

Author Journals Due Today

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

WK 15: 11/27

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

WK 16: 12/4, TBD

Response Journals Due Today

GENERAL STUDY GUIDE

Interpretive Community — a term used by Stanley Fish to distinguish readers sharing the same fundamental strategy of reading and interpreting texts

BUILDING OUR INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITY Critical Categories

Theme: a central idea—which is being spoken of, whether the specific subject matter, the emotional response to it, or its intellectual formulation. We will explore how particular structures, images, or metaphors alter or inform our interpretations of particular themes.

Structure: the planned framework of a piece of literature (including plot, sequence, theme) as well as aspects of the work such as diction, rhythm, and figurative language. We will look at structure as strategic, meaning authors employ conscious modification through which traditional generic formulations are expanded, contracted, embellished, recreated or tested, teased, and taunted into conveying African American ideas and attitudes, realities, prayers, myths and prophecies. We will discuss, but not read, die

adventure tale, the sentimental novel, the seduction tale, the American Dream saga, the quest narrative, and others as we contemplate structure.

Politics and Social Commentary: literature as a corrective force that can induce social economic and political change. We will focus, therefore, on the techniques used in Black literature (as well as the revision of traditional themes, structures, and myths) to achieve sociopolitical ends.

Literary and Communal Value: evaluating, exploring, and discussing manifestations of imagination or linguistic insight, conscious construction that distinguishes luck from work, insight from imagination.

THEMES UNDER CONSIDERATION

Bondage and Freedom
Family
Identity
Religion

BASIC SOURCES OF STRUCTURE

Black Speech and Other Vernacular Forms
Black music
Black Church
Universal Concepts of Written Artistic Expression

HELPFUL TERMS

Double Consciousness — tensions and divisions in an African American identity, referring to at least three different matters: problems of self-definition, a way of life that is “American” and “not American” simultaneously; and internal conflicts in the individual between what is “African” and what is “American.”

Masking — a deceptive role-playing (“tonguing,” “laughing to keep from crying,” “jumping Jim Crow”) and a shrewd survival strategy used by blacks in the presence of whites to maintain some semblance of empowerment in a racially prejudiced society. It hides true feelings, frustrations, cleverness, and sophisticated ambiguities of identity held by the mask wearers when they are in racial conflict or competition.

Ballad — a form of verse to be sung or recited and characterized by its presentation of a dramatic or exciting episode in simple narrative form (Lucy Terry, “Bars Fight”).

Lyric — a brief subjective poem strongly marked by imagination, melody, and emotion, and creating a single, unified impression (ex. Paul Laurence Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask.”)

Metaphor — an analogy identifying one object with another and ascribing to the first object one or more of the qualities of the second (objects are dissimilar). Ex: “That’s a lynch” when talking about an unfortunate set of circumstances.

Simile — a figure in which a similarity between two objects is directly expressed as in “I’ll beat you till you rope like okra.”

Sonnet — a poem almost invariably of fourteen lines and following one of several set rhyme schemes. The two basic sonnet types are the Petrarchan (Italian) and Shakespearean (English). Its division into the octave and the sestet distinguishes the Italian form: the octave rhyming *abbaabba* and the sestet *cdecde, cd cd cd, or cdedce*. Traditionally the octave presents a narrative, states a

proposition, or raises a question; the sestet drives home the narrative by making an abstract comment, applies the proposition, or solves the problem. In the Shakespearean sonnet, four divisions are used: three quatrains (each with a rhyme scheme of its own, usually rhyming alternate lines) and a rhymed concluding couplet (that is, two consecutive lines of verse with end rhymes). The typical rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efefgg*. Example: Countee Cullen, “Yei Do I Marvel.”

Free Verse — a poem “free” of regulations and structures that predetermine rhyme scheme, meter, or rhythm (Example: **Langston Hughes**, “Mother to Son.”)

Folk Poetry — a poem celebrating and using the dramatic activities, languages, rhythms, and codes of the folk (Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Philosophy,” for instance).

Heroic Couplet — iambic pentameter lines rhymed in pairs—a long dominant mode for the poetic drama

Iambic Pentameter — a line of verse with five units of rhythm (five feet) with unaccented syllable and accented syllable (rētúrñ)

Verbal Irony — a figure of speech in which the actual intent is expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning presented with a sort of grim humor and unemotional detachment, coolness in expression at a time when one’s emotions appear to be really heated. Characteristically it speaks words of praise to imply blame and words of blame to imply praise.

Signifyin(g) — a form of verbal play—centering primarily on the insult—common in African American communities that offers speakers the opportunity to demonstrate their improvisational mastery of rhyme and rhythm, as well as their capacity to improvise on the verbal play of others. It implies the art of expressing ideas, opinions, feelings, and so forth, by indirection and is, therefore, a culturally specific form of irony.

Signifying — a form of intertextual revision, by which texts establish their relation to other texts, and authors to other authors. The repetition implicit in this form of signifying criticizes or extends the previous and frequently (though not exclusively) white literary or cultural source by setting it within the context of African American expressive culture.

Synecdoche — a trope in which a part signifies the whole or the whole signifies the part such as saying threads for clothes

Apostrophe — a figure of speech in which someone (usually but not always absent), some abstract quality, or a nonexistent personage is directly addressed as though present

Chiasmas — a pattern in which the second part is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed

Toasts — a long narrative poem of rhyming couplets that feature alternation of action and dialogue and also featuring characters of strength and will in the animal and human worlds

Trope — a figure of speech (or theme) involving a “turn” or change of sense — the use of a word in a sense other than the literal (as with metaphor and simile) as well as ironical expressions

Tropological Revision — the manner in which a specific trope is repeated, with differences, between two or more texts

Metonymy — the substitution of the name of an object closely associated with a word for the word itself: “sweat” for hard labor

Parody — a composition imitating another, usually serious, piece but is designed to ridicule the original, its style, or its author

Pastiche — literary imitation that gives homage to the original

Prose Rhythm — the recurrence of stress and emphasis at irregular intervals, affording a pleasurable rise and fall. It is distinguished from the rhythm of verse in that it never for long falls into a recognizable pattern, for if it does it becomes verse rather than prose.

Figurative Language — intentional departure from the normal order, construction, or meaning of words

High Comedy — pure or serious comedy that appeals to the intellect and arouses thoughtful laughter by exhibiting the inconsistencies and incongruities of human nature and by displaying the follies of social manners

Low Comedy — lacks seriousness of purpose or subtly of manner and has little intellectual appeal (horseplay and buffoonery)

Satire — a work or manner that blends a censorious attitude with humor and wit for improving human institutions or humanity

Talking Texts — a term originated by Henry Louis Gates in which he identifies Black texts that “talk” to Black other texts

Speakerly Texts — representations of the speaking black voice in writing (the talking book)

Intertextuality — a term created by Julia Kristeva, who said, “Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations,

every text is adsorption and transformation of another text.”

*The definitions are from Holman and Harmon, *A Handbook to Hterature* (1992), *The Signifying Monkey* (1988) by Henry Louis Gates, and *The Oxford Companion to African American Hterature* (1997) edited by Andrews, Foster, and Harris.