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## LIT 6357: ALICE WALKER'S WOMANIST THOUGHT

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Professor: Dr. Debra Walker King

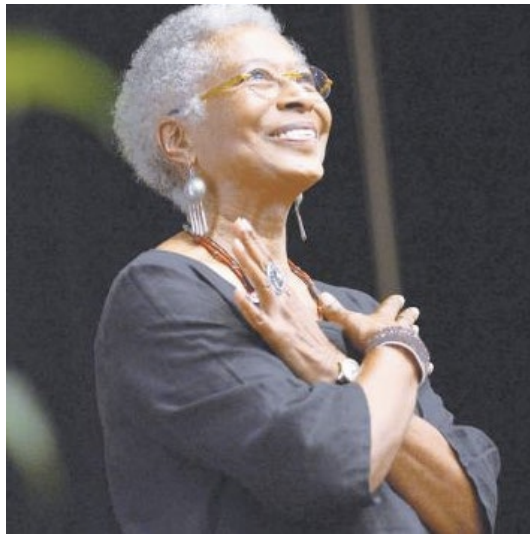
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Class Time: R 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> period (12:50-3:50)

Place: TBD

Office hours: T 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> 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](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 many 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*

### **Suggested Text:**

Maparyan, Layli. *The Womanist Idea*

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## COURSE CALENDAR

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WK 1: 1/6 Introduction

Alice Walker Speaks

WK 2: 1/13

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

WK 3: 1/20

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

WK 4: 1/27

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

WK 5: 2/3

- *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* Parts "One" through "Two"

WK 6: 2/10

- *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Parts "Three" through "Four"

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

WK 7: 2/17

- *The Temple of My Familiar* Parts “One” through “Three”

WK 8: 2/24

- *The Temple of My Familiar* Parts “Four” through “End”
- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 97-105; 117-125.
- Selection of Oral Reports (from the following texts)
  - *Oral Report Selection #1: In Love and In Trouble* (1973)
  - *Oral Report Selection #2: You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981)
  - *Oral Report Selection #3: Living by the Word* (1988)
  - *Oral Report Selection #4: The Same River Twice* (1996)
  - *Oral Report Selection #5: Horses Make the Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1984)
  - *Oral Report Selection #6: The Way Forward is With a Broken Heart* (2000)
  - *Oral Report Selection #7: Sent by Earth: A Message from the Grandmother Spirit* (2001)
  - *Oral Report Selection #8: Warrior Marks* (1993)
  - *Oral Report Selection #9: Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth* (2003)
  - *Oral Report Selection #10: Anything You Love Can Be Saved* (1997)
  - *Oral Report Selection #11: We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* (2006)
  - *Oral Report Selection #12: Overcoming Speechlessness* (2006)
  - *Oral Report Selection #13: Hard Times Require Furious Dancing* (2010)
  - *Oral Report Selection #14: The Cushion in the Road* (2013)

WK 9: 3/3      **Research BREAK**      **--No Class--**      Research BREAK

WK 10: 3/10      **SPRING BREAK**      **--No Class--**      **SPRING BREAK**

WK 11: 3/17

- Oral Reports

WK 12: 3/24

- *Possessing the Secret of Joy*
- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 143-162.

WK 13: 3/31

- *By the Light of My Father's Smile*
- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, pages 127-137 and 163-169.

WK 14: 4/7

- *Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*

WK 15: 4/14 (Last Day of Class)

- Plant, Deborah. *Alice Walker: A Woman for Our Times*, “Section V,” pages 183-218.

### PAPERS DUE BY 11:59 PM Monday 4/25

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#### FINAL PAPERS —250 PTS

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This twenty-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 25th**.

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#### ORAL REPORT —150 PTS

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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 your selected 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 oral reports, for grading. Assessment for this assignment includes both the handout and the oral presentation.

You will find the selection texts listed in the course calendar under “WK 8.” Please let me know which text you select ASAP to avoid someone else securing your selection before you do. Read your assigned book. 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 womanist thought do you find in it? What questions arise? 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 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, some 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 discuss during the session. Research your question/comment 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.*

### GRADE DISTRIBUTION AND GRADING METHOD

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 <sup>+</sup>	385 to 399 (77 % +)	C <sup>+</sup>	335 to 363 (67 %+)	D <sup>+</sup>
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.
- 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” (under assignment type title) 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

#### **Campus Resources**

##### *Health and Wellness*

- *U Matter, We Care:* If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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](https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf).
- On-Line Student Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>.