

LIT 4329: Toni Morrison
Spring 2025 MW 2:30-3:45 PM
Theresa M. Towner

Course Description and Requirements

This course surveys the works of Toni Morrison, the first African American winner of the Nobel Prize for literature. Morrison was a gifted commentator on American letters and culture, a composer of lyrics, a writer of children's books, and a frequently interviewed public intellectual; we will read about half of her novels and some of her nonfiction as a group and hear oral reports on selected other works. Students can expect to learn how to analyze the details of literary texts and to construct arguments based upon those details; they can also expect to be able to assess Morrison's contributions to the art of fiction. Course requirements include two in-class examinations, an oral presentation, and a comprehensive final examination. Each of these assignments counts for 25% of the course grade.

You cannot hope to pass this class if you do not complete all of the required work on time. I do not accept late papers; I do not issue grades of incomplete. This course will be conducted according to strict codes of academic honesty. All breaches of these codes will be reported to the University's judiciary officer. Penalties for deliberate cheating may include failing the assignment in question, failing the course, or suspension and expulsion from the University. Students are expected to know the University's policies and procedures on such matters, as well as those governing student services, conduct, and obligations.

My office hours are Monday from 1-2 PM and by appointment. You may telephone me at 972-883-2031 or send e-mail to tmtowner@utdallas.edu.

Texts

The following are required editions, available at the UTD Book Store and commercially.

The Bluest Eye (Vintage)

Sula (Vintage)

Song of Solomon (Vintage)

Beloved (Vintage)

A Mercy (Vintage)

God Help the Child (Vintage International)

Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (Vintage)

What Moves at the Margin (University Press of Mississippi)

LIT 4329: Toni Morrison
Spring 2025 MW 2:30-3:45 PM
Theresa M. Towner
Syllabus

22 January: Course introduction

27 January: "Recitatif" (PDF)

29 January: *The Bluest Eye*

3 February: *The Bluest Eye*

5 February: *The Bluest Eye*

10 February: *Sula*

12 February: *Sula*

17 February: First examination (covers Morrison Chronology, "Recitatif," *The Bluest Eye*, and *Sula*)

19 February: *Song of Solomon* (Ch. 1-3)

24 and 26 February: *Song of Solomon*

3 and 5 March: *Beloved*

10 March: *Beloved*

12 March: Second examination (covers *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved*)

17 and 19 March: Spring break

24 March: *A Mercy*

26 March: *A Mercy*

31 March: "Family and History," *What Moves at the Margin* (pp. 3-80)

2 April: View *Margaret Garner*

7 and 9 April: Oral reports

14 and 16 April: *God Help the Child*

21 April: Morrison interviews: Robert Stepto, "Intimate Things in Place" and Jane Bakerman, "The Seams Can't Show" (PDF)

23 April: Morrison interviews: Thomas LeClair, "The Language Must Not Sweat" and Nellie McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison" (PDF)

28 and 30 April: *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*

5 May: "The Dancing Mind" and the Nobel Lecture, *What Moves at the Margin*, pp. 187-90 and 198-207

7 May: Course review

12-16 May: Final examination (date and time to be announced)

LIT 4329: Morrison Chronology

- 1865 Civil War ends; Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolishes slavery
1868 Fourteenth Amendment establishes equal protection and due process under law
1870 Fifteenth Amendment removes race as barrier to the franchise
1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* establishes constitutionality of “separate but equal” facilities for races
1931 Chloe Ardelia (a.k.a. Anthony) Wofford born 18 February in Lorain, OH
1949 Chloe Wofford to Howard University
1953 Chloe Wofford receives BA in English from Howard
1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* declares the “separate but equal” doctrine unconstitutional
1955 Emmett Till murdered in Mississippi; Chloe Wofford receives MA in English from Cornell (thesis on Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner)
1958 Chloe Wofford marries Harold Morrison
1961 Son Harold Ford born
1962 Morrison joins writing group while teaching at Howard
1964 Son Kevin Slade born; Morrison divorced
1965 Begins work as editor for Random House; begins *The Bluest Eye*
1968 Morrison becomes senior editor for Random House (particular interest in African American writers)
1970 *The Bluest Eye*, first novel, published
1973 *Sula*
1974 *The Black Book* (editor)
1977 *Song of Solomon*: National Book Critics Circle Award
1978 Distinguished Writer, American Academy of Arts and Letters
1981 *Tar Baby*; cover of *Newsweek*
1983 “Recitatif”
1984 Albert Schweitzer Professorship of the Humanities, State University of New York at Albany
1986 *Dreaming Emmett* (play)
1987 *Beloved*
1988 *Beloved* wins Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and American Book Award
1989 Robert Goheen Professor in the Humanities, Princeton
1992 *Jazz*; *Playing in the Dark*; *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power* (editor)
1993 Nobel Prize for Literature 7 December; *Honey and Rue* (lyrics)
1994 “Four Songs” (lyrics)
1996 *The Dancing Mind*
1997 *Birth of a Nation 'hood* (editor)
1998 *Paradise*; “Spirits in the Well” (lyrics)
1999 *The Big Box* (with Slade)
2000 *Woman.Mind.Song* (lyrics); National Humanities Medal
2002 *Margaret Garner* (libretto); *The Book of Mean People* (with Slade)
2003 *Love*; *Who's Got Game: The Ant or the Grasshopper?*; *Who's Got Game: The Lion or the Mouse?* (with Slade)
2004 *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*; *Who's Got Game: The Poppy or the Snake?* (with Slade)
2005 *Who's Got Game: The Mirror or the Glass?* (with Slade)
2006, 2007 *Margaret Garner* premiers in Philadelphia, Charlotte, and New York
2008 *A Mercy: What Moves at the Margin*
2009 *Peeny Butter Fudge* (with Slade)
2010 *Little Cloud and Lady Wind* (with Slade); *The Tortoise or the Hare* (with Slade)
2011 *Desdemona* (play)
2012 *Home*; *Burn This Book*; Presidential Medal of Freedom
2015 *God Help the Child*
2017 *Race: Vintage Minis*; *The Origin of Others*
2019 Morrison dies 5 August