Literatures of Africa

ENGL 123B

Spring 2026   Section 01   In Person   3 Unit(s)   01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026   Modified 01/24/2026

👤 Contact Information

Instructor(s):	Dr. Meghan Gorman-DaRif
Email:	meghan.gorman-darif@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	Monday, 11:30-12:30 via Zoom, and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	TTH 3:00-4:15 Sweeney Hall, 413

🕗 Course Information

This section, 123B: Literatures of Africa, examines literature in English produced during the postcolonial period from a variety of countries and cultures in Africa, with special attention to how authors engage in their texts with the contexts of colonialism, systems of education, and the English language itself as a medium for self-expression. This course is not meant to be a complete survey in African literature, but instead aims to introduce students to some of the themes that have emerged in postcolonial African fiction over the last fifty years, and the historical, political, and social contexts from which such writing emerges.

💻 Course Description and Requisites

Examines the literatures of Africa, including the historical, cultural, and political contexts from which they emerge.

Satisfies UD Area: 3. Cultures and Global Understanding (Formerly Area V).

Prerequisite(s): Completion of Core General Education and upper division standing are prerequisites to all UD GE courses. Completion of, or co-registration in, 100W is strongly recommended.

Grading: Letter Graded

Sustainability Related - SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities 🌿

✳ Classroom Protocols

AI, phones, and laptops, oh my!

"AI promises compelling benefits—such as saving time in busy lives and helping your work to appear more creative or clever—but there are many important but invisible tradeoffs in using it, especially in the classroom. Therefore, at least in school, there's good reason *not* to use or rely on AI/LLMs while you're still learning new skills and growing as a person, even if it's ok to use it in future jobs where *producing work* is more important than *learning*." [Patrick Lin](#)

Because in this an English class, we are primarily concerned with developing close reading and analytical thinking skills, I am going to do my best as your Professor to compel you to do that reading and thinking and writing yourself, without AI. While AI can provide great shortcuts – and we **all love shortcuts** – such shortcuts in process are detremintal to student learning since thinking IS process. Learning happens in the direct encounter with the text in front of you and your responses to it. It happens in our classroom discussions when your classmates offer alternative takes and perspectives that encourage you to think more deeply about your own takes. While AI is a useful tool that you no doubt will engage with, it is not part of the skill development of this particular English course and I will ask you not to use it, and I will promise I will not use it either in my development of course materials, lectures, assignments, and grading feedback. As an experiment, let's try it this way and see what the experience is to read, think, discuss, and reflect together.

Part of the cultivation of this engaged learning community will also be a commitment to each other to keep our phones and laptops away. This is not punitive, but practical. Not only do we all love shortcuts, but we all love distraction. I am just as guilty of internet scrolling on my phone and laptop as any of my students! So, we're going to remove the option, and again – see how it goes. Of course, if you need to be reachable in emergencies I'm happy to accommodate (I have programmed in emergency overrides for my daughter's daycare teacher, for example). But beyond emergencies and exceptions, I will expect phones and laptops to be silent and away for the duration of our class time together.

▤ Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website (https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

English Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature
Department Office: FO 102
Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (https://www.sjsu.edu/english)
Department email: english@sjsu.edu (mailto:english@sjsu.edu)
Department phone number: 408-924-4425

📊 Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE UD Area 3: Cultures and Global Understanding

SJSU Studies courses -- GE UD Areas 2/5, 4, and 3 -- help students integrate knowledge between and among disciplines. SJSU Studies courses develop abilities that enable students to live and work intelligently, responsibly, and cooperatively in multicultural societies and to develop abilities to address complex issues and problems using analytical skills and creative techniques.

Courses in **UD Area 3: Cultures and Global Understanding** examine multiple aspects of human expression in cultures and societies outside the United States. By reflecting on how traditions of cultures outside the United States have influenced the United States' cultures and societies, students deepen their understanding of various cultures.

GE UD Area 3 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of an UD Area 3 course, students should be able to:

1. analyze the historical, social, and/or cultural significance of creative works of human expression (examples include, but are not limited to, written works, images, media, music, dance, technologies, and designs) , from at least one cultural tradition outside the United States;

2. examine how creative works of human expression [as defined in #1] outside the United States have influenced United States' cultures;

3. explain how a culture outside the U.S. has changed in response to internal and external influences; and

4. appraise how the study of creative works of human expression from outside the United States shapes one's own understanding of cultural experiences and practices.

Content

1. Courses shall focus on issues or present perspectives from different academic disciplines and include an integrative assignment appropriate to the course content.
2. Courses shall require students to apply basic skills (reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, research, and mathematics/quantitative reasoning) gained in Core General Education courses.
3. Assignments must utilize library research and oral and written communication skills.
4. Courses shall promote reflective processes and critical analysis of the civic relevance and ethical dimensions of course topics.

5. Materials must include primary sources appropriate to the disciplinary approaches used in the course (Examples include, but are not limited to, original creative works, scholarly journal articles, interviews, oral histories, historical documents).

Writing requirement

The minimum writing requirement is 3,000 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

📘 Course Materials

Weep Not, Child (1964) Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o ISBN: 978-0143106692

Nervous Conditions (1988) Tsitsi Dangarembga ISBN: 978-0954702335

The Joys of Motherhood (1979) Buchi Emecheta ISBN: 978-0807616239

Oil on Water (2010) Helon Habila ISBN: 978-0393339642

Homegoing (2016) Yaa Gyasi ISBN: 978-1101971062

📋 Course Requirements and Assignments

Weekly Notes and Reflection

Deep engagement with the books we are reading is a primary goal of the course. Taking notes or annotating a text improves comprehension and enables critical engagement and analysis all of which will strengthen your own understanding of the texts as well as the depth of our in-class discussions. To provide some structure for this kind of close reading practice, you will be required to submit your weekly notes with a brief reflection on what has stood out to you in the week's reading. An example of what these should look like is provided on Canvas.

In class writing

Throughout the semester we will have class time devoted to writing about the texts. These will range from informal reflections on our texts to more explicitly formatted exercises such as close reading or argument summary. These will be graded with an understanding that they are timed writings and I will be looking for engagement and thinking rather than perfect structure/organization or grammar.

Quizzes

You will be quizzed on reading, viewing, and lecture materials covered in readings or during class time. If you are regularly attending class and keeping up with readings, these should be an easy way to keep your grade up – I see them as built-in accountability to encourage you to stay on top of materials.

Participation

As you may have discovered, active participation is key to success the classroom. Active participation will help us develop a community to discuss ideas, collaborate, and discover new insights into the texts through the perspectives of others. Participation includes more than merely attending class, as I expect each of you to arrive prepared by having carefully read assigned readings, and to actively participate in full class discussions and smaller group discussions and in class projects and activities. Part of this active engagement in class and participation in the group dynamic of the classroom is to **keep your cell phones and computers for the duration of class.**

Final Exam

The final exam will assess your overall understanding of the course materials and your ability to analyze literature clearly and effectively. The specifics will be something we work to determine together in class but will be designed to assess the learning outcomes for the course.

✔ Grading Information

Grade breakdown as follows:

Weekly Notes and Reflection   15%

Quizzes   15%

Participation   20%

In class writing assignments   25%

Final Exam   25%

A (93%-100%)	B- (80%-82.9%)	D+ (67%-69.9%)
A- (90%-92.9%)	C+ (77%-79.9%)	D (63%-66.9%)
B+ (87%-89.9%)	C (73%-76.9%)	D- (60%-62.9%)
B (83%-86.9%)	C- (70%-72.9%)	F (0%-59.9%)

🏛 University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 (PDF) (http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information (https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php)](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

📅 Course Schedule

Course Schedule

Note: please bring hard copies of the texts with you to class for discussion.

Week One	1/22 Introductions/Syllabus	**HW:** Read Chinua Achebe "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*"; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,"The Language of African Literature" from *Decolonizing the Mind* (Canvas)
Week Two	1/27	**HW:** Read *Weep Not, Child* Chapters 1-3
	1/29	**HW:** Read *Weep Not, Child* Chapters 4-11
Week Three	2/3	**HW:** *Weep Not, Child* , Part Two, chapters 12-end
	2/5	**HW:** Read *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Part VIII: Feminism and Post-colonialism, Introduction (249-250), "First Things First, Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature" (251-245); Read *Nervous Conditions*, Intro through Chapter Three (pp. vii-57)
Week Four	2/10 In class writing	**HW:** *Nervous Conditions*, Chapter Four through Chapter Five (pp. 58-104)
	2/12	**HW:** *Nervous Conditions*, Chapter Six through half of Chapter 8 (pp. 105-161)

Week Five	2/17	**HW:** Read *Nervous Conditions*, second half of Chapter 8 through end (pp. 162-208).
	2/19	*Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny,* by Kate Manne, Chapter 1: Threatening Women (Canvas)
Week Six	2/24 In class writing	**HW:** Read *The Joys of Motherhood* Introduction, and chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-39)
	2/26	**HW:** *The Joys of Motherhood* Chapters 4-9 (pp. 40-110)
Week Seven	3/3	**HW:** Read *The Joys of Motherhood* chapters 10-12 (pp. 111-150);
	3/5	**HW:** Read *The Joys of Motherhood* chapters 13-18 (pp. 151-224)
Week Eight	3/10	**HW:** From *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel,* Chapter 11: "The African novel and the feminine condition" by Nana Wilson-Tagoe **HW:** Read *Oil on Water* Ch. 1-5 (pp. 1-64)
	3/12 In class writing	
Week Nine	3/17	**HW:** Read *Oil on Water* Ch. 6-9 (pp. 65-111)
	3/19	**HW:** read chapter 10-15 for Monday (pp. 112-179)
Week Ten	3/24	**HW:** *Oil on Water* (Ch. 16-end) (180-end)
	3/26	**HW:** Watch *The Thirteenth* and read Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations"

	SPRING BREAK	
Week Eleven	**4/7** In class writing	**HW:** *Homegoing*, Effia, Esi (pp. 3-49)
	4/9 Introduction to *Homegoing*	**HW:** *Homegoing*, Quey, Ness, James (pp. 50-110)
Week Twelve	**4/14** Discussion of *Homegoing*	**HW:** *Homegoing*, Kojo, Abena (110-153)
	4/16 Saidiya Hartman; discussion of *Homegoing*	**HW:** *Homegoing*, H, Akua, Willie (157-221) **Recommended:** The 13th (available on Netflix); Introduction and Chapter 1 of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*
Week Thirteen	**4/21** discussion of *Homegoing*	**HW:** *Homegoing*, Yaw, Sonny.
	4/23 In class writing	**HW:** Marjorie, Marcus Recommended: Reading and Interview with Yaa Gyasi;
Week Fourteen	**4/28** Discussion of novel	
	4/30 Final review	
Week Fifteen	Final prep, no class meeting	**HW:** End of semester reflection

Week Sixteen	Mon, May 11, Tues, May 12: Extended office hours	Final Exam: Wednesday, May 13, 3:15-5:15 PM