

LI 565: Southern Literature
Spring 2012: TR 11:00–12:15 (GB 315)
Dr. Christopher Rieger
Southeast Missouri State University
Office Hours: MWF 9–10, TR 9:30–11 and by appointment
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Course Description

This course is focused on Southern writers, Southern literature, and Southern culture. However, these texts cover a wide variety of themes and topics that we will explore in discussion, presentations, and written assignments. Indeed, some questions we will explore include: What is the South? Where does our notion of the South come from? Is there such a thing as Southern literature? The class includes both upper-level undergraduates and graduate students. Therefore, a large degree of student participation in each class is expected. Lectures will be kept to a minimum and students will be expected to lead the class discussions on occasion and to participate in discussions regularly. The reading load will be fairly heavy, and you are expected to read and be prepared for each class.

Course Texts

The Literature of the American South (Norton Anthology)

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (Norton Critical Edition)
Erskine Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*
Lee Smith, *The Devil's Dream*
Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Grading and Assignments (subject to change)

Short papers	375 points (3 @ 125 points each)
Presentation	125 points
Research paper	250 points
Class participation	150 points
Online Quizzes	100 points

A=895 points or more; B=795–894 pts; C=695–794 pts; D=595–694 pts; F<595 pts

Late/Absence Policy: Any assignment turned in late will be automatically penalized 5% of the total points for that assignment per day. While I do not deduct points for missing class, your participation grade will be hurt by each absence and you will likely

do worse on the assignments the more you miss. In short, missing class will lower your grade.

If you have to miss a class, try to let me know in advance. It is the student's responsibility to find out what he/she missed, preferably by getting notes from another student. If an assignment is due on a day you are absent, you must find a way to turn it in before class (by email attachment, sent with another student, turned in the day before, etc.). Without prior approval, there are no exceptions to the late policy.

Plagiarism: Passing off the words and/or ideas of others—those of classmates, friends, professional writers, or web sites—constitutes plagiarism. Even unintentional plagiarism is a serious offense, so make sure you understand how not to do it. **A plagiarized paper or assignment will receive a grade of zero.** The university's official statement about academic honesty and plagiarism is available at: <http://www.semo.edu/bulletin/index.htm>

Class Participation: As noted above, class participation is extremely important for the style and subject matter of this class. Lectures will be limited, and the main method for conducting daily classes is group discussion. As such, it would be a good idea to keep a notebook for this course which combines your class notes with reading notes. As you read, you should mark the text as you go, but also jot down a quick summary of the reading, some main points, comments, reactions, and (perhaps most importantly) questions about what you read. These can then become the basis for your contribution to class discussions.

Everyone will be expected to participate every day. So come to class with a list of questions and/or comments about that day's readings. Other elements that will help determine your participation grade include: attendance, questions you ask during presentations, written evaluations of presentations, and reading or sharing your response papers with the class.

Please turn off all cell phones before coming in class. Using cell phones in class for any reason will result in a deduction to your participation grade for the day, whether I mention anything about it or not. While you are free to express any ideas in this class—even ones that are controversial or may be disagreed with—you are expected to be civil in class discussions.

Quizzes: For each of the books of fiction that we read, you will be required to complete an online quiz prior to that day's class. These quizzes will be very short, typically with multiple choice questions and possibly short answer. They will only be available up until that class meeting. Quizzes are accessed through the course website: <https://cstl-cla.semo.edu/crieger/li565/index.htm>

Short papers: Each student will complete three short papers (about 4–5 pages each) over the course of the semester. Two of these must be on individual novels (*The Sound and The Fury*, *God’s Little Acre*, *The Color Purple*, or *The Devil’s Dream*). The third one can be on any poetry, short story (or stories), essays, or novel that you choose. Papers are due at the class meeting following our in-class discussion of it (e.g., a paper on Kate Chopin’s short stories would be due Thursday, Jan. 26). On the day one of your papers is due, you should bring it to class and be prepared to read and/or discuss your paper in class. These will provide starting points for class discussions.

You should make a specific argument and support it with details from the text. Direct quotes should be minimal since these papers are relatively short. I would like to leave the choice of novels to write on up to you, but I may need to assign them. If you have preferences for books you would like to write about, let me know as soon as possible. These short papers can be excellent starting points for the longer research paper.

Graduate students: one of your short papers (your choice which) must be a response to a critical article, essay, chapter, or book about the work. For this paper, you should summarize the key points of the critic’s argument and then provide your response to the critic’s points, as well as your own analysis of the primary text. The point here is for you to engage the critic’s argument and then to position your own interpretation in relation to it. What points of the critic’s do you agree with? What do you disagree with? Are there some you both agree and disagree with? Which could you take further or add to or find more examples of? How do your own interpretations fit with the critic’s arguments?

Presentation #1: The first presentation is one that will cover an author whose work we are reading in class. There are two parts to this assignment: a short (5 minutes or so) presentation on the author’s life and work, followed by leading the class discussion of the works on the schedule for that day. The first part should be a more formal style presentation that covers such things as biographical information (especially things that are interesting or pertinent to the author’s work), major works, critical reception, major themes, genres, and resources for looking up more about the author. You should use some sort of visual aid(s) for this assignment, whether it be handouts for the class, pictures/photographs you find online, a PowerPoint presentation, video/audio clips, or whatever. Remember that you are trying to make your presentation interesting and entertaining, as well as informative. You should provide resources for further research on your author to the rest of the class either through a printed bibliography on a handout or in an electronic format that can be sent to each student and/or posted on the class website. Essentially, you are providing a brief, annotated bibliography to the class of print and/or electronic resources.

After the first part of the presentation, you should be prepared to lead the class discussion of the works of your author that are on the schedule for that day (you could also bring in additional works, if you choose, particularly for poetry). You should not plan to just “wing it” and see where the discussion goes. This will not work. At a minimum, you should have a large number and variety of questions to ask the class: specific ones about particular passages and characters, as well as more general ones connecting authors, works, and other readings and/or themes from the class.

You might also consider using a brief writing assignment (5 minutes or so) in which you direct the rest of the class to respond in writing to specific questions and then use that as a basis for the day's discussion. Regardless of how you choose to lead the class for the day, you should have enough material ready to lead a 20–30 minute discussion.

Presentation #2 (optional—max of 15 extra credit points): Presentation on an author, work, or historical topic not covered in class **OR** on something that contributes to and/or participates in the idea of “the South.” You might, for example, show clips from *The Dukes of Hazzard* or *The Beverly Hillbillies* and analyze how they participate in creating particular versions of “The South.” You could also bring in a product or advertisement that trades on notions of Southernness. Or music. Or a novel. Or a comic book. Or your photographs from a trip to a plantation. Anything could potentially work. What qualities are attributed to the South? How are Southerners portrayed?

Possible Topics for Presentation #2

The Great Migration	Ellen Douglas
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men	Ernest Gaines
The Fugitives and The Southern Agrarians	Tim Gautreaux
Sharecropping/tenant farming	Ellen Gilchrist
Ku Klux Klan	Ellen Glasgow
Lynching	Barry Hannah
Reconstruction	Joel Chandler Harris
Jim Crow laws	Randall Kenan
School segregation	Barbara Kingsolver
Urbanization in the South	Cormac McCarthy
Southern Music	Carson McCullers
The Grand Ole Opry	Margaret Mitchell
Louisiana Hayride	Walker Percy
Sun Records	Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings
The Athens, Ga. music scene	William Gilmore Simms
Blues music	William Styron
Dorothy Allison	John Kennedy Toole
Larry Brown	Mark Twain
Robert Olen Butler	Tennessee Williams
Truman Capote	Thomas Wolfe

Research Paper: The final research paper should be the culmination of all we do in this course. It should not, however, attempt to cover all or even half of the works covered. Rather, your paper should be on a focused, specific topic, and it should make a clear, strong argument. You might consider focusing on topics like race, class, or gender in one or more works. You should also consider approaches such as, historical, biographical, psychological, and postcolonial. You could choose to concentrate on one work or multiple works. If you choose to cover multiple works, be sure that you are making an argument that links them together and not simply treating them separately.

The length of this final paper should be about 8–12 pages for undergraduates and 10–15 pages for graduate students. Undergraduates should utilize at least two outside sources. Graduate students' papers need to be somewhat more research oriented and should therefore use a minimum of four outside sources. It is important to get started on this assignment early. I am available to meet to discuss topics or review drafts.

Note: Any student who believes that they may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor to arrange an appointment to discuss their individual needs. Instructors rely on the Learning Assistance and Disability Support Services for assistance in verifying the need for academic accommodations and developing accommodation strategies. If you would like more information or would like to set up an appointment, see <http://www.semo.edu/cs/services/lec.htm>