

Dr. Tisha Brooks
ENG 477 Toni Morrison:
Exploring the Sacred
MW: 12-1:15PM
PH 3404

Contact Info:

Office: PH 2231

Email: tibrook@siue.edu (best method of communication)

Office Hours: M 11-11:45am (by appt.), 1:15-2:30pm (drop-in)

Contact Info: My primary form of communication will be through SIUE email. As a rule, you must check your SIUE email daily. I will send emails and announcements only to your SIUE account. Email is also the best way to contact me directly. When contacting me through email, please include your full name, the course number (ENG 477), and a clear subject heading in all communications. I will do my best to respond to any messages within 24hrs, though it may take longer on weekends. Additionally, you are welcome to meet me with during office hours to discuss any issues that cannot be addressed over email. If you would like to make an appointment to meet, I will need at least 24hrs notice.

Course Description:

During a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School in December 2012, Morrison claimed “Expressions of goodness are never trivial in my work; they are never incidental in my writing. In fact, I want them to have life-changing properties and to illuminate decisively the moral questions embedded in the narrative.” In an effort to better understand Morrison’s commitment to the sacred and to questions of morality, we will consider the following: 1) the definition of good and evil at work in her texts, 2) Morrison’s use of goodness as a bulwark against evil, and 3) the role of literature in providing the spiritual tools necessary to resist evil and to survive what David Carrasco refers to as “the terror of one’s historical condition.” Although this course focuses solely on the writing of a single author, our study of Morrison’s work (fiction, nonfictional essays, literary criticism, and speeches) challenges us to explore this broader question: How does literature empower us to live more freely and purposefully in the world?

Additionally, this course seeks to do the following:

- Introduce you to and/or expand your understanding of Morrison beyond her fiction by considering her nonfictional essays, critical work and speeches.
- Increase your exposure to and engagement with credible literary scholarship on Morrison’s work (past and present).
- Enhance your critical thinking, writing, and speaking skills through presentations, scholarly journals, and an independent research project.
- Encourage the integration and application of knowledge through collaborative and independent learning opportunities.

Primary Texts:

Lecture:

Morrison, “Goodness: Altruism and the Literary Imagination” (2012)

Nonfiction:

Morrison/Denard, *What Moves at the Margin* (2008): 978-1604730173

Novels:

Sula (2004): 978-1400033430

Song of Solomon (2004): 978-1400033423

Beloved (2004): 978-1400033416

Paradise (1997): 978-0452280397

A Mercy (2009): 978-0307276766

Additional Readings:

BB: texts available on Blackboard

JSTOR: scholarly articles available through the JSTOR database (may be accessed through African American LibGuide and/or through the Lovejoy Library Webpage)

Required Online Resources

Blackboard: course management site where you will submit and complete all assignments and projects.

Padlet: website allowing collaborative sharing of ideas on virtual “wall.” We will use this site for our Digital Humanities Project. No account sign-up is necessary. I will provide additional info about accessing and using Padlet later in the course. Web Address:
www.padlet.com

SIUE Email: required to receive all announcements and messages from instructor, as well as for communicating with instructor and peers. Make sure you are able to send and receive messages. Remember to check your SIUE email daily!

African American LibGuide: Use this online guide to access course readings available through the JSTOR database. This guide also contains a wealth of critical resources for your written and oral assignments and can be accessed through our course Blackboard page or through the Lovejoy Library website:
<http://siue.libguides.com/africanamericanlit/eng477brooks>

Recommended Online Resources

Zoom: Zoom is a web conferencing tool that SIUE faculty, staff, and students can use for a variety of purposes including online meetings, lecture capture, live or recorded screen sharing, group messaging, and more. You can log onto Zoom using your SIUE credentials here: <http://www.siue.edu/zoom/>. ITS offers Zoom training videos that can be accessed here: <https://www.siue.edu/its/zoom/videos.shtml>.

Assignments and Expectations

Class Participation

This class is collaborative in nature, which means your active participation is essential to the success of this course. As part of this active participation, we will use the discussion forum for weeks 1-4 to help shape our class discussions. Discussion Forums are due by 11:59pm the day before each of our classes.

We will also use the discussion forum to brainstorm and share ideas for larger projects, including the Digital Humanities Project and the final paper. Though I will not grade individual posts, they will count towards your overall class participation grade.

We will also work in large and small groups in and outside of class. One major collaborative project that we will complete as a full class is a Digital Humanities Project on Toni Morrison's nonfiction writings. This collaborative assignment will count towards half of your class participation grade (100pts), and will offer the opportunity to contribute to the larger conversation on the continuing relevance of Morrison's writings. I will hand out additional information about this project in class.

Co-Teaching

In addition to actively participating in large and small group discussions, you and a partner will co-teach the reading for a particular day. This assignment requires you to meet with me a week in advance of your presentation date in preparation for this assignment. During this meeting, we will review your teaching strategy and plan for working as a team. You will also create a PowerPoint presentation to be shared in class as a teaching aid. You will receive more detailed guidelines on this assignment in class. Grading for this assignment will be determined by how well you address the central themes/issues in the literature, your ability to work collaboratively with your partner, advanced preparation (presentation slides), as well as your in-class performance. As part of this assignment, you will also use literary criticism to enhance our discussion of the novels.

Critical Analyses

To further deepen your critical engagement with the literary scholarship in the class, you will write 3 critical analyses (2 pages each). These short critical responses should focus on the assigned article. Since literary scholarship can help expand our critical thinking and writing about Morrison's novels, you should use these responses as a critical space to explore the impact of this scholarship on your reading of the novels. Consider the ways in which this scholarship affirms, challenges and/or expands your understanding of the text. We will use these analyses to help shape our discussion of the readings in class. They should be submitted to Blackboard and will be worth 50 points each. Scoring for these assignments is based on your fulfillment of the above criteria, as well as clarity.

Literary Research Project

Your final assignment for the class will be a 10-page paper that analyzes Morrison's writing. This paper should integrate the fictional and non-fictional work we have read this semester, while also using literary criticism and other scholarship to deepen your analysis of Morrison's work. You will submit a research proposal for this assignment and attend a conference with me, so we can discuss your particular project. In addition, you will have the opportunity to present your work in progress during a class Symposium. Although you will present on one of the symposium dates, you will also be expected to actively contribute by asking questions and making suggestions about your peer's work as well. The feedback you receive during this presentation will help you further expand your final paper, which will be due 7 days after your symposium presentation date.

Please note that barring officially documented excuses, you cannot make up presentations. In order for this class to run in an organized fashion, you must present on your assigned date.

Paper Submissions

All papers should be typed, double-spaced with Times New Roman 12 pt. font and should follow standard MLA guidelines for citing sources. All assignments **must** be submitted to Blackboard in order to receive a grade. To ensure that I receive your work, be sure to use both submission methods: 1) upload the document (Microsoft Word or PDF preferred) *and* 2) copy & paste your work in the submission box just in case I have trouble opening the attached file. Emailing your work is an acceptable Plan C, but *only* if those first two submission options to Blackboard fail.

Graduate Requirements

Please note that course requirements for graduate level students will vary from undergrads. Although graduate students complete the same assignments, the expectations are higher, given their more advanced academic status. Critical Analyses should reflect a deeper critical engagement with the literary critical readings assigned for each week. Graduate students will complete the co-teaching assignment solo (no peer partner), and the final paper must be 15-20 pages in length.

Grading

Class Participation:	200
Co-Teaching:	250
Critical Analyses (50x3):	150
Research Proposal:	50
Symposium Presentation:	100
Literary Research Paper:	250
Total Points:	1000

Course Schedule

Note: We will use the discussion forum for Weeks 1-4 to help shape our class discussions. Discussion Forums are due by 11:59pm the day before each of our classes.

Week One

M 1/8: Introductions: Getting to Know the Author, the Course, and Each Other

W 1/10: View Morrison's Public Lecture, "Goodness: Altruism and the Literary Imagination" *in class*; Discuss lecture and "Good, but never simple" (Bb)

Week Two

M 1/15: MLK Birthday. No Class!

W 1/17: Introduction to *What Moves at the Margin* (xi); "A Slow Walk of Trees..." (*What Moves* 3)

Week Three

M 1/22: "She and Me" (*What Moves* 15); "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (*What Moves* 56)

W 1/24: "The Site of Memory" (*What Moves* 65)

Week Four

M 1/29: "The Nobel Lecture in Literature" (*What Moves* 198)

W 1/31: excerpt from *Playing in the Dark*, "Romancing the Shadow" (Bb)
Digital Humanities Project Contribution Due Friday, 2/2 by 11:59pm

Week Five

M 2/5: *Sula*

W 2/7: *Sula*

Week Six

M 2/12: Literary Criticism: *Sula* (JSTOR)

W 2/14: *Song of Solomon*

Week Seven

M 2/19: *Song of Solomon*

W 2/21: Literary Criticism: *Song of Solomon* (JSTOR)

Week Eight

M 2/26: *Beloved*

W 2/28: *Beloved*

Week Nine: Spring Break (No Class 3/5 & 3/7)

Week Ten

M 3/12: Literary Criticism: *Beloved* (JSTOR)

W 3/14: *Paradise*

Week Eleven

M 3/19: *Paradise*

W 3/21: Literary Criticism: *Paradise* (JSTOR); **Discuss Final Project Guidelines**

Week Twelve

M 3/26: *A Mercy*

W 3/28: *A Mercy*

Week Thirteen

M 4/2: Literary Criticism: *A Mercy* (Bb); **Research Proposals Due by 11:59pm via Bb**

W 4/4: **Library Research Day with Humanities Librarian**

Week Fourteen

M 4/9: **Library Research Day with Humanities Librarian**

W 4/11: **Writing Workshop/Conferences (library)**

Week Fifteen

M 4/16: **Writing Workshop/Conferences (library)**

W 4/18: **Symposium (Literary Research Paper Due 4/25)**

Week Sixteen

M 4/23: **Symposium (Literary Research Paper Due 4/30)**

W 4/25: **Symposium (Literary Research Paper Due 5/2)**

Literary Research Paper: The rolling due dates (4/25-5/2) are based on your symposium presentation date. All papers should be submitted to Blackboard by 11:59pm on the above due dates.

Note: This syllabus reflects how I have primarily taught the course. However, in an alternative version of this class, I removed a novel from the reading list in order to expand the amount of time we could spend on each novel to 2 weeks total (3 class sessions discussing each novel and 1 literary criticism session).