
AML: 3284 ALICE WALKER'S WOMANIST THOUGHT

Professor: Dr. Debra Walker King

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Class Time: T 4th (10:40-11:30) and R 4th – 5th periods (10:40-12:35)

Place: MAT 0002

Office hours: T 5th-7th periods (in office or by ZOOM appointment)



“The most common way people give up their power is thinking they don’t have any.”
Alice Walker

Description: This course introduces students to an internationally renowned novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, and activist whose work, both creative and sociopolitical, has shaken the foundations of American literature and feminist theory to reconstitute the boundaries of both. Walker’s work has earned the highest accolades of praise and accomplishment, including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award in 1983, induction into the California Hall of Fame in 1993 and the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame (2001) among others. Her works include seven novels, four children’s books, four collections of short stories, and innumerable essays and collections of poetry. Notably, one of American literature’s most prolific writers, her work has been translated into more than two dozen languages. As a writer and social activist, Walker remains an international figure of increasing fame and respect. Her novels, poetry, essays and blog (www.alicewalkersgardens.com) explore themes of naturalistic fiction while engaging dramatic (and often problematic) themes of Humanism; Gnostic Psychology (Jungian thought, for instance), Spirituality; Ontology, and, of course, Womanism.

This semester students will investigate why critics herald Alice Walker as the mother of Womanism and determine, through her writing, how she defines *Womanist thought*. The works we will study are powerful offerings of intellectual engagement that move beyond human victimization towards rectification, reconciliation, renewal, and revival. But most importantly, each selected text demonstrates not only what Womanism is, or can do, but also how one (regardless of color or

nationality) can achieve the Womanist gift of vital, human connectedness that provides access to individual and communal wholeness. I welcome you to journey with me into the world of Alice Walker's Womanist thought and discover how, as an elder, she pursues the survival whole of all humanity while professing, "Everything is a Human Being" (essay in *Living by the Word*).

Required Texts

Texts by Alice Walker:

The Third Life of Grange Copeland (1970)
Meridian (1976)
The Color Purple (1982)
In Search of Our Mother's Gardens (1983)
The Temple of My Familiar (1989)
Possessing the Secret of Joy (1992)
By the Light of My Father's Smile (1998)
Now is the Time to Open Your Heart (2004)

Other Texts and Materials

Plant, Deborah G. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*
Pack of 3x5 index cards

Suggested Text:

Maparyan, Layli. *The Womanist Idea*

COURSE CALENDAR

WK 1—1/ 6 Purpose and Goals

Thursday: Course Introduction – "Sawubona!...Yebo!"

***Entrance Pass Tip:** I collect entrance passes beginning Thursday of next week.

WK 2: 1/11-13

Required Readings: Essay selections from *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*

- T: "Womanist," pages xi-xii and "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self"
R: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages xv-47
Third Life of Grange Copeland, Parts 1-4

WK 3: 1/18-20

- T: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 49-56
and *Third Life of Grange Copeland*—full text
R: *Third Life of Grange Copeland*—full text **impromptu session**

WK 4: 1/25-27

- T: *Third Life of Grange Copeland* (full text **impromptu session**)
R: *Meridian*—Sections One and Two: "Meridian" and "Truman Held"

WK 5: 2/1-3

- T: *Meridian* (full text **impromptu session**)
Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 57-76
R.: Concluding--*Meridian* (full text **impromptu session**)

WK 6: 2/8-10

- T: *The Color Purple*—through page ending with "They postmark right here."
R *The Color Purple*—through ending
full text **impromptu session**

WK 7 – 2/15-17

- T: *The Color Purple* –full text **impromptu session**
“Writing *The Color Purple*” from *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*
R: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 77-96

WK 8: 2/22-24

- T: “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” and “Saving the Life That Is Your Own” in *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*.
R: “Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson,” “One Child of One’s Own” and Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 107-116—
impromptu session

*WK 9: 3/1-3

Research Project Study Week – NO CLASS

Please read your selected text for the final paper and begin working on it. Remember: your paper must include some discussion of texts we read (or will read) together this term. This paper is due April 14th.

*WK 10—3/8-10

SPRING BREAK --No Class-- SPRING BREAK

WK 11: 3/15-17

- T: *The Temple of My Familiar*—Parts “One” and “Two”
R: *The Temple of My Familiar*—Parts “Three and Four” **impromptu session**

WK 12: 3/22-24

- T: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 97-105; 117-125
F: *The Temple of My Familiar* (full text **impromptu session**)

WK 13: 3/29-31

- T: *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*—discussion of section titled “Angels”
Fri.: *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*—**impromptu session**

WK 14: 4/5-7

- T: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 127-137
R: *By the Light of My Father’s Smile*—**full text impromptu session**

WK 15: 4/12-14

- T: *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* –Through Chapter Nineteen, “I Am Peace”
R: *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*—Through Chapter Thirty, “Yolo Woke”
impromptu session
Final papers due today

WK 16: 4/19 (Last day of class)

- T: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 187-218
Now is the Time to Open Your Heart –**full text impromptu session**

Assignments and Grade Distribution

Final Papers: 200 pts

This assignment is due **Thursday April 14th**. The week preceding Spring Break is a “no class” week scheduled as such to assist you in preparing research for your final submission. Write a six to ten-page (6-10 page), analytical paper emphasizing some aspect of the course objectives and womanist themes we share this term. You may choose to include any novels listed for class discussion this term; but you must engage one of the texts below along with it/them. Our readings in Deborah Plant’s book, *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, will give you ideas for how you might integrate the novels and the text you select from the following short story, poetry, or essay collections:

- #1: *In Love and In Trouble* (1973)
- #2: *You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981)
- #3: *Living by the Word* (1988)
- #4: *The Same River Twice* (1996)
- #5: *Horses Make the Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1984)
- #6: *The Way Forward is With a Broken Heart* (2000)
- #7: *Sent by Earth: A Message from the Grandmother Spirit* (2001)
- #8: *Warrior Marks* (1993)
- #9: *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* (2003)
- #10: *Anything You Love Can Be Saved* (1997)
- #11: *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (2006)
- #12: *Overcoming Speechlessness* (2006)
- #13: *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing* (2010)
- #14: *The Cushion in the Road* (2013)
- #15: *The World Will Follow Joy* (2013)
- #16: *Taking the Arrow Out of the Heart* (2018)

This is a research paper, requiring at least two “outside” scholarly readings. By this, I mean texts not assigned by me in this course. This final paper is due by 11:59 pm Thursday April 14th.

100 points Impromptu Discussion

I will select participants for impromptu panel discussions randomly. These discussions are based on the readings for that day or week (see syllabus). Students are asked to present their entrance pass reading responses as prepared for that day and enter a discussion offered by another student seated on the panel. I require impromptu participants to **submit a 1–3-page paper** one week following their impromptu. If you do not use research in your entrance pass and impromptu discussion, be sure to do so in the paper. See the Impromptu Assignment under "Assignments" in Canvas for additional information such as panel structure and expectations. Be prepared always.

Other Expectations and Assignments

Point breakdown is available in Canvas under “Assignments”

Attendance: I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every session on time. I use your entrance passes (with reading response commentary) to document your attendance. You are allowed **up to three** unexcused absences, your grade will automatically drop a half letter grade after the third unexcused absence. **If you reach six (totaling three weeks of class) absences, you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class or you will receive an “E” for the semester.** No *Incomplete* grades are given for this 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 excused absence. For additional information, please see our University guidelines cited in the “Course Policies” section of this syllabus.

Preparation: All readings and at-home assignments must be prepared and ready for each class session. Everyone should use their 3x5 index card, *entrance passes* to present a discussion topic and question for in-class discussion each session. You may be asked to offer your discussion topic and questions during any class session, so be prepared. When asked to contribute your insights, be brief, intelligent, thoughtful, and scholarly. Identify why the material is valuable to our class discussion (or objectives). On the index card, put your name in the upper right corner, ask an engaging discussion question prefaced by brief contextualizing commentary. Consider including research to enhance your card and prepare for an impromptu discussion if assigned.

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

Strong participation includes:

1. only excused absences with no recorded tardiness
2. adherence to course policies and guidelines
3. 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 one's responsibility to advancing positive class or group dynamics
9. originality in thought, discussion and researched 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

- “A” level participation is strong in all key areas.
- “B” level participation, albeit promising, is notably weak in *two* key areas.
- “C” level participation is notably weak in *three* key areas.
- “D” level participation is significantly weak in *Three* or more of the key areas.

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

Extra Credit (5 bonus points): This is an optional assignment. See the extra credit assignment in Canvas. Bonus points are added to your final course score. This paper is due March 31st before 11:59 pm. The role of course timekeeper is a second opportunity for extra credit. There are only two slots available. See me for details.

Grade Distribution and Grading Method

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 they 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 and Wikipedia 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—including length of journal entries

Rubric

The “A or A-” submission has strong content, strong organization, AND strong grammar/mechanics. To receive an “A or 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 with sources documented using MLA style guidelines.

A “B” submission is notably weak in ONE of the above key areas.

A “C” submission, albeit promising, is notably weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

A “D” submission is significantly weak in TWO or more of the above key areas.

Additional information concerning UF grading policies may be found on the undergraduate catalog web page <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.)

Course Policies

- *“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* refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number:
 1. Each different word misspelled,
 2. Each sentence fragment,
 3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice,
 4. Each mistake in capitalization (capitalize Black and White when referring to individuals, communities, or ideas),
 5. Each serious error in punctuation that obscures meaning, including errors in the use or failure to use italics and quotation marks,
 6. Each error in verb tense or subject/verb agreement,
 7. Each instance of ending a sentence with a preposition,
 8. Each improper citation, or lack of citation, where one is needed
 9. Each misuse of words (*who* for *that* or unwarranted use of clichés, for instance) and reference problems,
 10. Poor Paragraphing or lack of paragraphing,
 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 suffer a half letter grade deduction. This policy applies to all assignments, excluding entrance cards.

- Cell phones and computers: Cell phones must be muted during the class session. If an emergency occurs and you must 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.

- Papers / Journals: All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layout with one inch margins all around. Use Courier or 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.
- 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. Except for miscalculation or oversight, I will not consider grade changes. **Please do not ask; I consider it harassment.** You may consult the English Department Associate Chair, for grade appeals, however. Please note that appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
- Midterm assessment Report: Individual grades are available in Canvas indicating your current status in the class. These reports will offer information on all graded aspects of the course, including attendance, as recorded in the e-learning grade book consecutive with graded assignments. You should consider these performance tracking reports carefully and govern yourself accordingly.
- Missed class sessions: Make up work for approved absences must be addressed within one week of your return. See me for submission deadlines for missed work within this time frame.
- *“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: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (Links to an external site).”*

University Policies

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- *Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)*
Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.
- *University Police Department* at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or <http://www.police.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#)).

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>.
- Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.
- Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.
- Student Complaints Campus:
https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf.
- On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.