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Course to be Globalized: ENG 231: American Literature I

Description of the course:

This course covers selected works in American literature from its beginnings to 1865. Emphasis is on historical background, cultural context, and literary analysis of selected prose, poetry, and drama. Upon completion, students should be able to interpret, analyze, and respond to literary works in their historical and cultural contexts. This course has been approved to satisfy the Comprehensive Articulation Agreement for the general education core requirement in humanities/fine arts.

This is a Universal General Education Transfer Component (UGETC) course.

Description of the module:

This module will introduce students to pre-colonial African art and cultures so they can gain a better understanding of American slave narratives. We will focus on the ways in which enslaved men and women had to compromise their traditional African cultures to survive their captivity and appeal to a white American and European audience. We will explore how enslaved people maintained their African traditions and created new cultures and traditions that had a profound impact on American literature.

Global Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will learn about the values and traditions of several traditional African cultures and compare/contrast these values and traditions with those of 18th and 19th-century America.
2. Students will encounter works of pre-colonial African art and literature and analyze these works to determine the values and traditions they represent.
3. Students will learn about important concepts, such as creolization and double-consciousness, that will help them better understand the complex struggles that exist within slave narratives.
4. Students will encounter several slave narratives and use their knowledge of African traditions and cultures to analyze these narratives, focusing on the tension between the authors' unique identities and cultures while appealing to white American and Western European audiences.

Activities:

1. Brief Introduction to African Culture and Art

Goal: The goal of this activity is to give students a small sampling from the great history of African culture and art. I hope that this will help students relate to the enslaved people we will talk about later and provide context to the great tragedy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Procedure: This activity will take place after students are introduced to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Slave Narrative as a genre. I will start with a lecture introducing students to several African cultures (Kingdom of Benin, Kingdom of Kongo, Mali Empire) that thrived before the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Next, I'll show the class several works of art paired with these cultures (a Benin Bronze, an ivory horn or textile from Kongo, a recording of a performance in the griot/jeli tradition to connect with Mali). We'll discuss the features of the works and how the works reflect the lives and values of the people living in these cultures. We'll use a think-pair-share activity where group work transitions to a larger discussion.

Assignment: To follow up, I will ask students to write a brief reflection essay about what they learned about African culture through the art we encountered in class.

Resources:

Afropop Worldwide, PRI, afropop.org. Includes many resources on Griot music.

Asante, Molefi Kete. *History of Africa: the Quest for Eternal Harmony*. Routledge, 2018.

Blier, Suzanne Preston. *Royal Arts of Africa : The Majesty of Form*. Laurence King, 1998.

British Museum, Trustees of the British Museum, britishmuseum.org/. Searchable database of art, including many from pre-colonial Africa.

Dathorne, O. R. *The Black Mind: A History of African Literature*. NED - New edition ed., University of Minnesota Press, 1974. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttts930.

Fromont, Cecile. *Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo*. UNC Press, 2017.

Grass Roots: African Origins of an American Art, Museum of African Art, <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/grassroots/intro.html>. Includes teacher's guide.

Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/toah/. Connects art to essays that help provide context.

“Kongo: Power and Majesty.” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*,
www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2015/kongo.

2. Slave Art/Culture and Creolization

Goal: The goal of this activity is to introduce students to some of the art and culture of the enslaved men and women in the Americas, and to introduce students to the process of creolization. I hope this activity helps students see the destructive nature of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, recognize the resilience and resourcefulness of the enslaved people, and get a glimpse of the complex processes that create cultures.

Procedure: This activity will start with a lecture based on Sterling Stuckey’s “Slavery and the Circle of Culture,” the introduction to *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. I will introduce several touchstones of slave culture that are highlighted in Stuckey’s introduction and talk about the importance of the African past to the enslaved people in the Americas. Next, I will introduce students to the process of creolization, and explain how understanding that process helps provide context for the slave narratives we will encounter later.

Assignment: To follow up, I will ask students to write a brief reflection essay about how they might see African slave culture and/or creolization in their lives today.

Resources:

Sidbury, James. “Globalization, Creolization, and the Not-So-Peculiar Institution.” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2007, pp. 617–630. *JSTOR*, JSTOR,
www.jstor.org/stable/27649484.

Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*, Oxford UP, *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 2013,
www.oxfordscholarship.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199931675.001.0001/acprof-9780199931675.

3. Double Consciousness and the White Mask

Goal: This activity will give students a context for understanding the slave narrative as more than just a straightforward account of a historical experience. The slave narrative can also provide us with deeper insights into how the enslaved people navigated difficult power structures and relationships.

Procedure: This module will take place after our introduction to the Enlightenment and after we've encountered some literature written by American Enlightenment thinkers. As homework, students will read "'I Whiten My Face, That They Might Not Know Me': Race and Identity in Olaudah Equiano's Slave Narrative" by Ronald Paul and selections from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. Paul's article introduces the concepts of double consciousness as formulated by W. E. B. DuBois and the white mask as formulated by Franz Fanon and applies these ideas to Equiano's slave narrative. In class, we will have a discussion about double consciousness and the white mask to make sure students understand these ideas. Next, students will be assigned to groups where they will try to find evidence of double consciousness and the white mask in Equiano's text. Each group will be responsible for a part of the reading from Equiano's narrative that they had to complete for class. The class will conclude with the groups leading a discussion about the passages they were assigned.

Assignment: To follow up, I will ask students to write a brief reflection essay about how the concepts of double consciousness and the white mask might help them understand the world around them.

Resources:

Du Bois, W., and Eugene F. Provenzo. *The Illustrated Souls of Black Folk*. Paradigm Publishers, 2005.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Pluto, 2008.

Moore, T. Owens. "A Fanonian Perspective on Double Consciousness." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2005, pp. 751–762. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40034879.

Paul, Ronald. "'I Whiten My Face, That They Might Not Know Me': Race and Identity in Olaudah Equiano's Slave Narrative." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 39, no. 6, 2009, pp. 848–864. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40282603.

4. Excerpts from Captivity Narratives

Goal: This activity is designed to give students a sampling of the great variety of enslaved people's experiences and how they communicated their experiences. We will also talk about some of the factors that influenced how these these experiences were communicated to a contemporaneous audience. .

Procedure: This activity will take place over several class periods. Before each class period, students will read several selections from a variety of slave narratives. I will start each class with a brief introduction to the authors we are encountering that day and a brief overview of some of the factors that influenced each author's particular experience. For instance, we will talk about the influence of the abolitionist movement on each author. After my brief introduction, we will

take a close look at the literature, thinking about how the idea we learned in activities 1-3 help provide context for the passages.

Assignment: In addition to possible reading quizzes and studying these passages for identification questions on exams, students will be asked to write a brief reflection essay after completing this activity.

Resources:

Slave Narratives:

Baquaqua, Mahommah Gardo. *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*. Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007.

Douglass, Frederick. *My bondage and my freedom*. Modern Library, 2007.

Douglass, Frederick, and Harriet A. Jacobs. *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*. Random House Digital, Inc., 2000.

Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. Broadview Press, 2001.

Grimes, William. *Life of William Grimes: The Runaway Slave: Brought Down to the Present Time*. Academic Affairs Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000.

Jacobs, Harriet Ann. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Smith, Venture. *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture: a Native of Africa, but Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America, Related by Himself*, docsouth.unc.edu/neh/venture2/menu.html

Other Resources:

Bontemps, Arna, ed. *Five Black Lives: The Autobiographies of Venture Smith, James Mars, William Grimes, The Rev. GW Offley, James L. Smith*. Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Campbell, Donna M. "The Slave, Freedom, or Liberation Narrative." *Literary Movements*. Dept. of English, Washington State University. <https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/slave.htm>

North American Slave Narratives. Documenting the American South. The University Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>

5. Group Project

Procedure: This assignment will be submitted near the end of the semester. Students will be assigned a slave narrative to read (Equiano, Douglass, or Jacobs). In groups, students will craft and deliver formal presentations on these narratives, answering several key questions about the works' structure, influence, and the tension between traditional African culture and the culture of their captors. Students will be expected to explore several key passages as they talk about how the narrative expresses ideas possibly derived from traditional African cultures while struggling to appeal to an audience from the dominant culture. As a class, we will discuss the differences in approach we find and explore what these differences tell us about the authors, their time periods, and their circumstances.

6. Bonus

We'll also explore several selections from contemporary literature that explore the same historical situations from a more contemporary perspective.

Gyasi, Yaa. *Homegoing*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

Ndibe, Okey. *Foreign Gods, Inc.* Soho Press, 2014.

Whitehead, Colson. *The Underground Railroad : A Novel*. Doubleday, 2016.