



**ENGL 491 (Section 32760D): Senior Seminar in
Literary Studies: Toni Morrison: Her Life,
Literature, and Legacy**

Units: 4

Fall 2022; Wednesdays 2:00-4:20 PM

Location: THH 107

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

Office: Taper Hall of Humanities 449D

Office Hours: Fridays 9 am – 12 pm on Zoom; please email me for an 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.

Contact Info: consult@usc.edu; (213)-740-5555

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 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 some of her most celebrated essays such as “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation” (1983), “Memory, Creation, and Fiction” (1984), and “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature” (1989). 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 (1 page), a close reading essay at midterm (2 pages), a seminar presentation (30 minutes), and a reflective paper at the end of the semester (10-12 pages).

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 texts within their contexts of production, and thus better understand literary history and intellectual genealogy
- Deliver an oral presentation
- Situate both primary and secondary sources within more recent trends and contemporary conversations about literature and culture

Course Notes

Grading Type: Letter

This is a web-enhanced course that utilizes Blackboard. I will post supplemental readings and links to 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)

---. *Song of Solomon* (1977)

---. *Beloved* (1987)

What Moves at the Margin (2008)

The Source of Self-Regard (2019)

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

Supplementary readings 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 (1 page)—For each week's reading/viewing assignments, you will need to draft an informal response to it. (Please draft in MS Word and then copy and paste into Blackboard.) 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. **Posts are due by Monday at 10 pm.** Please note that you are exempt from posting a Blackboard response during the week you are scheduled to deliver your seminar presentation.
2. Midterm Paper: Close Reading (2 pages)—Select a short passage (no more than a paragraph) from either *The Bluest Eye* or *Song of Solomon* and provide an interpretation of it, paying special attention to its formal attributes (style, grammar, syntax, tropes, literary devices) and its relevance to cultural, historical, or political phenomena/events outside of the text. You should begin by annotating your passage of choice. Make observations about any striking details or facts. Look for patterns. Pay close attention to language. Then interpret the details. Why are they fascinating? What deeper meaning do they have in relationship to the narrative?
3. Seminar Presentation (30 min.)—During one class session this semester, you will be responsible for delivering a 30 min. presentation on the assigned reading for that week. The presentation should do one of the following, depending on the reading assignment you select—that is, if you sign up to present on a portion of a novel, then you should: 1) advance an argumentative claim about the reading and support it with examples from the text itself, walking us through your argument and providing two to three brief close readings; however, if you sign up to present on one of Morrison's essays or a scholarly essay about a Morrison novel, then you should: 2) tell us what the essay is about; identify its methodological or theoretical approaches/theoretical concepts that are helpful or relevant to understanding the text, (e.g. literary history, cultural studies, Black feminism, critical race theory, psychoanalysis, trauma theory, new historicism, queer theory, Afro-pessimism, social death, agency, interiority, etc.). In addition to this, you should feel free to bring in any relevant teaching materials/aids (a handout or PowerPoint presentation) that will enhance your remarks and make them more accessible for your audience. After you deliver your presentation, you will have an opportunity to answer questions or respond to comments from your classmates. After q&a, will we have a more general conversation about the reading. During our first session, you will select a

presentation date. Given the limited number of class meetings, it is imperative that you come to class on the day that you are scheduled to deliver your presentation. You will not be able to reschedule your presentation. Please plan accordingly. I recommend that you meet with me during office hours to discuss your presentation.

4. Final Paper: Why does Toni Morrison Matter? (10-12 pages)—Why should we read Toni Morrison today? What lessons do her writings hold for us? What truths about America, race, class, and gender emerge in her novels? What do her non-fiction essays do for our understanding of American and/or African American literature and culture? How has studying her life, literature, and legacy enhanced your studies and sense of self?

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	10
Blackboard Posts	100	20
Midterm Paper	100	20
Seminar Presentation	100	20
Final Paper	100	30
TOTAL	500	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	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 via email. 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 and Participation:** Consistent attendance and participation are critical to your success in this class. You are allotted one unexcused absence—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. If you need to arrive late or leave early on a specific day, please let me know as soon as possible.
2. **Course Format/Meeting Structure:** This course is a senior “seminar.” This means that you are expected to make substantial contributions to class discussion. In a course at this level, my role is more of a guide than an instructor. Accordingly, I will not lecture or tell you what you need to know or what you should think about a particular work. Instead, we will work collectively to make sense of the material. This requires that everyone come to class having read all the assigned literature and Blackboard posts. It also demands that we come to class ready and prepared to have serious and sustained conversations about the work. To achieve this, our sessions will proceed as follows:

Time	Segment	Activity
2:00-2:30	30 min.	Discussion of the Blackboard posts
2:30-3:00	30 min.	Seminar presentation or other activity
3:00-3:15	15 min.	Break
3:15-4:05	50 min.	Guided Discussion
4:05-4:20	15 min.	Closing remarks

3. **Email:** I will respond to emails during normal business hours, Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 5 pm. Emails sent outside of this window will be responded to during the next business day. I generally reply to emails within a day, but if it takes me longer, please be patient.
4. **Office Hours:** I am available, by appointment, for virtual office hour visits via Zoom. If you’d like to schedule a virtual visit, please email me. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and help with assignments.
5. **In-class Behavior:** You are expected to demonstrate proper academic/professional etiquette at all times. Please do not check and/or send emails while in class, text-message, or complete assignments for other classes. Please refrain from voicing views that may be perceived as being offensive or insensitive.
6. **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/Readings Due	Deliverable/Due
Week 1	8/24: Introductions, course overview, and syllabus; sign up for seminar presentations	
Week 2	8/31: <i>Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am</i> (Amazon); Tayari Jones, "The Most Formidable Mind of Our Times: Tayari Jones Honors Toni Morrison's Work and Legacy" (Time, 2019)	BB post
Week 3	9/07: <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 1-93	BB post
Week 4	9/14: <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 97-206	BB post
Week 5	9/21: Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Fiction" (1984); Cheryl Wall, "On Dolls, Presidents, and Little Black Girls"; and Naomi Popple, "Imagining Freedom in a Post-Emancipation 'Pigmentocracy': Wallace Thurman, Toni Morrison, and Tupac Shakur"	BB post
Week 6	9/28: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , foreword + pp. 3-103	BB post
Week 7	10/05: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 104-204	BB post Midterm Paper
Week 8	10/12: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 205-337	BB post
Week 9	10/19: Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1983); Aaron Ngozi Oforlea, "My Great-Granddaddy Could Fly! Negotiating Cultural History and Family Legacies in <i>Song of Solomon</i> "	BB post
Week 10	10/26: <i>Beloved</i> , foreword + pp. 3-103	BB post
Week 11	11/02: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 104-204	BB post
Week 12	11/09: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 205-324	BB post
Week 13	11/16: Richard Perez, "The Debt of Memory: Reparations, Imagination, and History in Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i> "; Cynthia S. Hamilton, "Revisions, Rememories, and Exorcisms: Toni Morrison and the Slave Narrative"	BB post
Week 14	11/23: No Class/Thanksgiving Holiday	

Week 15	11/30: “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature” (1989); course wrap-up	BB post
		Final Paper 12/05

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

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>