## 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.

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YEAR: 2020

MAJOR: English and Interdisciplinary Major (Educational Policy and Research)

CLASS PRESENTATION: J., & C. [Names redacted for anonimity]

TITLE OF FINAL ASSIGNMENT: Songs of Self: Exploring Lawino’s Acoli Identity

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

I, like many others, thoroughly enjoyed Wainaina’s Pan-African stance in his interviews. I was touched by the idea that the current education system stifles imagination. As someone wanting to enter the education sector in some form, I want to have this idea of fostering imagination in mind whenever I consider my opinion on new education policy and initiatives. Wainaina’s ethos is life-changing.

#### 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.

Ever since reading Kincaid’s *Girl*, I have been much more alert to different styles of repetition. I enjoyed seeing how different authors used repetition in their work, whether that be in repetition of events to create parallels between Sogolon and Madjo, or whether that repetition was simply in the way authors such as Kincaid or Wainaina constructed sentences with repetitive structure.

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

I enjoyed being given the time to read Coetzee early in the semester, and to have the ability to refer back to it as I read other texts in the course. Because [my group member] and I lived in the same dorm, we were able to have conversations about *Boyhood* casually, but often – we were able to really talk about our confusions, frustrations and triumphs reading the novel. We both identified our areas of interest in the novel, and did independent research before coming together to discuss further. One area of interest we both had was in his relationship to others, especially his mother, and in our presentation I felt we were able to relay and further discuss that interesting dynamic between Coetzee and his mum.

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

I really enjoyed E.’s Miguel Street presentation as it set the scene for the rest of the semester. Despite the challenge of presenting on her own, E. was able to help me understand Naipaul’s characters’ connections to one another very easily.

The presentation I remember most vividly was during the week we read Liking. I had been overwhelmed by the web of characters in the novel, and T.’s breakdown of their relationships to one another was so helpful (and impressive!).

#### 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.

I wanted to be vulnerable when stating that I didn’t love Coetzee’s novel, I wanted to show others what it was like to crave a different reading experience to their own – I wanted the transformative experience Anaiah felt. I think that it allowed people who did enjoy Coetzee more to speak up and tell me why they did, pushing others who felt like me to reassess their thoughts about *Boyhood.*

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

I appreciated the praise I received from my peers about my *Girl* imitation – it allowed me to feel more comfortable inviting my personal reflection into my responses. From here, I felt less restrained about what to write, and the writing process became more freeing and enriching.

#### 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.

The first few books we read in class concluded with their protagonists pursuing studies abroad. I thought about this a lot with friends outside the class, especially with others who felt that they had left home to come to college. I wondered about what it means to consider higher education abroad a conclusion to a childhood – do readers consider this a satisfying conclusion that will put their mind at ease? I remember a friend saying it was almost a way to make readers feel less guilty for the challenges a character faced if they eventually succeeded, despite all the injustice they faced. However, I didn’t want to think about the reader’s gratification, I wanted to think about the protagonist’s satisfaction about their conclusion.

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

I am surprised that although I have read a significant amount of African literature, I had read no Caribbean literature other than *Girl* before this. I am enamored by Caribbean literature as a source of diaspora work. I enjoyed reading about how, although these authors descended from Africa, they grapple with considering new lands their home while still honoring their ties to Africa. In my thesis, I explored indentured servitude and how it brought many Indians to foreign lands that they eventually called home, and so it was rewarding to read stories of the diaspora and see the importance of the diaspora reflected in the syllabus. I will be reaching for Caribbean literature this summer.

Another insight gleaned from the course was what it means to read such texts in childhood – how can this benefit a child to read of such challenging themes. This is something I talk more about in my final paper, but as someone interested in becoming an educator, and at some point a mother, it is interesting to think about how I might curate my ideal childhood reading list. I am interested in what we should encourage children to read, and how children of different identities and backgrounds benefit from reading different texts. What am I grateful to have read so far?

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

With all that is going on, and all the hiring freezes that are stopping me from getting a job, it looks like I might have to move back to New Zealand. However, the course has taught me a lot about family and kinship, and so when I am home I hope to delve deeper into my own ancestry to understand how I can better preserve it, the way the talented authors we have read did.