

ENGL 5360 Topics in American Literature
Voices of Resistance: American Women Writers from Dickinson to Harjo
Texas A&M University - San Antonio
Fall 2026 Thursdays 5:30pm – 8:15pm



Professor: Laurie Ann Guerrero
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Office Location: Classroom Hall 314N
Office Hours: T & R 3:30-5pm, by appointment

Course Description

Study of an author, literary period or other specific topic in American literature. May be repeated when a different topic is scheduled.

Topic for this Section

In this course, students will survey the works of American women writers Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Perkins Gillmor, Kate Chopin, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Alicia Ostriker, Victoria Chang, Rebecca Solnit, Ana Castillo, Joan Didion, Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldua, and Joy Harjo. Through a close reading of fiction, essays, and poetry, students will engage in the writers' exploration of identity formation, intersectionality, social critique, language, cultural displacement, and the politics of women writing. Major themes discussed include the following: voice, space, early feminism, body, power, intersectionality, collective and individual memory, storytelling, land, and cultural identity. This course challenges students to make critical connections among various styles, subgenres, and historical or social contexts and is intended to more generally improve critical thinking, reading, speaking, as well as writing skills. As it is a discussion-based course, it is vital that students come to class having completed the reading for

that day and prepared to talk about assigned readings. Graduate students are expected to have a strong knowledge of basic grammar and punctuation.

Required Materials

- *Sula* by Toni Morrison
- *So Far From God* by Ana Castillo
- *For a Girl Becoming* by Joy Harjo

Excerpts from the following books will be handed out in class or made available as PDFs, but I strongly recommend purchasing these books for your personal library:

- *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* by Adrienne Rich
- *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde
- *Writing Like a Woman* by Alicia Ostriker

Learning Objectives

At the end of the course, students will...

- Exhibit an in-depth understanding of the range of cultural work being achieved by contemporary American women writers.
- Demonstrate recognition of the literary, cultural, historical, political and theoretical contexts within which these works were produced.
- Demonstrate an understanding of key themes, topics, arguments, and questions in the study of American literature.
- Gain confidence in oral and written expression and giving and receiving critique.
- Improve students' understanding of these works as expressions, and to cultivate an appreciation for the aesthetic principles that guide this literature, reflecting on the way literature influences and is influenced by intercultural experiences and linguistic theories associated with these works.

Grade Breakdown

These outcomes will be assessed through the completion of the assignments listed below.

- Participation (attendance, workshops, discussion, homework, etc.): 35%
 - Attendance (worth half of the participation grade)
 - Readings & Discussion (worth half of the participation grade)
- Assignments (5 total): 40%
- Final Presentation & Reflection: 25%

Grades will be calculated using the following scale.

90-100=A	80-89=B	70-79=C	60-69=D	59 or lower=F
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Participation in Class (35%)

You are participating when you are contributing to discussions; being a critical listener and thinker; asking questions of anything you do not understand; and offering constructive feedback on your peers' ideas, and participating in workshops. Also, you must come to class prepared with the proper materials (paper, pen, text, notebook, etc.).

Attendance: Attendance is taken at the start of each class. Each student is allowed 2 absences. After which, a doctor's note (or some kind of formal documentation) is required for an excused absence. Tardies result in a 50% grade for attendance that day, while absences will receive a 0%. **Chronic absences and/or tardies will affect your final grade.** A vital, ongoing intellectual conversation is at the heart of the course. Attendance and participation are crucial. I will be taking attendance at every class. Not showing up to class will affect your grade. Please observe, though, that your presence in the classroom does not automatically guarantee you full credit.

Readings: Successful completion of this course depends to a great degree upon your ability to read with scrupulous care, attention, and insight. Careful reading of all assigned material will be one of the foundations of your work for the course. **You will be expected to have completed all assigned reading on the day a text is discussed in class** and to prepare for class by taking notes and contributing to discussions. It is crucial that students arrive in class with required texts read, prepared to offer thoughtful responses to the readings.

Discussion: A vital, ongoing intellectual conversation is at the heart of the course. Attendance and participation are crucial. I will be taking attendance at every class. Not showing up to class will affect your grade. Please observe, though, that your presence in the classroom does not automatically guarantee you full credit. It is crucial that students arrive in class with required texts read, prepared to offer thoughtful responses to the readings. **If you have not done the reading, I will ask you to leave class, and you will be counted absent for that period.**

Assignments (40%)

You will only be given SIX assignments throughout the semester. Some are strictly analytical, while others have a creative aspect. Occasionally, we will do free-write assignments in class. These free writes are to help you think through your ideas and to be used alongside your assignments. If you struggle with grammar and punctuation, please attend tutoring sessions to improve your writing, as poor writing skills will affect your grade. All writing will be assessed according to MLA formatting. We will go over each assignment in detail.

Final Presentation & Reflection Paper (25%)

One day during the last week of class, students will present an analytical (and creative if they choose) presentation on American Women Writers, in addition to a 4-6-page reflection paper. Details on this will be given in class toward the end of the semester.

COURSE POLICIES

Absences

If you must be absent from class and cannot submit an assignment on time because of a personal emergency, you should email me as soon as possible to ask for an extension. I DO NOT ACCEPT LATE WORK, but I am happy to give extensions. If you were unable to attend class due to illness, please talk to me after you return. There is no need to email me to inform me of an absence unless you need an extension or to show me proof of an emergency. After an absence, a student should contact a classmate about class material and obtain info that was distributed. No in-class assignments can be made up. Please make every effort to avoid leaving class early. If you must leave class early, please inform me in advance. If you leave 30 minutes or more before the end of the class without discussing it with me beforehand, you will be considered absent for the day. Since our class functions as a community, it is essential that students attend class consistently.

Classroom Conduct

Be respectful. We will be discussing sensitive topics in this course, and it is perfectly normal that we may not all agree. However, you are to refrain from using language or behavior that is sexist, homophobic, classist, racist, intolerant and/or insensitive to the differences of others. I have a zero-tolerance policy on oppressive and unproductive language. I reserve the right to ask you to leave if you do not abide by these standards. You may also face more serious consequences, and your participation grade will suffer the consequence as well.

The following behaviors will also negatively impact your participation grade: missing class; coming to class without the required assignments/tools; disrespecting your peers and your professor; being on your phone or engaging with others while we are in class; off-topic conversations with your classmates; doing work for other courses; hostile behavior toward a classmate or me, or any behavior that is inappropriate, and/or off-task. These behaviors are not conducive to a positive classroom environment. If I witness repeated inappropriate behavior, ask you to leave, and you will be counted absent.

Any student who uses language or behavior that is sexist, homophobic, classist, racist, intolerant and/or insensitive to the differences of others, will be asked to leave. We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Deadlines & Late work

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, no late work will be accepted. All written and online work must be submitted on time. No exceptions, unless for real and serious emergencies, in which case you should get in touch with me at once.

Assignment Policies

You are expected to submit original work for this course. Do not recycle papers written for other courses. If any assignment is unclear, please ask questions.

ABSOLUTELY NO USE OF GENERATIVE AI PERMITTED:

ENGL 5360 assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT or Grammarly. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Academic Dishonesty for which a student is subject to penalty includes cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submission, misrepresentation of academic records, facilitating academic dishonesty, unfair advantage, violating known safety requirements and ethical misconduct. This includes holding other students to same standards and reporting any incidents of alleged violation of the honesty policy to the instructor involved or, if necessary, to the appropriate academic department head. All students are responsible for being familiar with the Academic Dishonesty Policy, which may be found by clicking on the [Texas A&M University-San Antonio Student Handbook](#).

Simply put, plagiarism is copying another's work, whether it is word-for-word or paraphrasing. Using AI is also a form of plagiarizing, and it is considered a form of cheating.

Collaboration

All written assignments outside of the classroom should be completed individually. I will let you know when an in-class activity is a collaborative one; if I do not specifically tell you to collaborate, you can assume that the assignment should be completed on your own. Note that in some situations uncalled for collaboration can be construed as plagiarism.

Availability

My office is located in **Classroom Hall 314N**. Please email me or see me after class to set an appointment. If you make an appointment with me, I expect that you will keep it like any other professional meeting. If you must cancel an appointment, please let me know at least 24 hours in advance, if possible. Office hours are an appropriate venue to confer with me about any aspect of the course, clarification of my expectations or your grades, comments on assignments, questions about course material. I recommend meeting with me early in the semester as one-on-one help and individual attention often results in a deeper understanding of course materials and clearer expression of that understanding in your writing.

E-mail

I am available by email at LGuerrero@tamusa.edu, and I check my email at least once a day Monday-Thursday before 5pm for any questions or comments. *Do not use the Blackboard message option.* I usually return emails within 48 hours, but I do not check my email on the weekend.

Blackboard

Everything we do for class will be on Blackboard—get familiar with it if you are not already. Blackboard can be accessed at <http://tamusa.blackboard.com/>. If you need assistance (technical support) with Blackboard, please call (210) 784-4357 BEFORE you contact me with tech questions. They are the experts.

Self-Reliance

This is a graduate-level English course; therefore, I expect a certain level of proficiency in terms of reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking. If you need extra help or assistance in a particular area, you need to be proactive and independently seek solutions.

Academic Freedom in the Classroom

Knowledge flourishes when inquiry is free and respectful. This class, which has been approved as part of the Texas A&M University-San Antonio curriculum by appropriate faculty bodies, aims to advance knowledge through discussion, debate, and carefully selected readings and assignments. In accordance with principles of academic freedom promulgated by the American Association of University Professors and affirmed by many universities, including A&M-SA, the instructor has the authority to set the class syllabus, which may include controversial material relevant to topics being studied. While all participants and their views will be treated respectfully, no one should expect to be shielded from challenging or even upsetting ideas, since thoughtfully engaging such ideas is crucial to free inquiry and intellectual growth.

Texas Senate Bill 17, the recent law that outlaws diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, does not in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations regarding academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB 17, and students should not feel the need to censor their speech pertaining to topics pertaining to race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Course Material, Academic Freedom, and Students' Rights: The materials and activities in this class were developed based on my subject-matter expertise and align with norms and best-practices in the discipline you are learning.

- As the Student Handbook states, “students will be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views in any course of study and to withhold judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.”
- As an instructor, I will respect the rights enumerated in the handbook, including “respect for personal feelings; freedom from indignity of any type, freedom from control by any person except as may be in accord with Texas A&M University-San Antonio, and conditions allowing them to make the best use of their time and talents toward the objectives which brought them to this University.” I ask that you respect the rights of your classmates to learn and have a positive experience in this class.
- I ask that you, further, respect my intellectual property and not share materials from our class with those outside of the university community and that you respect academic

freedom, which presumes that “teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject.”

- Should you have a problem with any of the materials in this course, please reach out to me for an explanation of why these materials are disciplinarily legitimate and to discuss strategies for completing the work in a manner that is acceptable to you and that meets course objectives. I ask that you do so before or after class and not disrupt the learning experiences of others if you have any objections.

Please click [UNIVERSITY POLICIES](#) to read more.

***Note:** I reserve the right to make changes to the reading & assignment schedule and requirements as necessary. **This document serves as a contract between the professor and the students.** Upon receipt of this document by the students, the professor assumes that expectations set forth in the syllabus have been read and acknowledged by the student, and that proper communication has been initiated about assignments, schedule, and grading. Please contact me at the aforementioned email address with any questions or comments. I look forward to the semester!

Week/Dates	Reading Schedule	DUE
Week 1 Aug. 27	• Introductions • Expectations/syllabus • Building a community agreement • Why “Voices of Resistance” • “Critical Thinking” by bell hooks • discussion / groups	
	Unit 1: Voice, Space, and Subversive Resistance	
Week 2 Sept. 3	• Emily Dickinson, bio (on Blackboard) and poems: “My Life Had Stood a Loaded gun,” “Because I Could Not Stop for Death,” “I Send Two Sunsets,” “I am Nobody” • Alicia Ostriker, essay, “Writing Like a Woman”	
	Unit 2: Early Resistance, Body, Power, Reclamation	
Week 3 Sept. 10	• Kate Chopin, short story: “The Story of an Hour” • Charlotte Perkins Gilman, short story: “The Yellow Wallpaper” • Zora Neal Hurston, “How it Feels to be Colored Me” • Assignment #1	

Week 4 Sept. 17	- Sylvia Plath bio and poems: “The Colossus,” “Daddy,” “Tulips,” “Lady Lazarus” - Adrienne Rich bio and poems: “Storm Warnings,” “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers,” “Diving into the Wreck” “Power” & “Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev”	Assignment #1 Due <u>Thursday,</u> <u>Sept. 17</u> @ midnight via Blackboard
Unit 3: Race, Gender, Memory, and Contemporary Voices		
Week 5 Sept. 24	- Audre Lorde bio and poem: “Power” - Audre Lorde, essays: “Poetry is Not a Luxury” & “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” - Assignment #2: (Plath/Rich/Lorde)	
Week 6 Oct. 1	- Toni Morrison, novel: <i>Sula</i> (entire novel) - in-class workshop - Assignment #3: Morrison	Assignment #2 due <u>Thursday,</u> <u>Oct. 1</u> @ midnight via Blackboard
Unit 4: Storytelling, Land, and Cultural Identity		
Week 7 Oct. 8	- Guerrero, poems: “Sundays After Breakfast,” “Preparing the Tongue,” “Put Attention” - Gloria Anzaldúa, essay from <i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i> “Birthing the Warrior” essay - Assignment #4	Assignment #3 due <u>Thursday,</u> <u>Oct. 8</u> @ midnight via Blackboard
Week 8 Oct. 15	Ana Castillo, novel: <i>So Far from God</i> (Chapters 1-8)	Assignment #4 due Thursday, Oct. 15 @ midnight via Blackboard
Week 9 Oct. 22	REDWORK Book Launch Celebration 7pm (class will meet in auditorium)	

Week 10 Oct. 29	- Ana Castillo, novel: <i>So Far from God</i> (Chapters 9-16) - Ana Castillo, poems: “I Ask the Impossible,” “My Father was a Toltec,” “Whitman,” “Drops Fell on the Roof,” “Othering” - in-class workshop	
Week 11 Nov. 5	- Rebecca Solnit, essay: “Men Explain Things to Me” - Adrienne Rich, essay: “Women & Honor: Some Notes on Lying” - Joan Didion, essay: “On Keeping a Notebook” - Assignment #5: (Solnit/Didion/Rich)	
Week 12 Nov. 12	ANA CASTILLO Reading & Book Signing 6pm (class will meet in auditorium)	Assignment #5 due <u>Friday,</u> <u>Nov. 13</u> @ midnight via Blackboard
Week 13 Nov. 19	- Victoria Chang, various poems - Joy Harjo, poems: “For a Girl Becoming” & other poems - Assignment #6: (Chang / Harjo / Castillo / Anzaldúa / Guerrero /Lorde) - Final Presentation Guidelines	
Week 14 Nov. 26	THANKSGIVING	Assignment #6 due <u>Sunday,</u> <u>November 29</u> @ midnight via Blackboard
Week 15 Dec. 3	Final Presentations	Due TBA