

English_OX 185 02A1: Critical Reading and Writing
Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30–4:10 p.m., Murdy Hall Seminar Room

Critical Reading and Writing

Instructor: Dr. Christopher Lirette

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Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 1–2 p.m. and by appointment

Course Purpose

This course seeks to prepare you for crucial skills as you begin your college career: close reading, critical thinking, effective and elegant writing, rigorous research, and lucid oral communication. In this course, you will read and write. A lot. I will ask you to not only read for deep comprehension, but for understanding and insight through identifying themes and asking incisive questions. We will discuss these understandings in class discussion, in low-stakes writing (in-class writing, close reading responses), and in formal essays. You will also pursue an independent research project related to the course's theme and present your findings at the end of the semester.

Course Theme

There are times in our life that throw place into relief: when we start a new school or job, when we move, when we go on vacation, when we fantasize about the worlds yet to come or dream about worlds not bound to the laws of physics we know as truth. Place, as much as the relentless march of time, gives context, specificity, and character to our experience, and yet we often overlook its power on our everyday lives. In this course, we will explore literature that explores place—from searching for an authentic experience in familiar or mythic places to the feeling of being unmoored by place. We will discuss how our individual experience intersects with collective experience of certain places, how official and institutional places often cannot contain the richness contained within their designations, how people cope with being displaced or the thick weight of everydayness, how people navigate alliances to place and governance, how people might change in their attachment to place especially as place, inexorably, changes as well, and more. We will read from both popular and literary fiction, supplemented by excerpts from other media, to root out the various roles place occupies in our imaginations.

Student Learning Outcomes

Critical reading

- Students will develop their ability to read texts closely and critically, focusing first on understanding before moving to evaluation.

Critical writing

- **Argument:** Students will develop their abilities to compose, organize, and support academic arguments in order to engage in ongoing intellectual conversations.
- **Revision process:** Students will understand that good writing is the result of a process of planning, drafting, receiving and giving feedback, and revision.

Research

- Students will develop their abilities to find evidence using library and other resources.
- Students will develop their abilities to incorporate their findings into academic arguments and to document their sources.

Oral expression

- Students will develop, through informed conversation, the ability to speak clearly and persuasively about the texts they study.

Course Requirements

<i>Close Reading (4x)</i>	30% (7.5%/essay)
<i>Essays</i>	30% (15%/essay)
<i>Presentation</i>	10%
<i>Participation</i>	15%
<i>Quizzes</i>	5%
<i>Final Exam</i>	10%
<i>Grading Scale</i>	A 100–94, A- 94–90, B+ 90–87, B 87–84, B- 84–80, C+ 80–77, C 77–74, C- 74–70, D+ 70–67, D 67–60, F <60.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, though I will allow you two absences for any reason. Each subsequent absence will lower your final grade by one third (A to A-, A- to B+, etc). If you reach six absences, you will fail this course. Please contact me in the next two weeks for religious holiday accommodations. If you have a situation, medical or otherwise, that requires you to miss multiple classes, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs and/or the Office of Accessibility Services.

Close Reading

You will complete four (4) close-reading essays of 350 words each responding to the course materials over the course of the semester. You will have six (6) opportunities to do so. You may skip two essays, but if you complete all six, I will drop your two lowest close reading scores. We will go over close reading in class the first day and practice it throughout the semester. I will handout both a guide to close reading and a rubric for these essays. Each essay will be score on a twenty-point scale.

Essays

You will complete two (2) short essays of 4–5 pages each. Each essay will have its own prompt available to you at least a week before the due date. Late papers will not be accepted. Sorry. These essays will be workshopped in draft-stage in class. In other words, if the syllabus says draft due, you should bring a completed essay for your peers to critique in class (not an outline or a partial essay).

Presentation

At the end of the course, you will present research on the course topic (unmooring, or place and displacement). You will pick a primary text—some piece of fiction, poetry, film, music, etc.—and analyze how it relates to concepts we have discussed in class. In researching this text, you will need to compile four secondary sources that contextualize, frame, support, or disagree with your interpretation. We will have a visit from a research librarian, and you will need to consult with one individually before your presentation. This assignment will be completed in steps, culminating with a presentation of your findings at the end of the semester.

Participation

This is a seminar-style class, and its success depends on us coming together to create a shared world of critical thinking, creativity, and community. You are this class, more than the readings or assignments. We begin creating this small world from a foundation of respect: show up on time having completed any assigned reading, actively listen to one another, offer thoughtful comments, and refrain from attacking or disparaging someone—even if you disagree with that person. Do not

be afraid to join discussion! If you are less vocal, send me comments and questions by email, meet with me during office hours, demonstrate that you are engaged with the class.

The consequence to disrupting the seminar (talking while someone else is talking, snoozing, texting your buddies, playing with your phone or laptop) is that I will eject you from class and you will be marked absent.

Quizzes

At least once a week, you will have a quiz on the assigned reading. There will be a mixture of “fact” questions and discussion questions that we will use to guide discussion in class. Generally, if you keep up with the reading, you will have no problem with the quizzes.

Course Materials

Disclaimer

This course asks you read and write about two literary novels, one dystopian science fiction novel, and one collection of comics about a superhero who is also the leader of a secret and futuristic African country. Regardless of the genre of work, I ask you to read critically and with pleasure. In addition, certain texts, especially *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, might include passages or language that some may find upsetting, offensive, triggering, or just plain rude. This includes profanity, racial slurs, and sometimes graphic depictions of violence or sexual activity (including sexual violence). If you feel that your discomfort at reading such material will be intolerable, please reach out to me and we can discuss whether this class is right for you. That said, I believe these texts are good, rich documents that offer unique and potent stories that speak to wide audiences.

Required Texts

Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Warner Books, 1993.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi, and Brian Stelfreeze. *Black Panther. A Nation Under Our Feet*. New York: Marvel Worldwide, 2017.

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007.

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *“They Say / I Say”: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Third Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

Percy, Walker. *The Moviegoer*. New York: Knopf, 1961.

Conferences

I am available on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1 until 2 p.m. in my office (Modular Unit 3, Room 5). Please feel free to come speak to me about class, organizing labor, the postwork economy, poetry, shrimp fishing, improv comedy, floodwater, elevated Louisiana cuisine, ghost stories, movie magic, or rare and luxurious maps. Also, feel free to email me at christopher dot lrette at emory dot edu.

Public Writing

Student writing (but never grades) may be shared with the class when the opportunity (such as workshopping) presents itself. Your work may also be reviewed by Oxford College faculty and staff to improve instruction.

University Policies

I uphold Emory's policies and regulations, including ones pertaining to religious holidays, disability accommodations, plagiarism, sexual harassment, and discrimination. You should acquaint yourself with these policies. Requests for appropriate disability accommodation must be made at the beginning of the semester, except in extraordinary circumstances, to ensure proper accommodation. You are encouraged to register with the Office of Accessibility Services to verify your eligibility.

Academic Integrity

All the work you submit in this course must be entirely your own work or your work with another classmate according to assignment guidelines. Make yourself familiar with Oxford's Honor Code (<https://inside.oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/>). Neither Emory University nor I will tolerate plagiarism. If you plagiarize, you can expect an F among other repercussions, such as a long, drawn-out hearing procedure, embarrassment, and ugly scribbles on your permanent record.

Office of Accessibility Services (OAS)

The Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) works with students who have disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, students must contact OAS and complete the registration process. Faculty may not provide disability accommodations until an accommodation letter has been processed; accommodations are not retroactive. Students registered with OAS who receive a letter outlining specific academic

accommodations are strongly encouraged to coordinate a meeting time with their professor to discuss a protocol to implement the accommodations as needed throughout the semester. This meeting should occur as early in the semester as possible. Contact OAS for more information at (770) 784-4690 or oas_oxford@emory.edu. Additional information is available at the OAS website at <http://equityandinclusion.emory.edu/access/students/index.html>.

Schedule

Place and Displacement

<i>August 23</i>	Introduction to this class, syllabus, and close reading.
<i>August 28</i>	<i>The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> , introduction, chapters 1 and 2
<i>August 30</i>	<i>Oscar Wao</i> , pages 77–113 in chapter 3. Close reading #1 due this week.
<i>September 4</i>	Labor day.
<i>September 6</i>	<i>Oscar Wao</i> , finish chapter 3.
<i>September 11</i>	<i>Oscar Wao</i> , chapter 4 and introduction to part 2 (167–210).
<i>September 13</i>	<i>Oscar Wao</i> , chapter 5. Close reading #2 due this week.
<i>September 18</i>	<i>Oscar Wao</i> , chapter 6 and introduction to part 3 (263–313).
<i>September 20</i>	<i>Oscar Wao</i> , chapter 7 through end (315–335).

Mooring and Unmooring

<i>September 25</i>	<i>The Moviegoer</i> , chapter 1.
<i>September 27</i>	<i>The Moviegoer</i> , chapter 2. Essay #1 due.
<i>October 2</i>	Library session.
<i>October 4</i>	<i>The Moviegoer</i> , chapter 3.
<i>October 9</i>	Fall break.

October 11	<i>The Moviegoer</i> , chapter 4. Close reading #3 due this week.
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October 16	<i>The Moviegoer</i> , chapter 5 and epilogue.
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Nation and Individual

October 18	<i>Black Panther</i> , issues 1–2.
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October 23	<i>Black Panther</i> , issues 3–6.
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October 25	<i>Black Panther</i> , issues 7–8. Close reading #4 due this week.
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October 30	<i>Black Panther</i> , issues 9–12.
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Change, or Advanced Unmooring

November 1	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , read 2024 (chapters 1–3). Essay #2 draft due.
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November 6	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , read 2025 (chapters 4–9).
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November 8	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , read 2026 (chapters 10–13). Essay #2 due.
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November 13	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , read 2027 (chapters 14–18).
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November 15	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , read 2027 (chapters 19–21). Close reading #5 due this week.
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November 20	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> , read 2027 (chapters 22–25). Close reading #6 due this week.
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November 22	Thanksgiving.
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November 27	Presentations.
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November 29	Presentations.
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December 4	Presentations. Final Day.
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December 13	Final exam due by 5 p.m.
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