

ENG 358: Death in the South

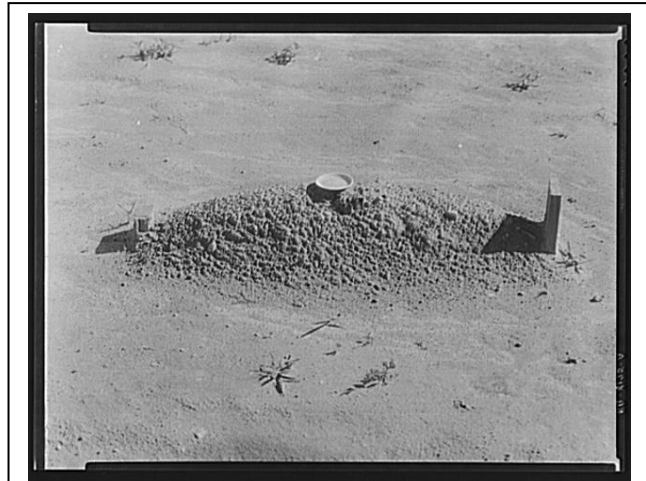
Death reveals much about a culture's values. In the South, a region known for its violence, religiosity, and extended families, death plays a prominent role in many novels. This semester, we will read several books and discuss the depictions of how a person dies, how their body is buried, how their life is remembered, and how their community responds to their loss.

Professor

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Course Objectives

- To read and discuss texts portraying death in the South.
- To learn techniques for literary research and criticism.
- To cultivate skills in reading comprehension, analysis, and critical thinking.
- To practice oral and written communication.



Walker Evans, "Sharecropper's Grave," Hale County, Alabama, 1935

Course Requirements & Grading Policies

English 358 is a discussion-based course that uses a modified seminar format. Your success in this course depends upon attending every session prepared to contribute to our mutual understanding of the text. Attendance constitutes 20% of your course grade. Attendance grades are computed according to the following scale:

Absence	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grade	100	97	93	85	75	60	40	20	0	failure

Entering class after attendance has been taken will count as a tardy, and three tardies will count as an absence. Missing class for a verifiable family emergency, participation in a university-sanctioned athletic event, or religious holidays will not result in a deduction from your final grade, but it is your responsibility to inform me of your absence.

During the semester I will administer several unannounced quizzes that will cover the reading assigned up to the day of the quiz. Quizzes constitute 20% of your course grade. You may replace up to three quizzes by writing replacement assignments. The replacement assignment requires that you write a

three hundred word synopsis of the reading assignment due the day of the missed quiz. Replacement assignments should be submitted on the day of the second class meeting after the missed quiz. Any missed quizzes beyond the three replacement assignments will factor into your quiz grade as a zero.

Your other assignments will allow you to practice your interpretive skills and to develop a significant level of expertise on the literature. You will deliver an eight-minute presentation on a book related to the day's reading assignment. The presentation will constitute 12% of your course grade. One week after your presentation, you will submit an eight-hundred word review of your book, and the review will constitute 12% of your course grade. You will also write a close reading analysis of a passage of a book, which will constitute 12% of your course grade. Your most significant assignment will be a research-based interpretive assignment, which will constitute the remaining 24%.

Papers will be submitted to my email, davis_da@mercer.edu, by 6:00 pm on the due date. I will grade the paper electronically in Microsoft Word and return it with embedded comments. Papers will be returned to the initiating address, so be sure to send the paper from your own email account.

You may rewrite and resubmit a written assignment after it has been graded. Revised papers should be submitted at the beginning of the class meeting immediately after original papers have been returned. Revised papers should include a self-critical analysis that explains how the paper has been improved. In cases of revision, the revised grade will be added to the original grade and averaged together for the overall paper grade. Keep in mind that revising means more than correcting minor errors. In fact, a cursory revision could result in a lower grade. Papers submitted after the due date will automatically receive an F, but they may be revised to improve the final grade.

The students of Mercer University have a long tradition of honorable conduct, and I expect all students in this class to continue that tradition. Cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic misconduct will result in prosecution from the honor court, who may censure, suspend, or expel a guilty student. If you ever have any concerns about plagiarism, please consult me, and I will be happy to discuss your situation confidentially.

Students requiring accommodations for a disability should inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting or as soon as possible. The instructor will refer you to the Disability Support Services Coordinator to document your disability, determine eligibility for accommodations under the ADA/AA/Section 504 and to request a Faculty Accommodation Form. Disability accommodations or status will not be indicated on academic transcripts. In order to receive accommodations in a class, students with sensory, learning, psychological, physical or medical disabilities must provide their instructor with a Faculty Accommodation Form to sign. Students must return the signed form to the Disability Services Coordinator. A new form must be requested each semester. Students with a history of a disability, perceived as having a disability, or with a current disability who do not wish to use academic accommodations are also strongly encouraged to register with the Disability Services Coordinator and request a Faculty Accommodation Form each semester. For further information,

please contact Carole Burrowbridge, Disability Services Coordinator, at 301-2778 or visit the Disability Support Services website at <http://www.mercer.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices>

In an ongoing effort to improve the quality of instruction, each student enrolled in this course is required to complete an end-of-semester course evaluation, to be administered on blackboard during the last week of class. Students failing to submit the evaluation will be assigned the grade of "Incomplete," which will automatically turn into an "F" if the evaluation is not submitted by the midterm of the very next semester.

As a final note, I realize that you are busy and that unexpected crises sometimes arise, but as a general rule I do not give extensions on any assignments. I also do not excuse absences. If you have a major emergency or extended illness, you should contact Associate Dean Ed Weintraut to intervene on your behalf. I do not ever give extra credit assignments.

Course Schedule

January 6	Course Introduction
January 8	James Agee, <i>A Death in the Family</i> , 3-52
January 10	Agee, 53-100
January 13	Agee, 103-162
January 15	Agee, 163-222
January 17	Agee, 225-310
January 20	MLK Holiday
January 22	Eudora Welty, <i>The Optimist's Daughter</i> , 1-45
January 24	Welty, 46-93
January 27	Welty, 93-155
January 29	Welty, 156-180
January 31	William Faulkner, <i>As I Lay Dying</i> , 1-40
February 3	Faulkner, 41-81
February 5	Faulkner, 82-122
February 7	Faulkner, 123-165
February 10	Faulkner, 166-209
February 12	Class cancelled
February 14	Faulkner, 210-261
February 17	Lillian Smith, <i>Strange Fruit</i> , 1-63
February 19	Smith, 63-116
February 21	Smith, 116-183
February 24-28	No class
March 3	Smith, 184-240
March 5	Smith, 240-310
March 7	Smith, 310-371
March 10-14	Spring Break
March 17	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson before Dying</i> , 1-50
March 19	Gaines, 51-102
March 21	Gaines, 103-151
March 24	Gaines, 152-203
March 26	Gaines, 204-256
March 28	Randall Kenan, <i>A Visitation of Spirits</i> , 1-44

March 31	Kenan, 45-103
April 2	Kenan, 104-168
April 4	Kenan, 169-208
April 7	Kenan, 209-257
April 9	Matthew Guinn, <i>The Resurrectionist</i> , 1-48
April 11	BEAR Day
April 14	Guinn, 49-107 Abstracts due
April 16	Guinn, 108-157
April 18	Good Friday
April 21	Guinn, 158-218
April 23	Guinn, 219-282
April 25	Writing Workshop

Course Assignments

Presentation

You will give an eight-minute presentation on an assigned book from the list below related to the day's class discussion.

After class on the day of your presentation, I will give you a brief critique on the four key criteria of a presentation: structure, content, delivery, and interest. A good presentation has a clear structure with a discernible beginning, middle, and end, and it demonstrates mastery of the book's content. You should deliver your presentation effectively with a clear voice, direct eye contact, and confident body language. Most importantly, your presentation should be interesting, since your classmates have to listen to it—whether they want to or not.

Presentation List

Date	Class reading	Presentation book	Student
January 17	Agee	Becker, <i>Denial of Death</i>	
January 24	Welty, 46-93	Jalland, <i>Death in the Victorian Family</i>	
January 27	Welty, 93-155	Mitford, <i>American Way of Death Revisited</i>	
January 29	Welty, 156-180	Farrell, <i>Inventing the American Way of Death</i>	
February 3	Faulkner, 41-81	Derrida, <i>The Gift of Death</i>	
February 5	Faulkner, 82-122	Weir, <i>Death in Literature</i>	
February 7	Faulkner, 123-165	Matthews, <i>Faulkner: Seeing through the South</i>	
February 10	Faulkner, 166-209	Norman, <i>Dead Women Talking</i>	
February 12	Faulkner, 210-261	Gwin, <i>The Feminine and Faulkner</i>	
February 17	Smith	Smith, <i>Killers of the Dream</i>	

February 21	Smith	Tolnay, <i>A Festival of Violence</i>	
March 3	Smith	Gunning, <i>Race, Rape and Lynching</i>	
March 7	Smith	Wood, <i>Lynching and Spectacle</i>	
March 19	Gaines, 51-102	Banner, <i>The Death Penalty</i>	
March 24	Gaines, 152-203	Bedau, <i>Debating the Death Penalty</i>	
March 26	Gaines, 204-256	Prejean, <i>Dead Man Walking</i>	
March 31	Kenan, 45-103	Bowes, <i>Magical Realism</i>	
April 4	Kenan, 169-208	Hoefler, <i>Apocalypse South</i>	
April 7	Kenan, 209-257	Hayes, <i>Forged in the Fiery Furnace</i>	
April 14	Guinn, 49-107	Guinn, <i>After Southern Modernism</i>	
April 16	Guinn, 108-157	Blakely, <i>Bones in the Basement</i>	

Book Review

Seven days after your presentation, you will submit an eight hundred word review of your book. Your review should describe and evaluate the book's content, not merely summarize the book. Keep in mind for the review that you are an expert writing for a general audience.

Close Reading

Analyze a passage of an assigned text, offering your own interpretation of its technique, symbolism, and meaning in eight hundred words.

- Eudora Welty, *The Optimist's Daughter*, "bird in the house," 163-169, January 29
- William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, "Addie's speech," 169-176, February 10
- Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson before Dying*, "Jefferson's diary," 226-234, March 26
- Randall Kenan, *A Visitation of Spirits*, "hog killing," 6-10, March 28

Interpretive Research Essay

The theme for this year's Society for the Study of Southern Literature meeting is "southern deathways," and they are looking for essays that examine how writers have portrayed death in the South.

They request 500 word abstracts by April 14, and 3,000 to 3,500 word papers are due on the day of our final exam, Friday, May 2, at 6:00 pm. They seek essays that argue a unique and provocative thesis, engage a vibrant scholarly conversation, use sources responsibly and accurately, and aggressively interpret one or more texts.