

Course Outline: Introduction to African American Literature

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Note for students: This short course outline is provided for planning purposes only. Course information is tentative and subject to change; the final course syllabus will be available by the first day of classes.

Course Code

AP/EN 2231 6.0A (Y) Introduction to African American Literature

Course Description

This seminar is a survey of African American literature, from the 18th century to the 21st century. Introductions to African American literature and history are sometimes framed—implicitly or explicitly—as extending “from” slavery “to” freedom. We will consider literary, intellectual and political accounts of this progressive development. What are the prevailing understandings of and assumptions around slavery and freedom? How are they expressed in literature? In other words, this introduction to African American literature is also concerned with critical, theoretical, political, and conceptual questions.

This course will stress the various multiplicities, geographies, and styles that make up African American literature across poetry, prose, drama, autobiography, fiction, non-fiction, and criticism. The reading schedule is broadly historical and chronological. The second semester will be more concerned with highlighting contemporary trends, theory, and discussions. While the focus of this course is on the so-called United States, we will often grapple with questions of diaspora, the idea Africa, international politics, and global capitalism, including the implications for our collection location in Canada. In addition to paying attention to the formal elements of literature (such as narrative, imagery, sound, rhythm, tone, figure, metaphor, etc.), other key ideas and topics include: feminism, gender, sexuality, queerness, difference, reproduction, labor, power, violence, politics, the afterlife of slavery, the vernacular, incarceration, and visibility.

Course Delivery

Delivery Mode: SEMR

This class is an in-person course held weekly at 11:30am on Mondays. A typical class will include a lecture, as well as some mix of discussion, collaborative work, writing, reading, and

listening exercises, and other active learning activities. Attendance and participation are mandatory.

Course Materials

To get a sense of what we will be reading, consult *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*.

Tentative Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
Participation	15%	Online and in-person, Asynchronous or Synchronous	Ongoing
Weekly responses	20%	Online	Weekly
Close-reading worksheet assignment	10%	Take-home	November 2026
Close-reading paper	20%	Take-home	January 2026
Workshop presentation	5%	In-person, synchronous	February 2026
Final	30%	Take-home	March 2026
	100%		

Additional Information

Category:	C
Historical Requirements:	N/A
Open To:	YR 2, 3 (EN, ENPR, CRWR students only)