

IDH 2930 The Poisonwood Bible:  
Cultural Imperialism, Corrupt Christianity, and Personal and Collective  
Tragedy

Fall 2021, 1 Credit Hour

Thursday P7, 1:55pm – 2:45pm, Little Hall 117

Instructors: Audrey DuBose, Will Eberhardt

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Amie Kreppel

---

### **Required Text**

"The Poisonwood Bible: A Novel" by Barbara Kingsolver

### **Course Description**

Barbara Kingsolver's acclaimed 1999 novel "The Poisonwood Bible" follows a Southern Baptist family from Georgia that settles in the 1960s Congo as missionaries. A series of mistakes and misguided motivations lead to their mission spiraling out of control, into doom. On the backdrop of the nation's struggle for independence, the tragedies that manifest and their decades-long ramifications help us explore themes of religion, colonialism and imperialism, and identity.

As we read this novel as a class, you are encouraged to reflect on the themes of the book and ask yourself what its intended messages are. Every week we will be discussing the book as a class, and we hope everyone will bring their interpretation to the conversation. Remember, there are no "wrong" answers in literature.

### **Course Goals**

In this course, students will

- Identify and analyze literary techniques using proper terminology
- Connect the content of the book to its themes and messages with literary analysis
- Think critically about the themes and messages of the book and their application to history, the modern world, and our own lives

## Course Instructors

This (Un)common Read course is taught primarily by two UF Honors Program upper-division undergraduates, Audrey DuBose and Will Eberhardt. Amie Kreppel (Director of the Center for European Studies, Professor of Political Science, and Jean Monnet Chair) is serving as a faculty advisor, and will not be heavily involved in lecturing during the course, but will provide overall supervision/guidance and is available to meet with students if desired. Questions regarding course policies, content, and grading should be directed to the student instructors.

## Office Hours and Contact

Will and Audrey will hold in-person office hours immediately after class on Thursdays from 3:00-3:50 PM (Period 8) at Turlington Hall Room 4407 (4th floor). They can be contacted at [audreydubose@ufl.edu](mailto:audreydubose@ufl.edu) and [w.eberhardt@ufl.edu](mailto:w.eberhardt@ufl.edu) for questions or for additional, virtual office hours on an as-needed basis.

Dr. Kreppel will also have regularly scheduled office hours via Zoom - time TBD. Students may also request an in-person meeting. Preferred contact is through the Canvas messaging system, as direct emails to UFL account are likely to get lost. Reminder: most course-related issues should be brought to Audrey and Will first.

## Course Schedule (reading assignments due on the listed week)

The listed pages are expected to be read before the start of the class on the date under which they're listed. For weeks with 'recommended' page numbers, we *strongly suggest* those pages be completed by the corresponding class date to keep up with the sheer length of the novel, but they are not required to participate in class activities that week.

### **Week 1 – August 26<sup>th</sup> – Add/Drop Week**

In-class activity: Introductions, syllabus and class format, and overview of book. Pre-reading perspective and reflection survey.

Homework: Sign up on Canvas for two biblical allegories/allusions, and prepare a few sentences of explanation. Post to Canvas discussion board, and be prepared to share during next week's class (6 points).

## **Week 2 – September 2<sup>nd</sup>**

### ***Due (Sept. 1st): Biblical Allusion Research***

*Pgs. 1-64 of Book One: Genesis (end before Leah's chapter)*

In-class activity: Discussion and presentation of biblical allusion assignments. Discussion of significant literary symbolism to be cognizant of while reading by briefly covering themes from *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* (not required reading).

## **Week 3 – September 9<sup>th</sup>**

*Pgs. 65-82 of Book One: Genesis*

*Pgs. 83-124 of Book Two: The Revelation (end before Rachel's chapter)*

In-class activity: Voice/style analysis of the 5 different characters' perspectives, insights, ways of progressing the narrative.

Homework: Read your assigned article on colonialism (posted on Canvas) and be prepared to discuss it in class in small groups next week, with a short oral summary to be presented to the class (6 points). Also, submit a short comment on Canvas for proof of reading.

## **Week 4 – September 16<sup>th</sup>**

### ***Due (Sept. 15th): Article Readings***

*Pgs. 125-186 of Book Two: The Revelation*

In-class activity: Discussion of homework articles. Discussion on motif of darkness vs. light. Generational societal consequences of colonialism. Implementation and subsequent failure of Western ideals and concepts in a non-Western context.

## **Week 5 – September 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Recommended: first part of *Book Three: The Judges* (pgs. 187-245)**

In-class activity: Literary analysis theme bingo - find examples of various literary techniques or themes in the book, to fill out the bingo board. Students will be split into groups randomly. First group to finish wins the respect of their peers.

## **Week 6 – September 30<sup>th</sup>**

*Book Three: The Judges* (pgs. 187-312)

In-class activity: Discussion of Nathan Price vs. Brother Fowles, pantheism and spirituality of nature, and religious imperialism/missions. Religious syncretism in Africa, religious landscape of the continent.

Homework: Research US involvement in foreign politics, in particular subversions similar to the CIA-backed intervention in the Congo, as detailed in the novel. Prepare a short summary to post on Canvas and share in class. Requirements can be found on Canvas (6 points).

### **Week 7 – October 7<sup>th</sup>**

#### ***Due (Oct. 6th): Foreign Interventions Research***

*Book Four: Bel and the Serpent (pgs. 313-376)*

In-class activity: Exploration of the political backdrop of the novel described in Book Four. Discussion of puppet governments, subversion as foreign policy, and other relevant examples of political imperialism. Cold War connection Presentations of homework research.

### **Week 8 – October 14<sup>th</sup>**

**Recommended: first part of *Book Five: Exodus (pgs. 377-439)***

In-class activity: Discussion of themes of guilt, redemption, and individual vs. collective burden.

### **Week 9 – October 21<sup>st</sup>**

*Book Five: Exodus (pgs. 377-506)*

In-class activity: “Sides of the room” debate. Using questions from the pre-reading survey, the class will divide into two parts, one agreeing, the other disagreeing with the read-aloud statement, and then debate its merits.

Homework: Upload to Canvas a short, 200-250 word reflection discussing how your opinions on a particular theme, character, or topic have developed or evolved thus far in the novel. Students’ pre-reading surveys will be returned to use as inspiration and can be drawn upon if desired (7 points).

**Week 10 – October 28<sup>th</sup>**

***Due (Oct. 27th): Personal Reflection***

*Book Six: Song of the Three Children (pgs. 507-534)*

*Book Seven: The Eyes in the Trees (pgs. 535-543)*

In-class activity: Discussion on themes of balance, justice, and forgiveness.

**Week 11 – November 4<sup>th</sup>**

In-class activity: Socratic Seminar: student-led discussion using questions available on Canvas 2 weeks prior.

**Week 12 – November 11<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS, VETERAN’S DAY**

**Week 13 – November 18<sup>th</sup>**

In-class activity: Partial movie screening: *Out of Africa*

(OPTIONAL) Potential class social in the following days after our class movie day, where we’ll have food, finish the movie, and discuss it. Date TBD by class’s collective availability.

**Week 14 – November 25<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING**

**Week 15 – December 2<sup>nd</sup> – Final Class Meeting**

***Due (December 1st): Extension Activity***

In-class activity: Extension activity presentations

**FINAL PAPER DUE: DECEMBER 4TH, SATURDAY 11:59PM ON CANVAS**

**December 9<sup>th</sup> – NO CLASS, READING DAY**

**Grading Scale (UF standard)**

|          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 93-100 A | 73-76 C  |
| 90-92 A- | 70-72 C- |
| 87-89 B+ | 67-69 D+ |
| 83-86 B  | 63-66 D  |
| 80-82 B- | 60-62 D- |
| 77-79 C+ | 0-59 E   |

## Grading Categories

| <b>CATEGORY</b>       | <b>POINTS</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Attendance            | 10            |
| Participation         | 10            |
| Take-Home Assignments | 25 (total)    |
| Extension Activity    | 15            |
| Socratic Seminar      | 15            |
| Final Essay           | 25            |
| Extra Credit          | 3 (max.)      |
| <b>TOTAL</b>          | 100 (+3)      |

### Attendance

Attendance at the weekly class meeting is mandatory. Given the short amount of time we have per week, as well as the reduced number of weeks we have together, missing a single class meeting impedes a deeper understanding and enjoyment of the novel.

One absence with advance notice or retroactive explanation is permitted without penalty, but per any additional absence(s) without a substantial excuse and appropriate documentation, one point will be deducted from the 10 available attendance points. Keep in mind that unexcused absences can also negatively impact your participation grade.

### Participation

Participation in class activities and assignments is expected of all students every week. There will not be a published weekly tally of participation points, but students whose participation is noted to be lacking across multiple weeks will have points deducted. Participation will be gauged by preparation of homework/assignments for class, responses during class discussions/questions, participation in small group activities, and general attentiveness during class.

As part of participation, students will be expected to come to class each week with an observation, takeaway, or question to share with the class, if time permits and reading was required.

### Take-Home Assignments

A few times throughout the semester (4), students will be given a short assignment to do as homework, in addition to the weekly reading. They will be due the Wednesday before class at 11:59pm, and descriptions and specifications for each assignment will be available on Canvas starting 2 weeks before its due date. They'll also be announced during class.

Each take-home assignment will be worth 6-7 points and grading will be based on **completion**. More specific requirements, if relevant - such as word count, number of sentences, etc. - will be posted to the assignment details on Canvas. In-class components of these take-home assignments - sharing with your group or the class, for instance - will contribute to each student's overall participation grade.

| Due                  | Assignment                    |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sept. 1st, 11:59 PM  | Biblical Allusion Research    |
| Sept. 15th, 11:59 PM | Article Readings              |
| Oct. 6th, 11:59 PM   | Foreign Intervention Research |
| Oct. 27th, 11:59 PM  | Reflection                    |

### Extension Activity

The extension activity will be a larger take-home assignment that asks students to "extend" their learning beyond just the pages of the book, by comparing the Poisonwood Bible to another book, applying it to a different medium, or furthering their knowledge of the historic or current situation of Africa. Details for this assignment, including a list of various activities that fulfill these requirements are available on Canvas. Students can also propose their own activity via Canvas mail or in-person no later than Thursday, October 28th. 300-400 words are expected.

Extension activities should be submitted no later than 11:59 PM on Wednesday, December 1st, the day prior to the extension activity presentations on Thursday, December 2nd (the final day of class). Students should be prepared to briefly present their projects to the class (3-5 minutes).

## **Socratic Seminar**

Toward the end of the semester (November 4th), after having read the whole book, we will have one class meeting dedicated solely to a student-driven discussion. The questions for discussion will be provided beforehand so that everyone can prepare their thoughts and evidence from the book, and discussion can flow freely between questions as appropriate. Absence on this day will not be permitted for an avoidable excuse. Students' grades will be based on their preparedness and verbal contributions during the discussion.

## **Final Essay**

At the end of the semester, each student will submit a 3-4 page, 750-1000 word essay related to the book. Proper paper formatting in any format style is required. Topic ideas will be posted on Canvas, and students may also submit their own proposals via Canvas mail or in-person no later than Thursday, November 4th.

Final essays are to be uploaded to Canvas no later than Saturday, December 4th at 11:59 PM.

## **Extra Credit Opportunities**

There will be two opportunities for extra credit throughout the semester.

One point will be given for attendance at the November class social, date TBD.

Two points can be gained for submitting a second Extension Activity, in addition to the one required. This extra credit opportunity will only be accepted until Monday, December 6th at 11:59pm.



## Health-Related Information

In response to COVID-19, the following practices are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones.

- If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available at no cost and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit this link for details on where to get your shot, including options that do not require an appointment: <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/vaccinations/vaccine-availability/>. Students who receive the first dose of the vaccine somewhere off-campus and/or outside of Gainesville can still receive their second dose on campus.
- You are expected to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings even if you are vaccinated. Please continue to follow healthy habits, including best practices like frequent hand washing. Following these practices is our responsibility as Gators.
  - Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.
  - Hand sanitizing stations will be located in every classroom.
- If you are sick, stay home and self-quarantine. Please visit the UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website about next steps, retake the questionnaire and schedule your test for no sooner than 24 hours after your symptoms began. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 (or email [covid@shcc.ufl.edu](mailto:covid@shcc.ufl.edu)) to be evaluated for testing and to receive further instructions about returning to campus. UF Health Screen, Test & Protect offers guidance when you are sick, have been exposed to someone who has tested positive or have tested positive yourself. Visit the [UF Health Screen, Test & Protect website](#) for more information.
  - Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.
  - If you are withheld from campus by the Department of Health through Screen, Test & Protect you are not permitted to use any on campus facilities. Students attempting to attend campus

activities when withheld from campus will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.

- Continue to regularly visit [coronavirus.UFHealth.org](https://coronavirus.UFHealth.org) and [coronavirus.ufl.edu](https://coronavirus.ufl.edu) for up-to-date information about COVID-19 and vaccination.

### **Disability Accommodations**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

### **Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>

Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>.

### **Cheating and Plagiarism**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.

## **In-Class Recording**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.