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# ENG 5061Z-600: Topics in Literature and Literary Theory

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*Eastern Illinois University*

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**Race and Masculinity  
in Contemporary American Literature  
English 5061–Spring, 2019**

Instructor: Tim Engles

Office: 3831 Coleman Hall

Office hours: Via email, and by appointment if you like in our course's Online Rooms; if you are on campus, you can meet with me in person during my regular office hours: 12:00 – 2:00 Tuesdays and Thursdays & 1:00 – 2:00 Wednesdays, or by appointment

**Books from Textbook Rental (listed chronologically by initial publication date, instead of in the order in which we will read them):**

Richard Wright, *Savage Holiday* (1954)  
David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (1988)  
Steven Yarbrough, *The Oxygen Man* (1999)  
Percival Everett, *Erasure* (2001)  
Adrian Tomine, *Shortcomings* (2007)  
David Small, *Stitches* (2009)  
Natalie Diaz, *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2012)  
Caroline Rivers & Rosalind C. Barnett, *The Truth about Girls and Boys: Challenging Toxic Stereotypes about Our Children* (2011)  
Adelle Waldman, *The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P* (2013)  
Chen Chen, *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities* (2017)  
James Brinkley, *A Lucky Man: Stories* (2018)

**COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**(these words constitute our contract; much of the following may seem familiar or tempting to skim over, but you really need to read it all carefully)**

Recent cultural, political and demographic changes in the United States have presented new challenges to the ways that men have traditionally thought of themselves and their relations to others. Such challenges confront men of all races and ethnicities, including those who have long occupied the dominant norms of straight, able-bodied, middle-class and white. We will study literary and other works that depict how social and cultural shifts have been pushing men to acknowledge their gendered and racialized selves in new ways. We will also seek further understanding via the revealing lens of literature of men who are confronted by conditions that raise insistent questions about themselves in terms of race and masculinity, and about what their genuine connections to others are.

Our course will be conducted as an inquiring conversation, with your active participation central to our work. Because the success of our conversations will depend so heavily on everyone's participation, it is *crucial* that you develop your own schedule for keeping up with the readings, and that you do so with careful attention.

For the record, here is EIU's Graduate Course Catalog description of our course:

### **ENG 5061 - Special Topics in Literature and Literary Theory**

(3-0-3) Special topics in language and literature not ordinarily treated in standard courses. The topic will vary from semester to semester.

Note that while you can to some extent work at your own pace, we have strict deadlines for various assignments (which are always due by 11:59 p.m. on their due date). You also will not be able to work all that far ahead—we will be working together in some ways, so course material will be rolled out during the semester on a biweekly basis. This schedule means that at any given time, you will need to wait for the activities and assignments coming up in the following weeks. For those looking ahead, I have provided an outline of our activities at the end of this syllabus.

**Learning Objectives:** The following objectives apply to all of the biweekly Modules. More generally, upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Better interpret literary works with male characters in terms of the characters' membership in significant social categories, especially race and gender.
2. Better interpret literary works that express a wide range of cultural perspectives and values, and think more critically and write more analytically about them.
3. Participate effectively in discussions of literature, the issues it raises, and scholarship related to it.
4. Demonstrate an increased understanding and appreciation for varied social, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic ideas and methods.
5. Better apprehend academic scholarship and its conventions, and better utilize concepts and terminology drawn from it.
6. Produce effective written critique of literature and the issues it raises.
7. Use improved research skills to find useful scholarly materials, and properly apply the principles of documentation.
8. Apply concepts and terminology from other fields of research to the study of literature, and vice versa.

**Technical requirements:** Students in this course should already have taken the D2L Student Orientation. Students must have regular access to the Internet while using a laptop or desktop computer. Students must know how to download and upload email attachments, install software, and (if requesting an individual conference) use a webcam and microphone. Papers must be submitted in Microsoft Word: D2L cannot open papers submitted, for example, with Apple's word processing program, Pages. You also must have access to Adobe Reader (free download) or Preview (for Macs).

**A note about reading:** Since one skill you will be developing in this course is the art of textual analysis, you must give our readings and viewings more than a quick skimming over. Instead of wolfing them down and rushing to complete them, set aside enough time on a regular basis to read and view carefully. Consider taking notes as you read, and then decide for yourself what each author is trying to describe and bring to light. In an online course, because we will not meet

regularly in a classroom, you are also more responsible for pacing yourself as you read, establishing your own schedule so that you complete reading (and other) assignments on time.

**Grades, assignments, and significant deadlines:** Unless otherwise indicated, I will grade assignments within three days of their due date. All assignments in this course will be graded on a 100-point scale (90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, etc.), and your final course grade will be determined in the following way. Note that “class participation” includes not only written Discussion forum posts, but also the reading of significant numbers of posts by other students, the reading of instructor comments on your graded Response Papers, and the complete viewing of each of the instructor’s online PowerPoint presentations (remember, I have background ways of seeing whether you are regularly doing each of these activities).

Class participation	20%
Average of Response Papers (usually 1000-1200 words each)	25%
Group Project (joint production of a Google document)	10%
Semester Project (4000-5000 word essay)	20%
Recorded Presentation	10%
Final Exam (2000-2500 words total in response to essay questions)	15%

Course materials will appear regularly as biweekly Modules. To a limited extent, students can work at their own pace. However, given the possibility at any point that software and internet connections may be down or working slowly, and because (as explained more fully below), late assignments are not accepted in this course, I *strongly* recommend against waiting until just before deadlines to complete assignments.

**General grading rubric:** Generally, your assignments in this course will be graded in the following terms; see below for a rubric specific to class participation:

**A grade of A** indicates work that is truly outstanding in every way. In addition to completely and promptly following the guidelines for the assignment, work that receives an A grade provides a depth of analysis that adds substantive insight to the conversation surrounding the literary text and/or related issues. This level of work engages deeply with the themes, issues and ideas involved in a particular text and often links those themes, issues and ideas to the larger ones reflected in our overall course. In this way, such work helps all who read it understand the literary text and/or related issues better and more deeply. A-level work is rare, and it should be noted that merely writing MORE than what was assigned does not necessarily merit a grade of A.

**A grade of B** indicates that, in addition to completing the assignment on time and completely, you have provided a depth of insight and analysis that shows that you have thought deeply about the assignment and its implications, that you have engaged actively with the reading or viewing, have thought carefully about it, and that this thought is reflected in clear, cogent and insightful writing. Such work engages with deeper meanings of the text, perhaps by connecting it to others and with some overall themes of our course. In other words, B-level work does more than simply complete the assignment; it engages deeply with the assignment. Again, it should be noted that merely writing MORE than what was assigned does not necessarily merit a grade of B.

**A grade of C** indicates that you have completed the assignment as required in an adequate, satisfactory and punctual manner. All necessary components of the assignment are present and completed according to what was required. The writing is clear and grammatically correct. In other words, merely doing the assignment adequately and on time will earn you a grade of C.

**A grade of D** indicates that the work does not meet the requirements of the assignment in some major respect(s). Although parts of the assignment may be satisfactory, an assignment that merits a D is incomplete or does not otherwise adequately address the requirements of the assignment. In other words, work might be given a D if it does not engage adequately with the question or the literary text in question. Note that a grade of D may be given to work that partially completes the assignment, but is incomplete.

**A grade of F** indicates that the assignment is either extremely incomplete or that it does nothing to engage with the question asked or with the literary text being discussed.

**Regarding formal written assignments:** Response Papers and the major essay must be submitted in Word format, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font, and in MLA Style. Unlike the major essay, Response Papers WILL NOT require a Works Cited page. If you have questions about MLA formatting, you should consult [Purdue's Online Writing Lab](#).

**Regarding assignment due dates, missed assignments, and biweekly Modules:** Deadlines for assignments and discussions will be clearly labeled in each biweekly Module. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline for each assignment will be 11:59 p.m. of the listed day.

With the exception of deadlines missed due to documented emergencies, **no late assignments will be accepted**. Assignments may only be turned in late if the student provides documentation of an emergency. Proper documentation must be an official, original scanned document containing the student's name; it must also cover the date(s) in question and be signed by a professional (e.g., a doctor). An email that merely describes why you want to turn in your assignment late is not proper documentation.

Note that with the exception of the first Module—labeled Introduction—the other Modules will appear biweekly, and they will be labeled numerically as they appear (Module One, Module Two, and so on). Each two-week Module will appear by 3 p.m. on the previous Friday afternoon; if I post it earlier, I will send everyone a notification email.

**Regarding Discussion Forums:** Since we cannot meet in person, and since there are too many of us to arrange synchronous meetings online, our Discussion Forums will be an extremely important way for us to discuss our course materials together. Notice above that class participation is a large part of your final grade; below is a rubric that I will use for grading your participation. I will not assign a grade to each of your posts, but I will of course be closely watching, and participating in, our Discussion Forums.

Be aware that just as listening to others in an in-person classroom is important, so too is reading

posts by other students. D2L allows me to see how often you do so (just as it allows me to see whether you watch the Recorded Presentations), and I can also tell when a student hastily dips in and out of Forums, merely dropping in their own posts and merely doing the minimal amount of required replies to others. On the other hand, be wary of writing overly long posts; do write enough to get your well-supported points across, but also be aware that writing *a lot* will mean that your post will largely go unread.

### Discussion Forum Grading Rubric

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Grade: A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>
<i>Response to Prompt</i>	Brought new, well-supported understanding to discussion of the prompt's topic	Good response but could have been more clearly connected to prompt	Attempted adequate response but may have missed main idea or wandered too far from topic	Post(s) not made at all, or not at all connected to topic
<i>Replies to other students (when required)</i>	Clear, direct and detailed engagement with other students; specific references to others' ideas; reads most posts by others	Engaged with other students but could have been more specific or original	Engagement with other students minimal, very brief, or vague; reads very few posts by others beyond those replied to	Missing or extremely weak replies; doesn't read posts by others
<i>Language</i>	Proper use of clear, mostly error-free language; appropriately professional communication	Language could have been clearer or more polished at some points	Communication is weak, unclear, or highly inappropriate in an academic setting	Breaking of basic rules of appropriate communication in an academic environment OR post was not made
<i>Evidence</i>	Clear connections made to specific parts of texts, with solid supporting evidence	Some good evidence, but lacking in examples and specificity	Little supporting evidence from texts presented	Misunderstood nature of evidence or lacked evidence entirely
<i>Timeliness</i>	Post and any required replies met deadlines	One deadline or one component may have been missed	Deadlines were missed or did not include all requirements	Post(s) extremely late or missed entirely

**Academic integrity:** Remember also that this course follows the Academic Integrity policy followed by all Eastern Illinois University students. Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated, and the consequences are severe. For any concerns you might have in this area, see EIU's [Code](#)

of Conduct. If you have specific questions about whether any particular method you want to use might violate this code, be sure to ask Dr. Engles about it, either by email or during his online office hours.

**Information for Students with Disabilities:** If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Student Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. Also, of course, let me know about it and about what I can do to help accommodate your needs.

**Help with course content and procedures:** As explained in the Introduction Module, our course has a “Need Help?” Discussion Forum where students can ask questions about the course that I (Dr. Engles) can likely answer. Asking a question there about course content and procedures is a good idea, because others (who may well have the same question) will be able to see my answers. If you have questions that you want to ask me individually, email is of course okay, preferably to [tdengles@eiu.edu](mailto:tdengles@eiu.edu). Unless otherwise indicated, I will respond to the “Need Help?” Discussion Forum questions and any student email within twenty-four hours (and usually much sooner).

**Technical Support:** As noted above, students in this course should already have taken the D2L Student Orientation. In order to succeed in this online course, your skills should include (but are not limited to): navigating an online course management system (in this case, D2L), composing emails, accessing online files and web links, submitting properly formatted assignments via the D2L Dropbox system, and producing a PowerPoint presentation with recorded audio (instructions regarding the latter will be provided later in the semester). We will also be using Google docs, and you will need a Gmail account.

For technical support with D2L, you can contact the ITS Help Desk at 217-581-4357 or [itshelp@eiu.edu](mailto:itshelp@eiu.edu) or CATS Training Services for Students at 217-581-8358.

### Semester Outline

The following outline is subject to change; primary texts will be accompanied by required secondary readings and viewings; a Response Paper will be due on the second Friday of most Modules

Module One (1/7 – 1/20)

Introductions, *The Smell of Burning Ants*, *The Truth About Boys and Girls*, and *Stitches*

Module Two (1/21 – 2/3)

*Savage Holiday*

Group One Google Doc due by 1/24, 11:59 pm

Module Three (2/4 – 2/17)

*M. Butterfly* and *Shortcomings*

Group Two Google Doc due by 2/7, 11:59 pm

Module Four (2/18 – 3/3)

*When I Grow Up...* and *When My Brother Was an Aztec*

Group Three Google Doc due by 2/21, 11:59 pm

Semester Mid-term: February 28

Module Five (3/11 – 3/31)

*A Lucky Man* and other authors' short stories

Group Four Google Doc due by 3/21, 11:59 pm

Spring Break! 3/11 – 3/15

Module Six (4/1 – 4/14)

*Erasure*

Group Five Google Doc due by 4/4, 11:59 pm

FYI: English Studies Conference, Tuesday, April 2, 9am-5pm, 3rd Floor Coleman Hall

Module Seven (4/15 – 4/26)

*The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P.*

Major Essay Due: Monday, 4/15, 11:59 pm

Recorded presentation due on the last day of classes: Friday, 4/26, 11:59 pm

The Final Exam—a 6-8 page essay exam—will be due by the end of final exam week, that is, by Thursday, May 2, 9:30 pm