

LIT 6934  
Spring 2018  
M 9-11<sup>th</sup> periods  
Email: [dwking@ufl.edu](mailto:dwking@ufl.edu)

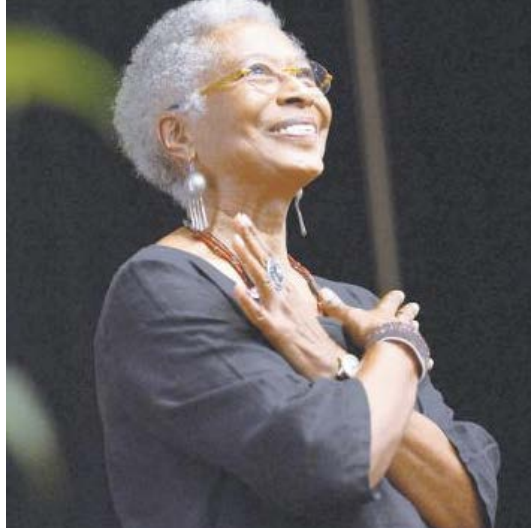
Professor: Dr. King  
Office Hrs.: M 6-8<sup>th</sup> periods  
Office: Turlington 4253

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## ALICE WALKER'S WOMANIST THOUGHT

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“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](http://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, what *Womanism* means. 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*

## GRADE DISTRIBUTION AND GRADING METHOD

Preparation and Participation	100 points
Oral Reports	150 points
Final Paper	250 points

All assignments are evaluated on content, originality, creativity, connections to course objectives, and form (grammar, spelling, bibliography, technology 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 (95 %+).

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.
- Researched support 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

The “A” submission 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 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.

### 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* refers to formal writing errors of form. Specifically, they include the following and will be identified in evaluated written assignments by error number or, simply, as (FE):

- ✚ 1. Each different word misspelled,
- ✚ 2. Each sentence fragment,
- ✚ 3. Each run-on sentence or comma splice,
- ✚ 4. Each mistake in capitalization,
- ✚ 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),
- ✚ 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** may be returned to the student for revision, but **will** suffer a half letter grade deduction. Only one resubmission is allowed. Penalties for final course papers (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: All papers must be typed and double spaced using the 8 1/2 x 11 page layouts 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. Submit papers to me via “Assignments” in Canvas only.
- 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 submission deadlines for missed work within this time frame.
- 8) FINAL PAPER SUBMISSION GUIDELINES: This assignment **must be submitted electronically**. Microsoft Word compatible documents only please. Unreadable documents will be returned ungraded. Submit your project by 11:59 p.m. on the due date. Late submissions must be submitted to my email address directly and will suffer a half letter grade reduction.

### 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 the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.” This oath represents UF’s commitment to academic honesty and integrity. “Cheating, plagiarism, bribery, misrepresentation, conspiracy and fabrication” are violations of the Honor Code. Violators will suffer the consequences. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized 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>

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### FINAL PAPERS — 250 PTS

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This twenty-five page paper should emphasize some aspect of the course objectives using any of the required texts (or combination) you wish. A minimum of twelve secondary sources published since 2007 must be used. This assignment is due **April 30th**.

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## ORAL REPORT —150 PTS

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Depending on course enrollment, each student is required to present 2-3 summary and critical assessment / responses to books written by Walker, which we are not reading in class. The number of reports and the point value of each depend upon the final number of registered students. Regardless, however, each report will be worth 50 points.

The goal of this assignment is to introduce course participants to non-required texts written by this prolific writer. With this goal in mind, read the assigned book, prepare a two-page handout for distribution to the class (at the conclusion of your presentation). This handout should include three things: **1) a one-paragraph summary of the assigned reading, 2) a two-paragraph précis of your response, and 3) a bibliography of works consulted/cited, listing no less than six sources.** In addition to providing a copy to each class member, you must submit the handout in Canvas, via the “Oral Report” assignment link associated with each report, for grading. Assessment for this assignment includes both the handout and the oral presentation.

You will find your assigned text listed in the “Oral Report Assignments” document posted under “Resources” in Canvas. Read your assigned book as soon as possible. Study it. Complete thorough research on the text or some essential aspect of it. Consider the following questions as you prepare your presentation and handout:

What evidence of womanism do you find in it? What questions does it raise? How? What is the catalyst for the text’s creation? Is the text pre-womanist, womanist, post womanist, or neutral? Why is the text valuable (or is it valuable) to a study of Walker’s womanist thought? Be specific.

You will direct a 30-minute class session for each report in which you do the following:

- present a close examination and critical assessment of an assigned text;
- present two class discussion questions;
- direct discussion of the two questions (after a 10 to 15-minute presentation); and
- distribute handouts for your classmate’s future reference.

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## OTHER EXPECTATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS –100 PTS

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**Preparation and participation:** Students should complete all readings prior to the class meeting and participate fully in discussion. We will move slowly through Walker's vast oeuvre. While some texts are assigned for complete discussion during one session, many are not. The breakdown in reading assignments is designed to encourage close readings of each assigned section; so, focus your comments on the assigned weekly readings (including reflections on previously read materials). Come to class with at least one insight or comment, concerning the weekly reading, which you would like the class to engage during the session. Research your question and study the texts, seeking evidence of Walker's womanist philosophy, its development and influences. Poor performance in this area, or failure to participate, will result in a final grade reduction by a half letter grade.

*Attendance:* Discussions cannot be replicated so if you miss a day of class you will have missed the lesson for that day. Therefore, I take attendance very seriously and expect you to come to class every day on time. You are allowed **up to three** unexcused absences. Your grade will automatically drop a half letter grade after the third absence (excused or unexcused). **If you reach six absences you will automatically fail the course and should withdraw from the class (or you will receive an “E” for the semester).** Remember, this is a three-hour seminar; missing one class in its entirety counts as three absences. No INCOMPLETES are given for this course.

*Caveat: Excused absences are permitted if you provide proof documenting an illness, a family crisis, or participation in a university sponsored event. Unfortunately, given the nature of the course, if you miss more than two weeks of class—even if it is due to illness or other reasons—you will automatically fail and receive an E.*

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## COURSE CALENDAR

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WK 1: 1/8 Introduction

Alice Walker Speaks

WK 2: 1/15 Holiday

Oral Report assignments posted in Canvas

Begin readings for next week.

WK 3: 1/22

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages xv--56.
- *Third Life of Grange Copeland*

WK 4: 1/29

- *Meridian* --Discussion of Section One: “Meridian”

WK 5: 2/5

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 57-76.
- Concluding discussion: *Meridian*

WK 6: 2/12

- *Oral Report #1: In Love and In Trouble* (1973)
- *Oral Report #2: You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981)
- *Oral Report #3: Living by the Word* (1988)
- *Oral Report #4: The Same River Twice* (1996)
- *Oral Report #5: Horses Make the Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1984)

WK 7: 2/19

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 77-96.
- Discussion: *The Color Purple*

WK 8: 2/26

- Discussion: *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*

- Discussion: Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 107-116.

WK 9: 3/5 --SPRING BREAK--prepare readings and reports for discussion and presentation the following week (3/12)

- Oral Report #6: *The Way Forward is With a Broken Heart* (2000)
- Oral Report #7: *Sent by Earth: A Message from the Grandmother Spirit* (2001)
- *The Temple of My Familiar*—Read parts “One” and “Two”

WK 10: 3/12

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 97-105; 117-125.
- Discussion of: *The Temple of My Familiar*

WK 11: 3/19

- Conclude discussion of *Temple of My Familiar*
- Oral Report #8: *Warrior Marks* (1993)
- Oral Report #9: *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* (2003)
- Oral Report #10: *Anything You Love Can Be Saved* (1997)
- Oral Report #11: *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (2006)

WK 12: 3/26

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 143-169.
- Discussion: *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

WK 13: 4/2

- Oral Report #12: *Overcoming Speechlessness* (2006)
- Oral Report #13: *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing* (2010)
- *By the Light of My Father's Smile*—Discussion of chapters “Angels” through “Luck”

WK 14: 4/9

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 127-137.
- Concluding discussion: *By the Light of My Father's Smile*

WK 15: 4/16

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

**WK 16: 4/23**

- Oral Report #14: *The Cushion in the Road* (2013)
- Oral Report #15: *The World Will Follow Joy* (2013)
- Oral Report #16: *The Chicken Chronicles, a Memoir* (2011)
- Oral Report #17: *A Poem Traveled Down My Arm* (2003)

- *Oral Report #18: Why War Is Never a Good Idea (2007); PAPERS DUE BY 11:59 PM 4/30*