



**ENGL 491 (Section 32759D): Senior Seminar in
Literary Studies:
Toni Morrison: Her Life, Literature, and Legacy**

Units: 4
Fall 2020; Mondays 2:00-4:20 PM

Location: Online

Instructor: Dr. Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus,
Assistant Professor of English



Office: Taper Hall of Humanities 439

Office Hours: Fridays 1:00-3:00 pm; by appointment

Contact Info: rauterku@usc.edu

IT Help: USC Information Technology Services

Hours of Service: Telephone support available 24 hours a day, 7 days per week; Email support available Mon-Fri. 8:00 am-6:00 pm.

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Course Description: Toni Morrison is an American treasure. No other author—black or white—has so thoroughly and bravely canvassed the American racial landscape and captivated the hearts and minds of readers everywhere. A Nobel laureate, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and a regular presence on the New York Times best-seller list, Morrison belongs to that special class of great American novelists whose books garnered both critical and commercial acclaim. Unlike her white contemporaries, Morrison wrote about black women—their lives, their loves, and their losses—and in this way, challenged the literary establishment’s ideas about “who” and “what” could be the focus of mainstream fiction. In the wake of her recent death, scholars and cultural commentators are returning to her formidable body of work to remember and pay tribute to a literary icon and “chronicler of the black experience”—to borrow a phrase from Tayari Jones. In this single-author seminar, we will contribute to this project in our collective efforts to assess Morrison’s life, literature, and legacy. We will read and discuss some of Morrison’s most important novels such as *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Beloved* (1987). We will study her celebrated works of critical non-fiction like *Playing in the Dark* (1992) and essays from *What Moves at the Margin* (2008) and *The Source of Self-Regard* (2019). We will also examine a range of scholarly responses to Morrison’s work to appreciate her impact on the field of literary studies. Assignments will consist of weekly Blackboard posts, a short paper (6-7 pages) at midterm, and a longer paper (12-15 pages) at the end of the semester.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete this class will be able to:

- Perform a close reading of a literary text
- Identify the narrative elements and interpretive problems that distinguish a literary work
- Locate imaginative and critical works within their appropriate contexts and traditions, and thus therefore, better understand literary history and intellectual genealogy
- Come up with a cogent thesis and craft a well-developed and polished analysis of a work or group of texts
- Conduct scholarly research and use secondary sources to substantiate and compose an original argument

Course Notes

Grading Type: Letter

This is a web-enhanced course that utilizes Blackboard. I will post assignments, supplemental readings, and digital content on the platform.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Beginner; access to Blackboard, Zoom, and the ability to stream digital content on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, etc.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye* (1970) ISBN: 978-0-307-27844-9

---. *Song of Solomon* (1977) ISBN: 978-1-4000-3342-3

---. *Beloved* (1987) ISBN: 978-1-4000-3341-6

---. *Playing in the Dark* (1992) ISBN: 978-0-679-74542-6

Toni Morrison: *The Pieces I Am*. Directed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Magnolia, 2019

*Scholarly essays/excerpts from *What Moves at the Margin* (2008) and *The Source of Self-Regard* (2019) on Blackboard

**All books are available for purchase/rent at the USC Bookstore: 840 Childs Way, Los Angeles 90089
(213) 740-0066.

Description and Assessment of Assignments:

1. Blackboard Posts (250 words)—For each week's reading/viewing assignments, you will need to draft an informal response to it. Privileging your own voice and perspective, reflect on the following questions: What is the aesthetic, cultural, or political value of the work? What does it reveal about both the imaginative world that Morrison has constructed and the real world that we inhabit? How does it contribute to our understanding of race, class, gender, the function of literature, or Morrison herself? The purpose of this activity is to establish a personal connection with the text and to help you contribute to in-class discussions. This is a more subjective exercise. Do not provide a formal, academic appraisal of the work. Focus on what you feel and what you have to say about what you read. I will call on you from time to time to share your writings with the class. Post your remarks to the appropriate discussion thread on Blackboard. Posts are due each Friday by 1:00 pm.
2. Midterm Assignment: Critical Analysis Paper (6-7 pages)—In this essay, you will construct a critical analysis on one of the literary works we've already read and discussed by mid-semester. Your analysis must address one of the following concerns: a) issues of aesthetics (e.g. formal/literary attributes such as genre or narrative strategies), b) historical matters (e.g. post-bellum African American life or the era of Jim Crow/segregation), or c) cultural phenomena (e.g. colorism in the black community or whiteness in American society). You may and should consult a few secondary sources to support your argument, but you should draw the bulk of your information from the literary work itself. The objective of this assignment is twofold: 1) to strengthen your analytical skills, and 2) to identify and articulate the concrete, practical value of literature and its ability to teach us about the world.
3. Abstract & Annotated Bibliography (100-200 words per entry/minimum of 10 sources)—To help you prepare for your final assessment in this class, which is a seminar paper, you will assemble an abstract and an annotated bibliography. The former is a brief overview of what you intend to explore in your paper; whereas the latter is an MLA Works Cited list with bibliographical summaries for each entry. Your abstract should have a working title, state your thesis, and provide a basic description and trajectory of your argument. Your annotated bibliography should list the sources you intend to use to write your paper. This will require you to plan/think ahead. Do not wait until the last few weeks of class to select a topic, but rather contemplate possible topics as you make your way through the course. Towards this end, you might choose to keep an idea notebook or detailed notes about your reading and/or our class discussions. Once you've settled on a topic and have done some preliminary research you should be ready to select your sources. Your sources should all be scholarly works written for an academic audience. This includes books of literary or historical criticism, journal articles, or book chapters in an edited volume. You may use an op-ed piece

provided that it is scholarly in tone or engages with the material in a scholarly way. For each entry, you will need to draft a summary of the work (100-200 words), redacting its argument, explaining its significance to your proposed thesis, how you intend to use the source, and why you think it is relevant. The abstract and the annotated bibliography will be due about a month before class ends so as to give you ample time to draft and revise your final paper.

4. End of Term Assignment: Seminar Paper (12-15 pages)—This course culminates in a seminar paper. This essay should reflect your mastery of the content we studied over the course of the semester. Towards this end, it should be your best and most sophisticated work. In terms of structure, it should have an introduction that provides background and contextual information about your topic and announces your thesis, it should demonstrate your ability to develop an argument across multiple paragraphs (using relevant examples and evidentiary material in the form of primary and secondary sources), it should connect the literature to its relevant cultural, historical, and political contexts, and finally, it should have a conclusion that underscores the significance of your argument. For example, you may choose to focus on how your essay contributes to/or intervenes in the existing scholarly conversation about your topic or you may choose to discuss the implications of your argument in the context of the current political moment. Why does this matter outside of this class? Why does this matter now? You may choose to build off your midterm essay, provided that you add a substantial amount of new work and significantly enhance your earlier arguments. I will provide a more detailed assignment sheet/guide well in advance of the due date.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	10
Blackboard Posts	100	15
Midterm	100	20
Abstract & Bibliography	100	25
Seminar Paper	100	30
TOTAL	500	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100	C	73-76
A-	90-94	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	59 and below

Assignment Rubric

A-range (90-100): Essay provides a sophisticated analysis of the topic or work in question; contains an identifiable argument and engages with the material in a complex way to illuminate cultural, historical or political issues relevant to its discussion. The essay is well-written and highly polished. The essay is formatted according to MLA citation guidelines.

B-range (80-89): Essay provides a solid analysis of the topic or work in question and attempts to engage with the material in a complex and thorough manner, but it does not fully address all of the relevant issues or does not provide a thorough accounting of the cultural, historical, or political factors involved. The essay may have a few compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may contain minor citation errors.

C-range (70-79): Essay does not provide a compelling analysis of the topic or work in question and does not earnestly attempt to address the cultural, historical, or political realms in a complex way. The argument is underdeveloped. The essay may have several compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may have multiple citation errors or may not properly cite sources or include a bibliography.

D-range (60-69): Essay lacks an argument and does not do the work of analysis. The essay does not engage with the relevant material and does not address cultural, historical, or political issues. The essay may be rife with compositional, structural, or grammatical errors. The essay may not reflect the use of a citation method.

F (59 and below): The essay does not demonstrate appropriate scholarly effort/critical engagement, or the student failed to submit the assignment.

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Please submit all work in Blackboard. Essays must be typed and formatted according to MLA guidelines.

Grading Timeline

All assignments will be graded and returned no later than two weeks after submission. Final seminar papers will not be returned unless requested.

Additional Policies

1. Attendance:

Consistent attendance and participation is absolutely critical to your success in this class. You are allotted two unexcused absences—without penalty—for the duration of the semester. Unexcused absences beyond this number will result in a penalty of a 5% grade reduction off your final grade for each class session that you miss. Please do not come to class late or leave early, as this is disruptive to me and your fellow classmates. Excessively late arrivals and early departures will be counted as absences. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.

2. Late/Missing Work:

In order to receive full credit, all assignments must be submitted by their respective due dates. Late assignments will be docked by 5% for each week that they are late. Any outstanding work that you want included in your final grade must be submitted before the last week of class.

3. Course Format/Meeting Structure:

The format of this course is a hybrid of lecture and discussion. I may rely on your Blackboard posts/journal entries, media, visual art, op-eds, supplemental readings, or other aids to enhance our understanding of the material and structure our time in class. Always bring your reading and writing materials to our meetings. Class will generally begin with an ice-breaker/warm up activity—e.g. we might discuss a quote, screen a clip, perform a close reading on a passage, or engage in a freewriting activity. After this, I will present important information or lead a discussion of the assigned reading. Finally, we will use the remaining time for applied learning or group activities.

4. In-class Behavior:

You are expected to demonstrate proper academic etiquette at all times. Please do not check and/or send emails while in class, text-message, or complete assignments for other classes. You are welcome to bring beverages to class, but please do not eat in class, as it can be distracting. Please refrain from voicing opinions that may be perceived as racist, homophobic, sexist, or generally insensitive.

5. Synchronous Session Recording Notice:

All synchronous sessions will be recorded and provided to all students asynchronously. USC prohibits the sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Please take note of the following policy:

S Campus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

*Please note that assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Homework	Deliverable/ Due
Week 1	M 8/17: Course Overview/Syllabus	Watch <i>Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am</i> (Amazon) Read <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 1-93	
Week 2	M 8/24: Morrison and <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 1-93	<i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 97-206	
Week 3	M 8/31: <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 97-206	<i>Song of Solomon</i> , foreword + watch Toni Morrison clip on the novel: https://youtu.be/RTAQHbLFi84 (see BB)	
Week 4	M 9/07: Labor Day/No Class	<i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 3-103	
Week 5	M 9/14: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 3-103	<i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 104-204	
Week 6	M 9/21: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 104-204	<i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 205-337	
Week 7	M 9/28: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 205-337	“The Site of Memory”	Midterm Paper
Week 8	M 10/05: “The Site of Memory”	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 3-103	
Week 9	M 10/12: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 3-103	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 104-204	
Week 10	M 10/19: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 104-204	<i>Beloved</i> , pp. 205-324	Abstract & Annotated Bibliography
Week 11	M 10/26: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 205-324	<i>Playing in the Dark</i> , pp. v-91	

Week 12	M 11/02: <i>Playing in the Dark</i> , pp. v-91	“How Can Values Be Taught in the University” and “The Nobel Lecture in Literature”	
Week 13	M 11/09: “How Can Values Be Taught in the University” and “The Nobel Lecture in Literature”		
FINAL	No Exam/Final Paper		Final Paper T 11/17

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* (see <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct (at <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* (see <http://equity.usc.edu>) or to the *Department of Public Safety* (see <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>). This is important for the safety whole USC community.

Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* provides 24/7 confidential support (see <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm>), and the sexual assault resource center webpage describes reporting options and other resources (see sarc@usc.edu).

Support Systems:

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students (see <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>). *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations (see http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html). If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology (see <http://emergency.usc.edu/>).

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [https://equity.usc.edu/
Bias Assessment Response and Support](https://equity.usc.edu/Bias-Assessment-Response-and-Support)

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response.
<https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>