

**GENED 1131 Loss
Syllabus**

Fall 2023

TTh 9:00–10:15 a.m. + weekly section

Deknatel Lecture Hall, Harvard Art Museums (entrance on Broadway)

“The shadow side of love is always loss, and grief is only love’s own twin.”
- Margaret Renkl

Instructor:	Kathleen M. Coleman James Loeb Professor of the Classics kcoleman@fas.harvard.edu	Office hours:	Thurs., 12:00–1:00 Fri., 12:30–1:30 p.m. Boylston G-23
TA (Head TF):	Nadav Asraf, PhD nadavasraf@g.harvard.edu	Office hours:	Thurs., 10:30–11:30 Boylston 236
TF:	Will Edwards wedwards@g.harvard.edu	Office hours:	Wed., 1:00–2:00 Boylston 236

1. Course goals

What we love is invariably vulnerable to loss. A major loss can seem to tear the fabric of life apart. This course explores emotional loss, primarily bereavement, but also loss of home; exile; amputation; various forms of “ambiguous loss” (missing in action; the “disappeared”; victims of brain injury or disease); and anticipated loss. We will try to understand the physiological and psychological changes that such losses bring about and assess how people cope with them. We will read memoirs of people who have endured such losses. We will also study responses to loss in architecture, art, literature, and music.

Most of our topics will be anchored in Greco-Roman antiquity, because reactions to loss 2,000 years ago illustrate with startling clarity the continuity of emotional experience down the millennia, but we will range far and wide in time and space right down to the contemporary United States. All texts will be read in English. Weekly reading/viewing should not normally exceed 75 pages or equivalent. Many of the readings are not scholarly articles but op ed columns, etc.

The **first goal** of the course is to give you a deeper sense of what is entailed in a major loss, and to marshal some resources to help you to manage the unmanageable, when the time comes. A **further goal** is to help you to develop empathy, so that you are more aware of the suffering of someone else who has suffered a loss, and better able to know how to help that person. A **third goal** is to develop the sense that when you suffer a major loss, you are joining an enormous community of persons, covering the globe and stretching back millennia, who have trodden this path before you and are available to give you succor. A **final goal** is to teach you the wisdom of the Latin saying, *carpe diem*, “Harvest the day.”

If you have already suffered a painful loss, I hope that this course may help you. But if your wound is very raw, please consider carefully whether you are ready for a course like this.

No prior background at college level is required. Students seeking to fulfill their distribution requirement are welcome; so are first-year students. This course fulfills the General Education

requirement in Aesthetics and Culture. It also counts towards the concentrations in Classical Languages and Literatures, Classical Civilizations, and Ancient History (Greek and Roman), and the secondary field in Classical Civilizations.

2. How the course works

Readings are prescribed for each lecture. Each week, one of them is chosen for annotation on Google docs (see §4). These readings form essential background to the topic of the lecture and are to be completed before the lecture is delivered. The lecture will not be limited to discussion of the readings, since it is assumed that you bring to the topic of the lecture what you have learned from them. The topic of the lecture will therefore be discussed against the background of those readings, but it will introduce new material that builds upon them and explores their implications.

The sections build upon the lectures that have already been delivered on a related topic. Readings are prescribed for the sections and a brief response paper is to be submitted in advance of each section, to lay the groundwork for discussion in class.

3. Required texts

- Deraniyagala, Sonali. 2013. *Wave*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Didion, Joan. 2005. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Penguin Random House.
- Genova, Lisa. 2009. *Still Alice*. Gallery Books.
- Lewis, C. S. 1961. *A Grief Observed*. HarperCollins.

All these texts are available at the Coop at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/Place-Fall-Book-Order-Here>. Fill in these details: Term = FALL 2023; Department = GNED; Course # = 1131; Section = 01.

4. Written work

- **10 weekly responses** to section material (200–300 words) due on Canvas **Monday at 9:00 a.m.**, beginning in Week 3. For each response, you will receive a question one week in advance. The purpose is to help you to prepare for a thoughtful discussion of the topic of the section. Letter graded. All ten response papers must be submitted, but the nine best results will count towards your grade.
- **8 weekly posts on Google docs** on the week's reading for the lectures, comprising one comment and one response to another student's post, due **Tuesday at 9:00 a.m.** beginning in Week 2. The purpose of this requirement is to help you to engage thoughtfully with the reading in advance of the relevant lecture. Graded check (B+), check+ (A), or check- (B-).
- **Midterm exam**, to be written in class on **Tuesday, October 3**. You will be given notice of the format well in advance.
- **Contribution to class project** (see §6).
- **Research assignment**: a research paper analyzing the public response to a significant loss in your own community (maximum 3,500 words), letter-graded. You will receive detailed instructions several weeks in advance, and you are *required* to submit a detailed outline to your TF by **Thursday, November 30** and arrange to meet your TF to receive feedback before you flesh out the outline into the full version, due at

11:59 p.m. on Monday, December 11, the last day of reading period.

Please put these deadlines in your calendar right away and review the course policies (§10).

5. Quizzes

Approximately every two weeks there will be a brief **multiple-choice** quiz testing comprehension of the readings and lectures to date. The four best results out of five will count towards your grade.

6. Course project

Participants in previous iterations of the course have curated a collection of material to help provide comfort in times of loss. They supplied a short paragraph introducing the item of their choice, and spoke briefly to the class about it:

<https://scalar.fas.harvard.edu/resources-for-loss/index>

During the semester, each participant is *required* to contribute to building this very valuable resource. From Section 2 onwards, each week—except when the sections visit Widener Library or the Harvard Art Museums—two students will present their Scalar contributions to the other members of their section. In Section 1, you will commit to the week in which you will present your contribution.

7. Interaction with the instructor and TFs

You are *required* to meet me one-on-one in the first month. This meeting will establish a connection that should immeasurably improve your experience in the course. Throughout September, I will offer extra office hours, divided into 10-minute slots, to facilitate these meetings. When the calendar goes live, please sign up for a slot and *please remember to come*, or e-mail me for a separate appointment. Failure to attend this meeting will impact your participation grade! Note that my office is not in the Classics Department but on the ground floor of Boylston Hall (G-23), accessible via WGS (Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality).

This course is partly about behaving sensitively towards people who are in distress. The best way for us to start learning to do this is by observing common courtesies in all our relationships, no matter what the circumstances are. For example, when your TF responds to a request for help, send them a very quick note of thanks. You might also find the following Wiki useful. It contains sensible advice about addressing a professor by e-mail (the same applies to addressing a TF):

<http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>

8. Schedule

The readings can be accessed via the relevant folder on Canvas > Files. Each day's reading/viewing must be done *in advance* of the class for which it is assigned. The average amount of reading/viewing per week does not usually exceed the equivalent of 75 pages (and is often far less), except when one of the required books is assigned for section. Most of the readings are op ed columns or articles or book chapters written for the general public; a few are more challenging articles in scholarly journals.

Week 1

1. Tu 9/5 Introduction: anticipated loss
2. Th 9/7 Physiology/psychology of loss

Week 2

3. Tu 9/12 **Post on Google docs #1 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas**
Losing a beloved person
4. Th 9/14 Losing a child, children's experience of loss

Week 3 Section 1:

Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*
Response paper #1 due M 9/18 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas

5. Tu 9/19 **Post on Google docs #2 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas**
Quiz #1 taken in class
Losing a beloved animal
6. Th 9/21 Animals' experience of loss

Week 4 Section 2:

Letters of condolence
Response paper #2 due M 9/25 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas

7. T 9/26 **Post on Google docs #3 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas**
Losing a member of the herd: class discussion with TFs
8. Th 9/28 Building a memorial

Week 5 Section 3:

Visit to the Memorial Room in Widener Library
Response paper #3 due M 10/2 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas

9. Tu 10/3 **No post on Google docs this week**
Midterm taken in class
10. Th 10/5 Loss of home: Camp Fire (2018) and Quabbin Reservoir (1939)

Week 6 Section 4:

Sonali Deraniyagala, *Wave*
Response paper #4 due M 10/9 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas

11. Tu 10/10 **No post on Google docs this week**
Quiz #2 taken in class
Exile
12. Th 10/12 Environmental loss

Week 7 Section 5:

Epitaphs
Response paper #5 due M 10/16 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas

13. Tu 10/17 **Post on Google docs #4 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas**
Images of loss 1: art

14.	Th 10/19	Grief and Grievance exhibit at the New Museum, New York, 2021
Week 8	Section 6:	Visit to the Study Gallery, Harvard Art Museums Response paper #6 due M 10/23 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas
15.	Tu 10/24	Post on Google docs #5 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas Quiz #3 taken in class Ambiguous loss 1: loss of mind or personality
16.	Th 10/26	Ambiguous loss 2: missing in action
Week 9	Section 7:	Lisa Genova, <i>Still Alice</i> Response paper #7 due M 10/30 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas
17.	Tu 10/31.	Post on Google docs #6 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas Ambiguous loss 3: the “disappeared”
18.	Th 11/2	Loss of a culture
Week 10	Section 8:	Sonnets Response paper #8 due M 11/6 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas
19.	Tu 11/7	Post on Google docs #7 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas Quiz #4 taken in class <i>Sous le sable</i> (“Under the Sand”): class discussion with TFs
20.	Th 11/9	Ritual as therapy
Week 11	Section 9:	Conflicting responses to loss Response paper #9 due M 11/13 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas
21.	Tu 11/14	No post on Google docs this week Requiem mass: guest lecture by Dr. Stuart Forster
22.	Th 11/16	Images of loss 2: music
Week 12		No section this week, no response paper, no post on Google docs
23.	Tu 11/21	Amputation
	Th 11/23	No class: Thanksgiving Recess
Week 13	Section 10:	C. S. Lewis, <i>A Grief Observed</i> Response paper #10 due M 11/27 @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas
24.	Tu 11/28	Post on Google docs #8 due @ 9:00 a.m. on Canvas Quiz #5 taken in class A space for loss: the Rothko Chapel
25.	Th 11/30	Outline for research assignment due on Canvas 11:59 p.m. National loss: the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial
Week 14		No section; no response paper; no Google post

26. Tu 12/5 Loss of a romantic relationship

Week 15 M 12/11 Research assignment due on Canvas 11:59 p.m.

9. Field trip

Field trips to Mount Auburn Cemetery will be conducted on the first three Saturdays in October (**October 7, October 14, and October 21**), leaving from Harvard Yard in front of Dudley House at **1:00 p.m.** and returning by 4:00 p.m. Bus tickets for both the outward journey and the return will be provided; if you prefer to walk, that's fine, too. You are *required* to attend one of these trips. You will be canvassed for your availability early in the semester.

10. Course policies

Grades.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Lecture attendance and section participation | 15% |
| • 4 best quizzes out of 5 | 5% |
| • Scalar contribution | 5% |
| • 8 weekly posts | 10% |
| • 9 best response papers out of 10 | 15% |
| • Midterm | 20% |
| • Research assignment | 30% |

To pass the course, students must complete all requirements.

Attendance. Attendance is required at all meetings of this course, both lectures and sections. Religious holidays that are recognized by the university are an acceptable reason for absence. More than two absences without a documented excuse will result in a reduction of your participation grade. If you are obliged to miss class because of a serious illness, family emergency, or other extreme circumstance, please contact your instructor as soon as possible to develop a plan to keep you from falling behind. You will be responsible for any material you miss. Please note that the lectures are not recorded. If you are forced to be absent on the day of a quiz, you will be enabled to make it up. For discussion of any unusual circumstances, please consult the instructor.

Participation. Since participation is 15% of your grade, here are the criteria which will factor into that assessment:

- attendance: are you on time for lecture and section, barring excused absences?
- preparation: have you done the reading for lecture and section?
- focus/listening: are you attentive in section and lecture, or distracted or distracting others?
- contributing: are you responding to questions/raising issues in lecture and in section, or do you “tune out”?
- productive engagement: do you engage productively with others and make a contribution that leads to a clearer elaboration of the topic under discussion, in lecture and in section?

Submitting Work/Late Assignments. All assignments should be submitted via the course Canvas site. One grade step will be deducted for each day that an assignment is late, e.g., A will

be reduced to A-. The following letter-grade/numeric equivalents are used:

- A 93–97
- A- 90–92
- B+ 87–89
- B 83–87
- B- 80–82

Etc.

Academic Integrity. Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity—that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs. Read more about the Honor Code at <https://honor.fas.harvard.edu>.

Collaboration Policy. Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates, but you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing, you must also acknowledge this assistance.

ChatGPT Policy. To function in society, you need to be able to think for yourself and articulate your thoughts in your own words in both speech and writing. In this course, you are therefore not permitted to use Chat GPT or any similar AI tools, except when their use is prescribed for specific exercises. Submitting work composed by Chat GPT or any other AI tool will earn the grade of F, which will be entered on the grade sheet as zero, and violators will be reported to the Honor Council.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities. Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Disability Access Office \(DAO\)](#) and speak with the instructor by the end of the second week of the term, Friday, September 15. Failure to do so may result in the instructor’s inability to respond in a timely manner. By DAO rules, faculty may contact DAO to discuss appropriate implementation of the prescribed accommodations. All discussions will remain confidential.

Policy on Laptops / Tablets / Mobile Devices. Laptops, tablets, and phones can be a distraction to others in the class, and should only be used to access material at the request of the instructor.

Kathleen M. Coleman
kcoleman@fas.harvard.edu
Tel. 617-495-2024
Boylston G-23

September 13, 2023