

Ithaca College  
Department of English

**ENGL 220**  
**BLACK WOMEN WRITERS**

Fall 2009  
Prof. Laura Murphy

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This course will explore the writing of black women from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. We will consider the development of a black women's writing tradition over the last two centuries, but we will largely focus on major 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century authors. The course will be broken into three thematic units, each of which will put into conversation two or three authors who seem to be invested in exploring one of the following loosely-construed and overlapping concerns: the memory/history, place and geography, and politics/power of marginalization. Though many other topics will surely be explored as we read the texts, these three will guide the pairings initially.

**Required Texts**

Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*  
Ama Ata Aidoo, *Our Sister Killjoy*  
Edwidge Danticat, *Farming of Bones*  
Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills*  
Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*  
Zoe Wicomb, *David's Story*  
Suzan-Lori Parks, *Fucking-A*

**Options for obtaining the texts:**

All texts have been ordered at the school bookstore. They should be available immediately for purchase, in both used and new copies. However, I strongly encourage you to buy used books online, which can save significant money (up to 80 percent even). Amazon.com includes many vendors of used books. But alibris.com, abebooks.com, and powells.com also have an extraordinary number of used books. Shipping can take around a week, so it's best to order them all immediately. If you choose this option, I recommend trying to get the same edition of the book as the one we're using in class. Not having the book will never be considered a valid excuse for not reading.

### **Meetings and Attendance:**

Attendance and participation are integral to a worthwhile educational experience; therefore, they are both required in this course. You are allowed two absences without any explanation. Students missing more than two unexcused class meetings will be severely penalized. Students missing more than five class meetings (the equivalent of two and a half weeks) for any reason **will automatically fail the course**. Participation will comprise 10% of the course grade. Students should expect to contribute something *thoughtful* to *each* class period.

### **Assignments and Grading:**

Students will be required to write two essays during the semester as well as several short QHQs. The first paper will be a 5-page literary analysis. The second paper will be a 9- or 10-page take-home final paper which will be preceded by an annotated bibliography of the sources to be used in the final paper.

Papers are assessed on:

- clarity and organization
- analysis and intellectual engagement
- originality
- precision of argument
- evidence/substantiation
- thoughtful, measured use of sources (when appropriate)
- re-vision

On the last day of discussion for each text, students will be required to write a short, 2 page “QHQ.” QHQ stands for question-hypothesis-question. You will begin the paper by asking yourself an analytical question about the text which you have not yet been able to answer. The majority of the paper will be comprised of your attempt to formulate a hypothesis. Your short paper will end with another question that this thinking experiment has led you to. These papers may very well aid in the invention of a larger paper topic. QHQs will be due on blackboard by 10am on the morning of the class date on which it will be discussed.

The grading breakdown is as follows:

QHQs	25%
Midterm Paper (5p)	25%
Final Paper (8-10p)	30%
Participation	10%
Presentation	10%

**Late Paper Policy:**

Papers turned in after the due date will receive a lowered grade. For each day that the paper is late, the grade will be lowered one-third of a grade. Thus, an A paper turned in one day late will receive an A-. Turned in two days late, it will be a B+.

Extensions: Turning papers in on-time is integral to the learning process in this course, as feedback on papers prepares students for more significant engagement in the course and for improvement on future papers. Extensions will be granted *only* in extreme cases, and *must* be requested at least *four* days in advance of the due date to be considered. It is usually better to decide ahead of time to take the grade deduction than to expect an extension. Extensions are *rarely if ever* granted.

**Plagiarism:**

The instructor of this course has no tolerance for plagiarism of any kind. This includes, but is not limited to, copying another student's work, purchasing or in any other way procuring written work from a source online or elsewhere, utilizing published resources either word-for-word or in paraphrase, and misrepresenting the sources used for research. You will be held responsible for knowing, understanding, and complying with the college's plagiarism policy which is copied below. If a student is suspected of plagiarism, they will immediately be referred to the appropriate college authorities and will likely fail the assignment and possibly the course. If you are unclear about plagiarism, please discuss this with the instructor immediately.

Whether intended or not, plagiarism is a serious offense against academic honesty. Under any circumstances, it is deceitful to represent as one's own work, writing or ideas that belong to another person. Students should be aware of how this offense is defined. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's published or unpublished ideas, whether this use consists of directly quoted material or paraphrased ideas. Although various disciplines follow styles of documentation that differ in some details, all forms of documentation make the following demands:

- That each quotation or paraphrase be acknowledged with a footnote or in-text citation;
- That direct quotations be enclosed in quotation marks and be absolutely faithful to the wording of the source;
- That paraphrased ideas be stated in language entirely different from the language of the source;
- That a sequence of ideas identical to that of a source be attributed to that source;
- That sources of reprinted charts or graphs be cited in the text;
- That all the sources the writer has drawn from in paraphrase or direct quotation or a combination of paraphrase and quotation be listed at the end of the paper under "Bibliography," "References," or "Works Cited," whichever heading the particular style of documentation requires.

A student is guilty of plagiarism if the student fails, intentionally or not, to follow any of these standard requirements of documentation.

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

1	Aug 26	Introductions	
<i>Memory and History</i>			
2	Aug 31	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , 1-89	
	Sept 02	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , 90-161	
3	Sept 07	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
	Sept 09	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , 162-258	
4	Sept 14	Morrison, <i>Song of Solomon</i> , 259-337	<b>QHQ #1</b>
	Sept 16	Aidoo, <i>Our Sister Killjoy</i> , 1-82	
5	Sept 21	Aidoo, <i>Our Sister Killjoy</i> , 83-134	<b>QHQ #2</b>
	Sept 23	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
6	Sept 28	Danticat, <i>The Farming of Bones</i> , 1-81	
	Sept 30	Danticat, <i>The Farming of Bones</i> , 82-166	
7	Oct 5	Danticat, <i>The Farming of Bones</i> , 167-229	<b>THESIS DUE</b>
	Oct 7	Danticat, <i>The Farming of Bones</i> , 230-312	<b>QHQ #3</b>
<i>Place and Geography</i>			
8	Oct 12	Naylor, <i>Linden Hills</i> , 1-61	
	Oct 14	Naylor, <i>Linden Hills</i> , 62-141	<b>PAPER DUE</b>
9	Oct 19	Naylor, <i>Linden Hills</i> , 142-200	
	Oct 21	Naylor, <i>Linden Hills</i> , 201-304	<b>QHQ #4</b>
10	Oct 26	Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i> , 1-81	
	Oct 28	Kincaid, <i>A Small Place</i> , 1-81	<b>QHQ #5</b>
<i>Power and Politics of Marginalization</i>			
11	Nov 2	Wicomb, <i>David's Story</i> , 1-56	
	Nov 4	Wicomb, <i>David's Story</i> , 57-106	
12	Nov 9	Wicomb, <i>David's Story</i> , 107-159	
	Nov 11	Wicomb, <i>David's Story</i> , 160-213	<b>QHQ #6</b>

13    Nov 16    Parks, *Fucking-A*, 113-184  
      Nov 18    Parks, *Fucking-A*, 185-221

**PAPER TOPIC DUE**

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

14    Nov 30    Poetry and Short Story Readings (online)  
      Dec 2    Poetry and Short Story Readings (online)

**ANNOTATED BIB DUE**

15    Dec 7    PRESENTATIONS  
      Dec 9    PRESENTATIONS

**FINAL PAPER DUE ON THE DAY OF THE FINAL FOR THIS COURSE**