



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

**Units:** 4

**Spring 2024; Thursdays 2:00-4:20 PM**

**Location:** WPH 204

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

**Office:** Taper Hall of Humanities 449D

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 9 am – 12 pm on Zoom; please email me for an appointment

**Contact Info:** [rauterku@usc.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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. Students will write a short reaction paper at midterm (3-5 pages) and a longer reflective essay at the end of the semester (10-12 pages).

**Learning Objectives**

- Understand African American literature as an aesthetic, political, and intellectual project
- Trace African American literary history in terms of periodization and aesthetic developments
- Identify the aesthetic, narrative, and interpretive elements that characterize African American literature
- Historicize and contextualize literary and cultural production
- Use scholarly criticism as an interpretive tool to analyze literature

## 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. Midterm Assignment: Reaction Paper (3-5 pages)**—Select one of the following: a chapter from *The Bluest Eye*, or *Song of Solomon*, or an essay, or the documentary on Morrison, *The Pieces I Am*, and draft a response to it. Prioritize your personal experience reading and thinking about the work. What experiences and/or feelings did it evoke? What impact did it have on you? What are the major takeaways?
- 2. End of Term Assignment: 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, sense of self, and your understanding of American culture?

## Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Attendance & Participation	100	20
Midterm Paper	100	40
Final Paper	100	40
TOTAL	400	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 Submission Policy**

Assignments are due on the day listed on the syllabus. Please submit all work via email. Essays must be typed and double-spaced.

### **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 is critical to your success in this class. If you miss a class, then you should reach out to another student in the class for notes or make an appointment to see me during office hours. 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:** The format of this course is a mixture of lecture, discussion, and applied learning activities. I'm a big fan of the "flipped" classroom, in which activities that would traditionally be assigned as homework are completed during class time. Towards this end, I may use freewriting exercises, 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, or engage in a freewriting activity. After this, I/or another student might present important information in the form of a mini-lecture, guided discussion, or a reaction paper. Other times, I will give you an applied learning activity to work on in a pair or smaller group. Class will end with a summary/wrap-up of the material discussed.
- 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 for a 20-minute consultation. In office hours, I can elaborate on class discussions and help with assignments.
- 5. 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. Please refrain from voicing opinions 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
<b>Week 1</b>	1/11: Introductions, course overview, Tayari Jones, “The Most Formidable Mind of Our Times: Tayari Jones Honors Toni Morrison’s Work and Legacy” ( <i>Time</i> , 2019), <a href="https://time.com/5646235/toni-morrisons-work-and-legacy/">https://time.com/5646235/toni-morrisons-work-and-legacy/</a> , syllabus	
<b>Week 2</b>	1/18: <i>Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am</i> (Amazon, Hulu, and Netflix)	
<b>Week 3</b>	1/25: “The Site of Memory” (1986)	
<b>Week 4</b>	2/01: <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 1-93	
<b>Week 5</b>	2/08: <i>The Bluest Eye</i> , pp. 97-206	
<b>Week 6</b>	2/15: Morrison, “Memory, Creation, and Fiction” (1984); Cheryl Wall, “On Dolls, Presidents, and Little Black Girls”; and Naomi Poppo, “Imagining Freedom in a Post-Emancipation ‘Pigmentocracy’: Wallace Thurman, Toni Morrison, and Tupac Shakur”	
<b>Week 7</b>	2/22: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , foreword + pp. 3-103	
<b>Week 8</b>	2/29: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 104-204	<b>Midterm Paper 2/29</b>
<b>Week 9</b>	3/07: <i>Song of Solomon</i> , pp. 205-337	
<b>Week 10</b>	3/14: <b>Spring Break/No Class</b>	
<b>Week 11</b>	3/21: 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> ”	
<b>Week 12</b>	3/28: <i>Beloved</i> , foreword + pp. 3-103	
<b>Week 13</b>	4/04: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 104-204	
<b>Week 14</b>	4/11: <i>Beloved</i> , pp. 205-324	
<b>Week 15</b>	4/18: 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”	

<b>Week 16</b>	4/25: “Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature” (1989); course wrap-up	
		<b>Final Paper 5/02</b>

## *Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems*

### **Academic Integrity:**

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university’s mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity’s website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.