

ENGL 275 JUSTICE AND LITERATURE

Dr. Katy Ryan | Fall 2021

[Online Office Hours](#): Wed 9:00 – 10:30 and by appt.

Colson 205

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Redaction is a dialect after prison.

R. Dwayne Betts, *Felon*

This semester we will study the history and literature of imprisonment in the United States. We will read 20th-century and contemporary stories, poems, and essays written mainly by imprisoned and formerly imprisoned people. We will examine the history of convict leasing, the rise of the modern penitentiary, the use of the death penalty, and conflicting perspectives on the purpose and efficacy of confinement and the criminal legal system. We will learn about efforts to address the drivers of incarceration and movements to reform or abolish the system. We will ask what the literary record of incarceration contributes to our understanding of this central practice in U.S. American life.

In addition to questions you bring to class, we will explore:

- How did the United States come to lead the world in incarceration?
- What is the literary record of imprisonment?
- What meanings of justice emerge from this literature?
- What are the human, environmental, & financial costs of mass incarceration?
- What do victims of violence and harm need?
- What might restorative and transformative justice models have to offer?

You will have a chance to learn about the Appalachian Prison Book Project, a nonprofit that sends free books to imprisoned people in six states and facilitates book clubs inside prison.

I am excited to work with and learn from each of you.

Contents of Syllabus

1. Required Texts
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1. REQUIRED TEXTS

H. Bruce Franklin, ed., *Prison Writing in Twentieth-Century America*
Ernest Gaines, *A Lesson Before Dying*
Dwayne Betts, *Felon*

James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* is recommended, not required.

Additional readings will be available on ECampus, provided in class, or linked in the schedule. Do not hesitate to contact me if you cannot find something.

2. GRADE DISTRIBUTION (Point System)

Four reader responses	20
Essay (6 pp H10 pp)	20
Final Research Project	30
Honors includes annotated bibliography	
Class participation	30
Two big questions	10
Class discussion	10
Informal writing	10

Midterm grade will include participation, 1 big question, 2 reader responses, + essay draft.

Grading Scale

A+	100-98;	A	97-92;	A-	91-90
B+	89-88;	B	87-82;	B-	81-80
C+	79-78;	C	77-72;	C-	71-70
D+	69-68;	D	67-62;	D-	61-60
F	below 59				

3. CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE POLICY

This course will strengthen your ability to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, listen, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. We will create an environment that invites all of us to learn, contribute, and listen. I set a high bar for thoughtful and respectful exchange. Multiple perspectives are welcome. If you have any concerns about class discussion, please let me know.

Your class participation points will be the sum of three parts:

1. *Two Big Questions* 10 points total

You will sign up for two Big Question Days. On each day, prepare one question that engages broadly with the reading—that is, not a plot or easily answered question. Pull back from the material and

ask a question from a bird's-eye view. I will give examples of Big Questions during the first week of class. We will typically begin or end class with a student question.

2. *Informal writing* 10 points

Occasionally I will ask you to write in response to course materials or discussions. These writing exercises are ungraded opportunities to process information and share your understanding. You receive full credit (2 points each) as long as your writing demonstrates that you have read and been paying attention in class discussion.

Informal writing cannot be made up if you miss class. However, I will collect informal writing seven times, which will give everyone two grace periods with no penalty. (If you receive 14/10 points, the extra points will contribute to general class discussion.)

3. *Class discussion* 10 points

There will be many ways to participate—by answering and asking questions; taking initiative in small groups; reading aloud; putting a key quotation on the board before class begins. Participation can also include posting on our course blog. Ask me at any point if you have questions about your points for “class discussion.”

ATTENDANCE POLICY

You can miss four classes for whatever reason. After the fifth absence (if there has not been a documented emergency), you will receive zero points for the “class discussion” portion of participation. I will revisit this policy as needed to be in line with University guidance on public health concerns.

Routine lateness (three classes) will count as an absence. I will let you know when you have been late more than three times.

The University's statement on attendance is available [here](#).

4. **WRITING REQUIREMENTS**

Upload all written work to the appropriate ECampus folder on the due date before midnight.

Late Policy: I will accept late work only once, and there will be a one-point deduction. The assignment must be handed in within one week of the original due date. Visit me during office hours or make an appointment if you are having trouble making deadlines.

Four Reader Responses 20 points

You will write **four reader responses** (approx. 500 words) to the readings. You can choose the literary work you want to focus on. Due dates are on the syllabus. Please read the sample reader response on ECampus.

The strongest responses typically investigate a specific question about the literature and are anchored in careful observation of language. Your analysis should advance an insight or argument and offer evidence for your claims.

Literary evidence consists of direct quotations, paraphrases, and summaries. Include at least **three direct quotations** from the text in your response. Provide the page number in parentheses after the quote. This practice will prepare you for the essay assignment.

You are welcome to make connections to other works we have read in class or that are relevant to your analysis.

You have the option to write one creative response (max. 1000 words). For this option, you do not need to quote directly from the literary works, but your understanding of the original needs to be clear; the same level of analysis needs to be demonstrated through the creative response as in the analytical response.

Below are ideas for the optional creative response.

- **Create a Comic:** Draw a comic strip or panel that engages with the original. Your comic might include your own writing, such as dialogue or thought bubbles.
- **Be the Author:** Write an additional scene a literary work. Your scene should illuminate an important question or insight about the original. You could create a scene that would occur within, before, or after the fiction or nonfiction work.
- **Create a dialogue:** Imagine a conversation between two characters or writers. The characters could be from the same or different literary works.
- **Conduct an Interview:** Imagine an interview with a character or the author of one of our works. Explain who is conducting the interview, where, when, etc. Your interview should help us to define key terms, understand concepts, or make sense of a confusing part of the work.
- **Write a Letter:** Compose a letter to an author or one of the characters. This letter should explore a question you have about the original and convey your interpretation.

Essay *20 points*

Around midterm, you will write one 6-page essay; 10 pages, if you are in the Honors section. I will collect drafts and provide feedback. You will have an opportunity to revise your work and read the work of other students. I will give you detailed instructions in writing.

Need Writing Help? The Eberly Studio -- a free tutoring service for WVU students -- is located in G02 Colson Hall. Tutors are available to help with any writing project in any course. The Center specializes in helping students with brainstorming, drafting, and revising their work. Phone: (304) 293-5788 |Call for Evansdale and evening hours

http://english.wvu.edu/centers_and_projects/wcenter/writing_center_home

Final Research Project 30 points

There will be several options for the final research project, which might take the form of a research essay or a digital humanities project. Everyone will present their final project to the class. I will give you written instructions in the second half of the semester.

5. Learning Outcomes, English Major Program Goals, and SpeakWrite

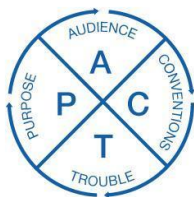
Upon completing this course, a student should be able to:

- Identify literary genres such as poetry, essay, memoir, short story, novel
- Analyze complex passages in literature within textual and historical contexts
- Communicate ideas effectively in speech and writing
- Define and describe concepts of justice

English Major Program Goals

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.
2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.



- Purpose:** What exactly do I want to happen?
- Audience:** Who is reading, listening, or viewing?
- Conventions:** What is expected in this context?
- Trouble:** What could get in the way of my goals?

SpeakWrite

ENGL 275 has been designated as a SpeakWrite course by the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. As part of Eberly's commitment to fostering effective communication skills, this course will:

- Emphasize informal and formal modes of communication
- Teach discipline-specific communication techniques
- Use a process-based approach to learning that provides opportunities for feedback and revision
- Base 90% of the final grade on successful written and spoken performance

6. UNIVERSITY POLICY STATEMENTS

Academic Integrity Statement

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, instructors will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of their courses. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University [Academic Standards Policy](#). Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see your instructor before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Academic Standards Policy, including Academic Dishonesty

The WVU Catalog contains the full [Undergraduate Academic Standards Policy](#) and [Graduate Academic and Professional Standards Policy](#).

- [Resources for Faculty and Students for Reporting and Appealing Violations of Academic Standards](#)

Adverse Weather Statement

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, everyone should use his or her best judgment regarding travel to and from campus. Safety should be the main concern. If you cannot get to class because of adverse weather conditions, you should contact your instructor as soon as possible. Similarly, if your instructor(s) are unable to reach the class location, they will notify you of any cancellation or change as soon as possible, using agreed upon methods to prevent students from embarking on any unnecessary travel. If you cannot get to class because of weather conditions, instructors will make allowances relative to required attendance policies, as well as any scheduled tests, quizzes, or other assessments. [adopted 9-8-2014]

Appropriate Use of Technology Statement

Use of technology in the classroom should always be directly related to class activities and/or course learning outcomes. Inappropriate technology use can be an impediment to learning and a distraction to all members of the class. As such, inappropriate use of technology in the classroom may be considered a disruption of the class and constitute a violation of the [WVU Student Conduct Code](#) and could potentially result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct. Use of technology in the classroom when specifically prohibited by the instructor may also constitute a violation of WVU's [Academic Integrity](#) policy.

Campus Safety Statement

The WVU Police are committed to creating and maintaining a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Part of this mission includes educating the campus community on how to respond to potential campus threats, such as the threat of an active shooter on campus or other suspicious behaviors. Fortunately, WVU Police offer training - both online and in-person - on how to handle a variety of campus safety scenarios. All students are encouraged to visit the [WVU Police](#) webpage, in particular the content under the [Active Shooter](#) training program. Students are also encouraged to report any suspicious behaviors on campus using the [Report a Threat](#) portion of the webpage. Additional materials on campus safety prepared by WVU Police, including special safety tips and training, will also be provided on our eCampus page. [adopted 10-2-17]

Notice of Class Recording Policy

Meetings of a course at West Virginia University (WVU), whether online or in-person, may be recorded. Recordings are not guaranteed, and are intended to supplement the planned class session. Recordings will be made available to class participants, which may include students, assistants, guest lecturers, and co-facilitators. Recordings may be shared by the instructor or institution in accordance with WVU Rules and policies. The Recordings are owned by and contain intellectual property of WVU. The Recordings may not be shared, copied, reproduced, redistributed, transferred, or disseminated in any form or by any means without the prior written consent of authorized officials of WVU.

COVID-19 Syllabus Statement

WVU is committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for all students, faculty, and staff. Should campus operations change because of health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that this course will move to a fully online delivery format. If that occurs, students will be advised of technical and/or equipment requirements, including remote proctoring software.

In a face-to-face environment, our commitment to safety requires students, staff, and instructors to observe the social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) guidelines set by the University at all times. While in class, students will sit in assigned seats when applicable and wear the required PPE. Should a student forget to bring the required PPE, PPE will be available in the building for students to acquire. Students who fail to comply will be dismissed from the classroom for the class period and may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct for further sanctions.

If a student becomes sick or is required to quarantine during the semester, they should notify the instructor. The student should work with the instructor to develop a plan to receive the necessary course content, activities, and assessments to complete the course learning outcomes.

Inclusivity Statement

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in your classes, please advise your instructors and make appropriate arrangements with [the Office of Accessibility Services](https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/).
(<https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>)

More information is available at the [Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](https://diversity.wvu.edu/) (<https://diversity.wvu.edu/>) as well. [adopted 2-11-2013]

Incomplete Policy

The WVU Catalog contains the full [Incomplete Policy](#).

Mental Health Statement - Main Campus

Mental health concerns or stressful events can adversely affect your academic performance and social relationships. WVU offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns that you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at the Carruth Center for Psychological and Psychiatric Services (CCPPS) website: <https://carruth.wvu.edu/>

- If you are in need of crisis services, call the CCPPS main number 24/7: (304) 293-4431.

Crisis services are also available through text: Text WVU to 741741 for support 24/7 from a trained Crisis Counselor.

Student Advocacy Center

Part of the Campus and Community Life, a Division of Student Life, the [Student Advocacy Center](#) is comprised of the Senior Associate Dean of Student Life who serves as the Student Advocate, Student Legal Services, the Off-Campus Housing Office, Commuter Student Programs, Non-traditional Student Assistance, and the Student HelpLine. The goal of the Center is to assist students with non-academic questions and concerns and to make the proper referrals when necessary.

Questions are answered daily about many concerns that students may have. The Advocacy Center is designed to simplify procedures and to help students cut through red tape by finding answers to questions and helping to familiarize our students with campus policies

and procedures. We specialize in problem solving and helping our students be better informed about making the decisions they need to make, whether these decisions involve classes or any other aspect of university life.

The Student HelpLine number is 304-293-5555

Sale of Course Material Statement

All course materials, including lectures, class notes, quizzes, exams, handouts, presentations, and other course materials provided to students for their courses are protected intellectual property. As such, the unauthorized purchase or sale of these materials may result in disciplinary sanctions under the [Student Conduct Code](#). (<https://studentconduct.wvu.edu/campus-student-code>) [adopted 5-11-2015]

Sexual Misconduct Statement

West Virginia University does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence [[BOG Rule 1.6](#)]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff; keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the [Title IX Coordinator](#).

If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure confidential, please seek assistance from the [Carruth Center](#), 304-293-9355 or 304-293-4431 (24-hour hotline), and locally within the community at the [Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center](#) (RDVIC), 304- 292-5100 or 304-292-4431 (24-hour hotline).

For more information, please consult [WVU's Title IX Office](#) (<https://titleix.wvu.edu/resources-offices>).

Student Evaluation of Instruction Statement

Effective teaching is a primary mission of West Virginia University. Student evaluation of instruction provides the university and the instructor with feedback about your experiences in the course for review and course improvement. Your participation in the evaluation of course instruction is both strongly encouraged and highly valued. Results are strictly confidential, anonymous, and not available to the instructor until after final grades are released by Admissions and Records. Information about how you can complete this evaluation will be provided by your instructor.

7. SCHEDULE

The schedule is subject to change in response to weather and other contingencies. Assignments are due by midnight on the given date.

DATE	TOPICS and READING ASSIGNMENTS	DUE DATES
Aug 18	<p>Introductions Syllabus ECampus Nikki Giovanni, "A Journey" Sign Up for Big Question</p>	
NONFICTION		
Aug 20	<p><i>Prison Writing</i>, Bruce Franklin, Introduction (1-17) "Trends in Corrections" (ECampus/Readings/Reports) Language Best Practice – Open Letter Example of Big Question Recommended: "People First" Report</p>	
Aug 23	<p>Douglas Blackmon, excerpt from <i>Slavery By Another Name</i> (See ECampus/Readings/Scholarly Articles) In class: Interview with Blackmon on Slavery By Another Name</p>	
Aug 25	<p><i>Prison Writing</i>, Anonymous, "Autobiography of an Imprisoned Peon" (21-29) <i>Prison Writing</i>, "Songs of the Prison Plantation" (29-34) In-Class: Leadbelly, "Midnight Special" Discussion of Reader Responses – See Sample Example of Big Question Recommended: Sarah Haley, "'Like I Was A Man': Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia," <i>Signs</i> 39.1 (2013), 1-7. (ECampus/Readings/Scholarly Articles)</p>	
Aug 27	<p><i>Prison Writing</i>, Jack London, "Pinched" and "The Pen" (37-57)</p>	<p>First Reader Response due to any of the readings so far</p>

Aug 30	<i>Prison Writing</i> , Kate Richards O'Hare, excerpt from <i>Crime and Criminals</i> (73-89)	
Sept 1	Meet at the Aull Center (351 Spruce St, 2 nd floor). Intro to Appalachian Prison Book Project and Applied Liberal Arts Watch Welcome to the Zo , episode one. An animated series from The Marshall Project. Illustrated by Molly Crabapple and narrated by Michael K. Williams. "The Zo uses anecdotes from prison letters collected in the American Prison Writing Archive , voiced by people who were formerly incarcerated." Additional episodes at https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/02/27/the-zo	
Sept 3	Gina Clark, " Shattering the Maximum Security Ceiling ," Brett Story, from <i>Prison Land</i> (ECampus / Readings / Scholarly Articles) In-class: clips from <i>13th</i>	
Sept 6	No Class. Labor Day	
Sept 8	<i>Prison Writing</i> , Malcolm X, from <i>Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> (329-334) In-Class: clips from <i>Make It Plain</i> Leonard Peltier, from <i>My Life is My Sundance</i> (ECampus / Readings / Nonfiction – Life-Writing)	
Sept 10	Jimmy Santiago Baca, "Coming Into Language" (ECampus/Readings/Nonfiction – Life Writing) Discussion of First Essay Assignment	
Sept 13	Willie Francis, "My Trip to the Chair" (ECampus/Readings/Willie Francis Materials/Francis) Recommended: Deborah Denno	Reader Response due to any reading since Aug 27
FICTION		
Sept 15	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> (novel) chaps 1-4	
Sept 17	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> chaps 5 - 9	

Sept 20	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> chaps 10-16	
Sept 22	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> chaps 17-21 Discussion of Essay	
Sept 24	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> chaps 22-25	
Sept 27	Ernest Gaines, <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> chaps 26- end	
Sept 29	David Garland, Prologue and Introduction to <i>Peculiar Institution</i> (ECampus/Readings/Scholarly Articles)	
Sept 30	<i>Optional Event: Festival of Ideas, Eddie Glaude Jr. 7:00 PM</i>	
Oct 1	Writing Workshop	Essay Drafts Due
Oct 4	No class – individual conferences	
Oct 6	No class – individual conferences	
Fall Break Oct 7-8		
Oct 11	Judee Norton, “Norton #59900” (short story) ECampus/Readings/Stories	
Oct 13	<i>Prison Writing</i> , Patricia McConnell, “Sing Soft, Sing Loud” (294-306)	
Oct 15	Discussion of Essays	First Essay Due
POETRY		
Oct 17	<i>Felon</i> pp. 1 - 25	
Oct 20	<i>Felon</i> 26-56	
Oct 22	<i>Felon</i> entire book	

Oct 24	<i>Felon</i> Don Chiasson, "RDB: Poetry After Prison ," <i>New Yorker</i> Mellon Foundation Million Book Project R. Dwayne Betts, " Could an Ex-Con Become an Attorney "	
Oct 27	<i>Prison Writing</i> , Kathy Boudin, "Our Skirt" and "The Call" (329-334) Ross Gay, " A Small, Needful Fact "	Third Reader Response due to any reading since Sept 13 (should not be the same focus as your essay)
Oct 29	<i>Prison Writing</i> , Carolyn Baxter, "On Being Counted" <i>Prison Writing</i> , Norma Stafford, "The Gone One"	
Nov 1	Emily Dickinson, Three Poems (ECampus/Readings/Poems)	
VISIONS		
Nov 3	Martin Luther King, Jr., " Letter from Birmingham Jail " Alabama clergy, " A Call for Unity "	
Nov 5	Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow" (ECampus/Readings/ Visions) In-class: Interview on Bill Moyers	
Nov 8	Danielle Sered, from <i>Until We Reckon</i> (ECampus/Readings/Visions) Restorative Justice and Sujatha Baliga	
Nov 10	Susan Burton, from <i>Becoming Ms. Burton</i> (ECampus/Readings/ Visions)	
Nov 12	" A Conservative Case for Prison Reform" Conversation with Angela Davis and Toni Morrison	
Nov 15	Paul Butler, from <i>Let's Get Free</i> , chap 9 (ECampus/Readings/ Visions) [Nov 16 Last day to withdraw]	Fourth Reader Response due to any reading since Oct. 27

Nov 17	Nicole Fleetwood, " Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration " (around 10:00 – 1:00) Doran Larson, " Why Scandinavian Prisons Are Superior "	
Nov 19	Bryan Stevenson, Commencement Address (ECampus/Readings/Visions) Decarceral Brainstorm	

Nov 20 – 28 Fall Break

Nov 29	Preparation for Presentations	
Dec 1	Final Project Presentations	
Dec 3	Final Project Presentations	
Dec 6	Final Project Presentations	
Dec 8	Concluding Thoughts	