



U.S. Literature - Q1: Race, Identity, & the American “Story” Mr. Neilson

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Zoom: [Mr. Neilson’s Classroom](#) (Password: reading)**

“You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, ‘You are ugly people.’ They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. ‘Yes,’ they had said. ‘You are right.’”

“Beauty was not simply something to behold; it was something one could do.”

-Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye

Overview

Since its foundation to the present day, the United States of America has been plagued by racism. This is evident in the historically persistent idea that some people are inferior to others based on their skin color. Indeed, the historical record shows us an ongoing legacy of practices justified by that idea: from institutions of dehumanizing oppression (chattel slavery) and disenfranchisement (Jim Crow segregation, voting laws, socioeconomic inequality), to various types of physical and symbolic violence (lynchings, police killings, degrading stereotypes, and psychological trauma).

Given that now, in the fall of 2020, we live in a moment when the entire world is acutely aware of Black Lives Matter, and the day-to-day issues behind that movement, there is no more timely

and relevant topic to think about and discuss in our U.S. Literature class than this one.

This quarter we will be reading Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, a novel first published in 1970. This was a time when the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement were thrown into question by the persistence of racial inequality in America. Morrison, the first African American to win the Nobel Prize in literature and the most powerful voice in American literature in the late-20th century, tells a story about race, gender, and family relationships that questions the ideals of freedom, opportunity, and the worth of the individual in the American "story."

guiding question 1: How do *unconscious* attitudes about race manifest themselves in American culture?

guiding question 2: How do individuals and communities most adversely affected by racist attitudes create forms of beauty, joy, and self worth *despite or independent of* those attitudes?

guiding question 3: How are family relationships affected by the daily experience of racial and gender inequality?

Lessons

1. *The Bluest Eye*: Context, Issues, & Style
2. *Racism, Antiracism, & You* (excerpt from Ibram X. Kendi's book *Stamped*)
3. Apprentice Sentences: Toni Morrison
4. Writing a Good Thesis Statement
5. Quotation Sandwiches
6. Topic Sentences & Transitions

Individual Work

- Professional Email (due 8/31 or 9/1) ~ 30 mins
- Summer Reading Assignment (due 9/3 or 9/4) ~ 60-90 mins
- Daily Warm Ups / Reading Responses (Schoology) ~ 10 mins each
- Apprentice Sentence I & II (#1 due 9/10 or 9/11 ; #2 due 9/28 or 29) ~ 30 mins each
- Songs of Oppression video (on Flipgrid) (due 9/24 or 9/25) ~30-60 min
- Vocabulary "Artifacts" - Choose 6 words from Vocabulary List (due 10/1 or 10/2) ~ 60-90 mins total

Group Work

- Racism, Antiracism, and You*: Group Project & Presentation (due 10/8 or 10/9) ~ 120-240 mins

Project Description: Each group will research, collect cultural artifacts, and reflect on a specific manifestation of racism in our present world. Your group will then create some form of

media (original art, movie, song, digital collage, children's book, comic book, syllabus for an elective, political poster, etc.) to present this piece to the class with commentary that expresses a vision of what needs to be changed in the way we think and act regarding this issue, and *how*.

- The "Black is Beautiful" movement (e.g. cultural norms of "racialized" beauty)
 - Police brutality towards African Americans
 - African Americans & socioeconomic inequality
 - “Beyond Barbie” - racial stereotypes and children's toys
 - Advertising that exploits racist ideas (e.g. “conspicuous consumption”)
 - Racism in professional sports
 - Black leadership in politics (connections to gender?)
 - Racial “microaggressions”
 - Black femininity in today's media
 - Other forms of discrimination (Sexism, Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Ableism, Queer/Transphobia, Classism)
- Group designed topic...? Propose to me. . .**

Assessments

- The Bluest Eye* Socratic Seminar (in class on 9/30 or 10/1)
- Literary Analysis Essay: *The Bluest Eye* (due 10/22 or 10/23) ~ 220-300 min

Readings/Film

[The Bluest Eye](#) by Toni Morrison (schedule to be posted on Schoology)
Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am (documentary film)
 Articles about, essays by, and interviews with Toni Morrison (**Honors**)

Extension Requests, Academic Integrity, Bathroom Breaks

Extension policy: Students must request extensions with their teachers at least 24 hours before the due date. Extension request contracts must be filled out and **emailed** to teachers 24 hours before the due date.

Late Work Policy: No late work accepted without an extension request.

Absentee Make-up Work Policy: Students with excused absences are allowed to submit make-up work. Assignments are due by the next class session.

Plagiarism is the copying and pasting of any material that is not your own work. This includes a full sentence or sentences of text, phrases, or key ideas from any source that is not your own, including study guides. A first instance of work that contains **any** plagiarized material will receive a “0” and asked to redo the

assignment by editing out all plagiarized content. If subsequent assignments are plagiarized, a “0” will be given and a parent conference will be held.

Bathroom Breaks: Students are allowed up to 10 minutes for a bathroom break. Students are required to send a private message to teachers to request a bathroom break. Students stay logged into Zoom but can turn their camera off. If the student does not return within 10 minutes, they will be removed from the Zoom and Ms. Ledezma or Ms. Rodriguez and your parents will be contacted.