

## I. COURSE TITLE: Teaching Selected Authors

### Contact Information

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### Office Hours:

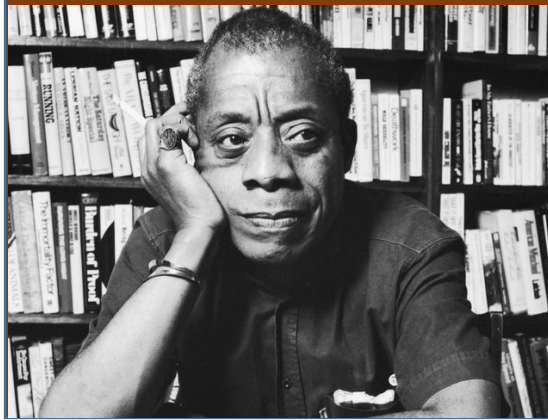
Available to meet via Zoom or  
Google chat by appointment.

### Course Information

3 Credit Hours  
WEB

## American Literature in Times of Crisis: James Baldwin and Flannery O'Connor

English 773.01 | Summer 2020



## II. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PREREQUISITE(S):

An intensive study of one or more selected authors and approaches to teaching those authors. May be repeated once for credit with a different emphasis. May include field experience. Prerequisite: permission of graduate coordinator.

## III. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students who successfully complete ENG 773 will be able to:

- A. demonstrate familiarity with key critical, contextual, and pedagogical questions surrounding the writing of James Baldwin and Flannery O'Connor;
- B. develop strategies for teaching literature in times of crisis, strategies anchored in but not limited to extensive engagement with Baldwin and O'Connor throughout the course;
- C. design classroom activities and assignments that help students to engage with literary when thinking through various crises of faith, conscience, care, and knowledge; and
- D. engage in respectful and reasoned discourse with other educators about their interpretations of and approaches to teaching American writers such as James Baldwin and Flannery O'Connor.

“What should teachers do in the classroom in times of crisis, disaster, tragedy, sorrow, and panic? Does teaching literature...demand that we rise to these occasions, and if so, how? In dark times, moments of personal and collective anguish...the clichés of our field suddenly take on startling life, and the platitudes of the humanities become credos that confront us with real choices.”

Elaine Showalter, *Teaching Literature*

“The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around.”

James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers”

#### IV. CONTENT OUTLINE:

Long before it went viral on social media, the image of the “life changing” English teacher proved to be a durable fixture of the American educational imagination. From Robin Williams standing on desks (and reinforcing tropes about masculinized charisma in literary pedagogy) in *Dead Poets Society* to the shadowy “Mr. Philips” from the popular series *Riverdale*, English teachers routinely receive both acclaim and blame for the emotional, interpersonal, and social development of their students.



riley

@EndOfDaysWoman

did EVERYONE have an English teacher that changed their life?

2:13 PM · 24 Apr 20 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

56K Retweets 365K Likes

“What are we doing here,” asks novelist Marilynne Robinson in a 2017 essay for *The New York Review of Books*, “we professors of English?” What ideals and circumstances vindicate the teaching of literature today? “Our project is often dismissed as elitist,” she laments, yet “the teaching we do is what in America we have always called liberal education, education appropriate to free people, very much including those old Iowans who left the university to return to the hamlet or the farm.” Even *Critical Inquiry*, one of the discipline’s headiest theory journals, recently published an article that champions this image of the “life changing” English teacher. “[W]e face our students and our publics and say: We will show you a better way to live” (Clune, “Judgment and Equality”). Whether or not we agree with this job description, the role we are given to perform is routinely that of a secular calling turned quasi-spiritual vocation where we face our classrooms and, like Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo,” exclaim: “You must change your life.”

This course proposes that instead of trying to decide whether the “life changing” English teacher is a cliché or a calling, we should investigate how the relationship between the work we teach and the contexts in which students learn enables such a picture to emerge. Specifically, we will consider how the teaching of literature might facilitate learning during pivotal periods of personal and collective crisis. Our guides through this process will be two postwar American writers who seem to share little in common: James Baldwin and Flannery O’Connor. Baldwin’s work exemplifies the development of African American literature a generation after the Harlem Renaissance, infusing this tradition with the rhetoric of the Black church and the pangs of queer desire. O’Connor’s writing, by contrast, smuggles a violently redemptive Catholic imagination into the labyrinths of the Southern Gothic, even as it embodies what Mark McGurl has called “the program era” of American literature. Yet both writers share an insistence upon plunging their readers into the moral and epistemological crises of their characters and communities. As we shoulder through our own time of unprecedented crisis, we will read Baldwin and O’Connor and ask: What “life changing” encounters between readers and texts might they help us to engender today?

**V. INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES:** In this course, students will:

- A. read all assigned texts carefully, commenting on all readings via online class discussion;
- B. write two short position papers;
- C. write two responses to classmates' position papers; and
- D. develop a self-directed, research-based final project that links the course content to their own needs and experiences as teachers.

This is an **asynchronous** online course, meaning that we will not have scheduled meetings as a class. There are, however, regular deadlines built into the course. If your summer schedule will require some flexibility with these deadlines, please keep me informed with as much notice as possible.

Despite being an online class, this will still be a *discussion-driven*, not lecture-driven, course. I will occasionally post short videos and notes to Canvas in order to provide background information or explain confusing concepts. For the most part, however, our conversation will take place on the Canvas discussion board. I will also be available throughout the course to meet one-on-one via Zoom.

**VI. FIELD, CLINICAL, AND/OR LABORATORY EXPERIENCES:** None

**VII. TEXTS AND RESOURCES:**

***Required Texts:***

- Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room*. (Vintage, 2013). ISBN: 978-0345806567
- Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. (Vintage, 2013). ISBN: 978-0345806543
- Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man: Stories*. (Vintage, 1995). ISBN: 978-0679761792
- Baldwin, James. *If Beale Street Could Talk*. (Vintage, 2006). ISBN: 978-0307275936
- O'Connor, Flannery. *The Complete Stories*. (FSG Classics, 1971). ISBN: 978-0374515362
- O'Connor, Flannery. *Wise Blood*. (FSG Classics, 2007). ISBN: 978-0374530631
- Additional required readings will be posted as PDF files on Canvas.

***Films:***

- *I am Not Your Negro*. (Free streaming with Amazon Prime; \$0.99 to rent on YouTube.)
- *If Beale Street Could Talk*. (Free streaming with Amazon Prime; \$3.99 to rent on YouTube.)
- *Wise Blood*. (Free to stream on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qYWD\\_akRvA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qYWD_akRvA))

***Recommended Websites, Books, and Resources:***

- Pedagogy and American Literary Studies (<http://teachingpals.wordpress.com>)
- *American Literature* special issue (89.2) – “Pedagogy: Critical Practices for a Changing World” (<https://read.dukeupress.edu/american-literature/issue/89/2>)
- *Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice* (<https://www.cpcc.edu/teaching-american-literature-journal-theory-and-practice>)
- The OWL (Online Writing Lab) at Purdue (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>)
- *MLA Handbook* (8<sup>th</sup> edition)

## VIII. EVALUATION AND GRADING PROCEDURES:

Grades in this course will be assigned through a modified form of “contract grading.” This system enables grades in a course driven by reading, writing, and discussion to hinge on a student’s overall contribution to the class instead of the accumulation of points from assignment to assignment. Your final grade for the course will be based on the following assignments, each of which will have a separate assignment sheet with details and due dates. Instead of percentages or letter grades, all assignments will receive one of the following assessments: “exceeds expectations,” “meets expectations,” “does not meet expectations,” or “unacceptable.”

- Regular participation in Canvas discussion groups, including weekly responses to instructor’s prompts and classmates’ comments.
- Two position papers (~3 pages each).
- Two responses to classmates’ position papers (1-2 pages each).
- One self-directed, research-based final project (length may vary depending on project).

Grades for the course will be distributed as follows:

**B:** Consistent, weekly participation in Canvas discussion groups. All assignments meet expectations.

**A:** All requirements for a B, plus thorough and exemplary participation in Canvas discussion groups. At least one of the following exceeds expectations: (1) both position papers, (2) the final project.

**C:** All requirements for a B, but either (1) weekly participation in Canvas discussion groups is insufficient, (2) one of the shorter written assignments (position papers or responses) is unacceptable or incomplete, (3) two of the shorter written assignments (position papers or responses) do not meet expectations, or (4) the final project does not meet expectations OR process components of the final project (prospectus, draft) are not completed.

**D:** All requirements for a C, but meets more than one of the criteria above for reducing a B to a C.

**E:** No participation in Canvas discussion group, final project incomplete or unacceptable, or both position papers incomplete or unacceptable.

I will post instructions for all writing assignments to Canvas. Assignments will be returned, with comments, through Canvas. (A graded assignment marked “3” in the Canvas gradebook exceeds expectations; “2” meets expectations; “1” does not meet expectations; and “0” is incomplete or unacceptable.) I will update your grades on Canvas regularly, and it is up to you to check your grades.

### *Policy on Revisions and Late Work:*

Any essay that you submitted complete and on time may be revised as many times as you wish. Late or incomplete essays will receive no higher grade than “does not meet expectations,” and late / incomplete work may not be revised.

### *Extensions:*

Sometimes life interferes with your ability to turn in your best work. (This is, after all, a course themed around the question of learning during times of crisis.) You may request an extension on any essay. Extended essays will be graded as though they were submitted on time, but they cannot be revised. With the exception of emergencies, you must request an extension within 24 hours of the deadline.

**IX. ATTENDANCE POLICY:** As an asynchronous online course, there is no attendance policy. Regular participation in your Canvas discussion groups is required, however, and it is important that you keep up with all deadlines and notify me at any point that you are worried about falling behind.

**X. ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY:**

Murray State University takes seriously its moral and educational obligation to maintain high standards of academic honesty and ethical behavior. Instructors are expected to evaluate students' academic achievements accurately, as well as ascertain that work submitted by students is authentic and the result of their own efforts, and consistent with established academic standards. Students are obligated to respect and abide by the basic standards of personal and professional integrity.

**Violations of Academic Honesty include:**

**Cheating** - Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized information such as books, notes, study aids, or other electronic, online, or digital devices in any academic exercise; as well as unauthorized communication of information by any means to or from others during any academic exercise.

**Fabrication and Falsification** - Intentional alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification involves changing information whereas fabrication involves inventing or counterfeiting information.

**Multiple Submission** - The submission of substantial portions of the same academic work, including oral reports, for credit more than once without authorization from the instructor.

**Plagiarism** - Intentionally or knowingly representing the words, ideas, creative work, or data of someone else as one's own in any academic exercise, without due and proper acknowledgement.

Instructors should outline their expectations that may go beyond the scope of this policy at the beginning of each course and identify such expectations and restrictions in the course syllabus. When an instructor receives evidence, either directly or indirectly, of academic dishonesty, he or she should investigate the instance. The faculty member should then take appropriate disciplinary action.

Disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to the following:

- 1) Requiring the student(s) to repeat the exercise or do additional related exercise(s).
- 2) Lowering the grade or failing the student(s) on the particular exercise(s) involved.
- 3) Lowering the grade or failing the student(s) in the course.

**If the disciplinary action results in the awarding of a grade of *E* in the course, the student(s) may not drop the course.**

Faculty reserve the right to invalidate any exercise or other evaluative measures if substantial evidence exists that the integrity of the exercise has been compromised. Faculty also reserve the right to document in the course syllabi further academic honesty policy elements related to the individual disciplines.

A student may appeal the decision of the faculty member with the department chair in writing within five working days. Note: If, at any point in this process, the student alleges that actions have taken place that may be in violation of the Murray State University Non-Discrimination Statement, this process must be suspended and the matter be directed to the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Access. Any appeal will be forwarded to the appropriate university committee as determined by the Provost.

## **XI. NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

### **Policy Statement**

Murray State University endorses the intent of all federal and state laws created to prohibit discrimination. Murray State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, age, veteran status, or disability in employment or application for employment, admissions, or the provision of services and provides, upon request, reasonable accommodation including auxiliary aids and services necessary to afford individuals with disabilities equal access to participate in all programs and activities.

In particular and without limiting the preceding and pursuant to and consistent with the requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its regulations 34 CFR 100 et seq.; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its regulations 34 CFR 104; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 USC 1681 et seq., and its regulations 34 CFR 106 et seq; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and its regulations 34 CFR 110, Murray State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, or age in its educational programs and activities. This non-discrimination in education programs and activities extends to employment and admissions and to recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student services, athletics, and housing. Murray State is required by Title IX and 34 CFR part 106 not to discriminate on the basis of sex and the prohibition against sex discrimination specifically includes a prohibition of sexual harassment and sexual violence. Examples of prohibited sexual harassment and sexual violence can be found in the “Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment” which can be accessed via the link referenced in Appendix I.

For more information concerning the application of these provisions may be referred to: 1) the Executive Director of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Access/ Murray State University Title IX Coordinator, Murray State University, 103 Wells Hall, Murray, KY 42071 Telephone: (270) 809-3155 Fax: (270) 809-6887; TDD: (270) 809-3361; Email: [msu.titleix@murraystate.edu](mailto:msu.titleix@murraystate.edu).

### **Students with Disabilities**

**Students with Disabilities:** Students requiring special assistance due to a disability should visit the Office of Student Disability Services immediately for assistance with accommodations. For more information, students with disabilities should contact the Office of Student Disability Services, 423 Wells Hall, Murray, KY 42071. Telephone: 270-809-2018 (Voice) 270-809- 5889 (TDD)

## COURSE SCHEDULE – Subject to Change

\*Indicates that the assignment is posted to Canvas as a PDF.

### Unit 1. Literature, Criticism, and Education (July 1-7)

Read:

- James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” and “A Talk to Teachers”\*
- Flannery O’Connor, “The Nature and Aim of Fiction” and “The Teaching of Literature”\*
- Chad Harbach, “MFA vs. NYC”
- I.A. Richards, excerpts from *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment*\*
- Robert E. Scholes, excerpts from *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*\*
- Rita Felski, excerpts from *The Uses of Literature*\*
- Elaine Showalter, excerpts from *Teaching Literature*\*

Watch documentary: *I am Not Your Negro*

Write: Introductions and discussion group comments by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, July 7.

### Unit 2. Crises of Faith: Religion, Secularism, and Spirituality in Public Spaces (July 8-13)

Read:

- James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.
- Flannery O’Connor, “The River,” “Good Country People,” and “Judgment Day.”
- Douglas Field, “Pentecostalism and All That Jazz: Tracing James Baldwin’s Religion”\*
- Heather Thomson-Bunn, “Mediating Discursive Worlds: When Academic Norms and Religious Belief Conflict”
- Michael Warner, “Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood”\*

Write: Discussion group comments (7/13). Group A position papers (7/13) and Group B responses (7/15).  
**Final project prospectus due by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, July 12.**

### Unit 3. Crises of Conscience: Identity and Authenticity in the Representation of Self and Other (July 14-19)

Read:

- James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*
- Flannery O’Connor, “A Temple of the Holy Ghost,” “Parker’s Back,” and “A Late Encounter with the Enemy”
- Cynthia Barounis, “‘Not the Usual Pattern’: James Baldwin, Homosexuality, and the *DSM*”\*
- Kaelin B.C. Alexander, “Teaching Discomfort? Uncomfortable Attachments, Ambivalent Identifications”\*
- Paul Elie, “How Racist Was Flannery O’Connor?” \*

Write: Discussion group comments (7/19). Group B position papers (7/19) and Group A responses (7/21).

#### **Unit 4. Crises of Care: Imagining Family, Community, and State through Literature (July 20-27)**

Read:

- James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*
- Flannery O'Connor, "Everything that Rises Must Converge" and "The Displaced Person"
- Robert J. Corber, "Romancing Beale Street"\*
- Nicole King, "'Getting in Conversation': Teaching African American Literature and Training Critical Thinkers"\*
- Anna Kornbluh, "Academe's Coronavirus Shock Doctrine"\*

Watch: Barry Jenkins's film adaptation of *If Beale Street Could Talk*

Write: Discussion group comments (7/27). Group A position papers (7/20) and Group B responses (7/29).  
**Final project draft due by 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, July 26.**

#### **Unit 5. Crises of Knowledge: Critical Thinking and Ideology Critique in a "Post-Truth" Age (July 28-August 3)**

Read:

- Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*
- James Baldwin, "The Outing," "Previous Condition," "Sonny's Blues," and "Going to Meet the Man"
- Steve Pinkerton, "Profaning the American Religion: Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*"\*
- Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern"\*
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You"\*

Watch: John Huston's film adaptation of *Wise Blood*

Write: Discussion group comments (8/3). Group B position papers (7/31) and Group A responses (8/3).  
**Final projects due by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, August 4.**