## CHILDHOOD IN CARIBBEAN AND AFRICAN LITERATURE

### SELF-EVALUATION 2020

A major goal of this course is to help you become confident, independent readers of Caribbean and African Literature, capable of creating a context for understanding the work of a specific author, and of articulating, in writing and in conversation with others, what interests you about that author’s work. Please use the criteria below to help you monitor your progress towards this goal over the course of the semester, and to evaluate your performance at the end of the semester. Fifty percent of your final grade will be based on your self-evaluation.

#### **PART ONE** of the evaluation asks you to rate the consistency of your performance over the course of the semester. [Note: Part 1was removed to reduce the length of document.]

#### **PART TWO** gives you an opportunity to comment on specific readings and ideas; to evaluate your contributions to the course; and to describe how the course contributed to your intellectual development beyond the classroom, more broadly. **Answers in this section can help boost your grade as well as someone else’s.** This section should take about an hour to complete.

### PART TWO

**Please answer all questions with examples and discussion. Remember that your answers may help your grade as well as that of one of your classmates, so take your time with this section.**

##### Write a short paragraph about what you found most provocative or enlightening in one assigned reading.

My favorite reading assignment for this course was Girl by Jamaica Kincaid. While it was our shortest assignment, I feel that our reading and discussion of it was incredibly enlightening. We picked Girl apart piece by piece and focused so much on Kincaid’s style. I have never looked so closely at a text so as to be able to then imitate it. I not only learned how to “overwhelm” readers with my writing structure, but I also learned about chiasmus and emotional writing. This lesson influenced my understanding of the texts we read later in the semester as well as my reading of texts for my other classes. I can’t help but think about style and intention as I read now, and I am learning so much from my readings because of it!

##### Identify one author, country, theme, or literary device and describe how you engaged with the ideas to which your exploration exposed you in your weekly papers.

While reading Annie John I was struck by the scene where she talked about the long rain she experienced in Antigua. This prompted me to conduct a close reading of a few passages in the book for my weekly response paper. Alongside my close reading I also did some research into the climate of Antigua because of my surprise at the amount of rain they receive there. I thought to myself that doing this type of exploration into knowing more about the places our books were taking place in would be helpful for class discussions, so I continued to do it for other countries I was unfamiliar with. It was also nice to understand a little more about the setting of our materials when listening to my peers presentations.

##### Describe how you (or you and your group) prepared for your presentation and what you think the class learned from your presentation.

To prepare for my presentation I did a lot of research about Kenyan politics. I also decided it would be a good idea to conduct close readings of different parts of One Day I Will Write About This Place in order to be prepared to discuss those parts of the memoir with my class. I tried to focus a lot on Wainaina’s stylistic choices during my presentation because I felt that through his use of sound and language Wainaina was giving a lot to learn from. I think that the class walked away with a better understanding of Wainaina’s writing style as well as a better comprehension of the memoir. I was able to help with this comprehension because of my having read the book two times through and conducting extra research about the book, but for many of my peers they expressed confusion about the memoir, and I aimed to share my understanding with them through my presentation. Of course, I learned from my peers at the same time as they opened my eyes to different moments in the book that could complicate my explanations and understandings.

##### Identify at least two group presentations you consider most memorable and describe what you learned from them.

J.’s [redacted names for anonymity] presentation on The Shadow King was really wonderful and has stuck in my memory since. I appreciated his use of photographs in his presentation they allowed to book to come to life for me. I also learned a lot about Ethiopian history that I was not previously familiar with (it was super interesting to learn that Ethiopia was never colonized by European powers).

I also really enjoyed C.’s presentation on The Dark Child. She did a great job engaging the class with activities like drawing on the board and asking us to divide up our lives like the book. What I took away from her presentation was a lot of knowledge about Laye and a new understanding of storying telling and the importance of truth/accuracy.

##### Identify one comment you made during class that you think your classmates found useful and describe the discussion it generated within or outside of the classroom.

A few class meetings ago, during our discussion of The Shadow King I asked the class if anyone had recommendations for more books that share the stories of non-traditional families. This led to a great conversation between me and S. outside of class. We discussed her recommendations for me which included Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things. My comment in class allowed us to bond over our interest of family structures in literature and gave me an opportunity to connect with a classmate outside of class which has been particularly difficult given our current online learning situation.

##### Describe at least two comments your classmates made that helped you to understand the material or to take a concept further.

* During our discussion of Miguel Street, E. made a comment about her presentation that really shaped my understanding of the book. She asked us to all think about the criticism that Naipaul received for his book and consider what it means to write a book that only offers representations of “failures”. Her comment pushed me to think about portrayal and helped me to understand Naipaul’s stylistic decisions and their effect on his readers.
* J. made a comment during our conversation about Nothing’s Mat that also helped me with understanding the material. He told us how he interpreted the magic and spirituality in the novel which was different than some other students’ interpretations. Like he has done through much of our class J. offered his insights about the book based on his own personal experiences growing up in Trinidad. His comments helped me widen my understanding of almost all of our novels because I was able to engage with someone that did not grow up in the same country and in the same culture I did. His comments were often humorous and lighthearted which was a great thing to have in class where we often discussed very heavy topics.

##### Describe one memorable conversation you had with someone who was not a member of this class about the ideas to which this course exposed you.

* When working on my presentation I consulted my younger sister about Wainaina’s writing style because I was quite honestly stunned by it. I read her the first few pages of the novel and she shared my confusion. His sounds and choice of language seemed strange and made it hard to follow at first. However, after reading the few pages to my sister (who is only 12) she asked me if I was putting my expectations of writing onto Wainaina. I looked up at her and again was stunned- she was right. We continued to talk about how our appreciation for certain books may change based on our expectations and she encouraged me to open my mind to accept Wanaina’s style despite its unfamiliarity. It was a great conversation to have, and any moment in which I can learn from my younger sister is always going to be a memorable one!

##### Describe two insights about Caribbean and/or African literature that you will take away from this course.

* I took this class to start my journey into reading more African and Caribbean literature since I had only been exposed to a few Caribbean poets prior to the course. Something that I took away from the course is to (like my sister told me to) be more open minded to different writing styles. I feel like it has been easy for me to fall into a pattern of the sorts of books and authors I will read because a simple google search can tell me what books are similar to books I have previously enjoyed. This has closed me off to so many different worlds of literature and through our readings in this course I have been inspired to step outside of my comfort zone. If I had picked up One Day I Will Write About This Place a few years ago I would have immediately put it down and moved on to a different, more easily understood novel- but by pushing my boundaries I came across an amazing book and author that will surely be part of my favorites for a while!
* Another insight this class allowed me to gain was into the general history of some of the countries we read about. I have learned a lot about colonization in a U.S context but have never explored the effects of colonialism in depth in other countries. Especially with Annie John, I was able to dive into the lives of people that lived during this time which gave me a better understanding of the ways colonization impacted day to day life. I have moved away from exploring history since I have arrived at Amherst, but this class allowed me to dip my toe back into understanding and thinking deeply about history and its effects on where our world is today.

##### How did the COVID-19 crisis affect what you will take away from this course?

* I was very sad to hear that we needed to transition to online learning because I think our in class discussions and presentations were very valuable to our class experience. However, despite the interruption we created a wonderful class atmosphere online and I feel very happy about how the course went overall. The crisis definitely changed the way I had been looking at my courses because I now am focusing not only on my schoolwork but also on the very scary world around me. This class and my other zoom style class for the semester became a sort of escape from everything during that hour/hour and a half I spent in class. I will take away happy memories of my classmates and of Professor Cobham-Sander and will cherish the positivity that always came from being in the class!

##### OTHER: