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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Phone: (478) 538-6471

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.

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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absence</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>failure</td>
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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 your 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 ADAAA/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, *A Death in the Family*, 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, *The Optimist’s Daughter*, 1-45
January 24   Welty, 46-93
January 27   Welty, 93-155
January 29   Welty, 156-180
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, *Strange Fruit*, 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, *A Lesson before Dying*, 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, *A Visitation of Spirits*, 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, *The Resurrectionist*, 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Class reading</th>
<th>Presentation book</th>
<th>Student</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 17</td>
<td>Agee</td>
<td>Becker, <em>Denial of Death</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>January 24</td>
<td>Welty, 46-93</td>
<td>Jalland, <em>Death in the Victorian Family</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>Welty, 93-155</td>
<td>Mitford, <em>American Way of Death Revisited</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>January 29</td>
<td>Welty, 156-180</td>
<td>Farrell, <em>Inventing the American Way of Death</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Faulkner, 41-81</td>
<td>Derrida, <em>The Gift of Death</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 5</td>
<td>Faulkner, 82-122</td>
<td>Weir, <em>Death in Literature</em></td>
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<td>February 7</td>
<td>Faulkner, 123-165</td>
<td>Matthews, <em>Faulkner: Seeing through the South</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>Faulkner, 166-209</td>
<td>Norman, <em>Dead Women Talking</em></td>
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<td>February 12</td>
<td>Faulkner, 210-261</td>
<td>Gwin, <em>The Feminine and Faulkner</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Smith, <em>Killers of the Dream</em></td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Author</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 21</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Tolnay, <em>A Festival of Violence</em></td>
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<td>March 3</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Gunning, <em>Race, Rape and Lynching</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 7</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Wood, <em>Lynching and Spectacle</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>Gaines</td>
<td>Banner, <em>The Death Penalty</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>Gaines</td>
<td>Bedau, <em>Debating the Death Penalty</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>Gaines</td>
<td>Prejean, <em>Dead Man Walking</em></td>
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<td>March 31</td>
<td>Kenan</td>
<td>Bowes, <em>Magical Realism</em></td>
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<td>April 4</td>
<td>Kenan</td>
<td>Hoefer, <em>Apocalypse South</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>Kenan</td>
<td>Hayes, <em>Forged in the Fiery Furnace</em></td>
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<td>April 14</td>
<td>Guinn</td>
<td>Guinn, <em>After Southern Modernism</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>April 16</td>
<td>Guinn</td>
<td>Blakely, <em>Bones in the Basement</em></td>
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**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.

- 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.