

# English 460: The Civil War in Literature

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Office Hours: Tues and Thurs., 12:30-2:00, and by appt.  
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## Description

English 460 explores the Civil War as it has been represented in novels, drama, letters, journals, poetry and autobiographies from the 1800s through the present time. The course examines a diverse range of texts, ranging from slave narratives to letters home from a woman who during the Civil War disguised herself as a man to fight in the Union Army to the story of a woman inexplicably yanked out of the present and thrust back in time into slavery in pre-Civil War America. We will pay special attention to the larger ideological uses of the Civil War in the American literary memory, especially as it pertains to race and gender and the radical ways these categories have been reconfigured in our postmodern era.

## Books

*Kindred*, by Octavia Butler. Beacon Press, 1979.  
*Beloved*, by Toni Morrison. Penguin/Plume, 1987.  
*Flight to Canada*, by Ishmael Reed. Simon & Schuster/Scribner, 1976.  
*Gob's Grief*, by Chris Adrian. Vintage, 2000.  
*An Uncommon Soldier*, by Lauren Cook Burgess. Oxford University Press, 1994.  
*Topdog/Underdog*, by Suzan-Lori Parks. Theatre Communications Group, 2001.  
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, by Frederick Douglass, 1993.  
Various handouts

## Attendance

I expect you to attend class. Since this course only meets once a week, for any misses beyond one your final course grade will be docked by one letter.

## Plagiarism

The work you turn in should be your own. When you draw on the ideas of another writer you need to attribute and cite your source using the Modern Language Association (MLA) format. If you plagiarize in this class, you will fail. When in doubt, ask me.

## On Assignments, Requirements, and Grade Distribution

1. IN-CLASS WRITING = 20% Near the beginning of class, I will ask you to write briefly about the week's assigned reading. Very often I will leave the precise topic up to you, as I would like to know what you found interesting or notable about the readings.

2. **THE FIRST PAPER = 20%** You will prepare your first paper, 5-7 pages, on a text and topic of your own selection, for the day we are covering that selection in class. For example, if you wish to write on Octavia Butler, prepare it for February 12. If you wish to write on Ishmael Reed, prepare it for February 26. In class on the day we will be discussing "your" writer and text, you'll be expected to comment briefly (about ten to fifteen minutes) about what it is you are exploring with that writer. It could be, too, you'll have decided to prepare your report for that day as well. (That's up to you, but it might give you some good background to do it this way.) Your first draft will be due on the date your author is scheduled on the syllabus. Your final draft will be due the following Monday. That will give you the weekend following your brief comments and class discussion to get your rough draft into final shape to be turned in. (The only exceptions in due dates are for those who might wish to write on materials covered very early in the semester; if you wish to write on something you read for classes on January 15, 22, or 29, you will have until Jan. 29 to turn your first paper in.)

3. **IN-CLASS REPORT = 15%** You'll prepare one report for the class on materials assigned on the syllabus. See the separate sheet on preparing the report for the class. Note: You might consider preparing the report for the day on which "your" writer/text is up for class discussion, for that will be the target date for your first, short paper.

4. **THE SECOND PAPER, THE SEMINAR PAPER = 35%** This paper, 8-15 pages, might be a revision of your first paper, or else a new paper on a new author. Why not make this paper a revision and extension of what you did with the first one? In handling it this way, you'd provide yourself an opportunity to "workshop" the first paper, taking advantage of class comments about the materials and my own comments about your work in order to prepare a more "finished," potentially publishable paper.

5. **CLASS PARTICIPATION = 10%** Class participation of a high quality is expected. This doesn't mean you are expected to know already the materials we are covering; it does mean that you are asked to think carefully about the materials you're reading and venture sometimes in addressing questions and concerns that arise in the classroom discussion. There are few "right" and "wrong" answers in interpreting these materials; talking about them with an informed group of people like colleagues in class assists the overall learning process. Class participation helps us all learn. We will preserve what might be called "civil discourse" in this class at all times. Disagreements are okay; disparagements are not.

## **Schedule**

(Subject to change.)

1-8 Introductions

1-15 *Narrative of the Life of Douglass* (1845)  
“Introduction: A Psalm of Freedom”

1-22 Carolyn Lee Hentz, from *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854)  
George Fitzhugh, from *Southern Thought* (1857)  
Angelina Grimke, from *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (1836)

1-29 Walt Whitman, from *Specimen Days & Collect* (1883)  
Whitman, Civil War poems from *Leaves of Grass* (1867)

2-5 Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, *An Uncommon Soldier* (Letters), (1862-64)  
Mary Boykin Chesnut, from *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (1861-65)

2-12 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., from *Race, Writing, and Difference* (1986)  
Hazel V. Carby, from *Reconstructing Womanhood* (1995)  
Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (1979)

2-19 Paula Gehy, *Postmodern Literary Theory*  
Fredric Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”

2-26 Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada* (1976)

3-1 through 3-6 / Spring Break

3-11 Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Part One (1987)

3-18 Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Part Two (1987)  
Kimberly Chabot Davis, “Postmodern Blackness: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and

the End of History”

3-25 Suzan-Lori Parks, *Topdog/Underdog* (2001)

4-1 Chris Adrian, *Gob's Grief*, 1-190 (2000)

4-8 Chris Adrian, *Gob's Grief*, 191-end

4-15 Final Project Conferences / Wrap-Up

4-19- through 4-24 / Finals Week