

ENGL 275 Justice and Literature
West Virginia University
Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

Fall 2017

Professor Katy Ryan

Outside Teaching Assistants Rayna, Alex

Inside Teaching Assistants Michael, Jonathan

Wed 9:00–12:00 FCI, Hazelton

Weekly Office Hours at WVU Colson 221

Tuesday 10:00-12:00

Weekly Office Hours at FCI, REC

Friday 9:00 AM



Hopelessness is the enemy of justice.

Bryan Stevenson

Course Description

This semester, we will study twentieth-century and contemporary American literature that encourages us to think about justice. We will read essays, poems, short stories, and memoirs, many by imprisoned writers. As we learn about the history of the modern prison, we will also consider the liberating potential of education (both formal and informal practices) for everyone.

This class will strengthen your ability *to think*—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason—and *to listen*. Dialogue is essential to our process. This is the first Inside-Out class offered by the English Department at West Virginia University (WVU). A group of students from WVU and a group of students from the Federal Correctional Institute (FCI) at Hazelton will take the course together.

ENGL 275 is also a SpeakWrite course designed to strengthen written and oral communication.

Welcome to class!

Learning Objectives

1. Explore the meanings of justice through a study of American prison literature
2. Learn about literary genres
3. Study the role of race and class in the criminal justice system
4. Reflect on educational models that facilitate growth and freedom
5. Build a challenging, supportive, and cooperative intellectual community
6. Strengthen written and oral communication skills
7. Evaluate how concepts such as PACT (purpose, audience, conventions, and trouble spots) inform communication practices

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this class, students should be able to:

1. Define or describe justice based on literary and historical works
2. Identify literary genres (poetry, essay, memoir, novel, short story)
3. Analyze complex passages in literature
4. Compose detailed responses to literary works
5. Write logical and thesis-driven essays
6. Express ideas clearly in discussion and respond thoughtfully to the ideas of others

Contents of Syllabus

1. Required Materials
2. Grade Distribution
3. Class Participation, Three Points Every Class, and Attendance
4. Four Reader Responses
5. Two Class Responses
6. Final Essay
7. Final Project
8. Learning Outcomes / English Major Program Goals / WVU + Hazelton Information
9. Schedule

1. Required Materials

- ✓ John Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers*
- ✓ Course Packet of Readings

These materials will be provided to inside students and will need to be returned at the end of the semester.

2. Grade Distribution (Point System)

Class participation	20
Four reader responses	20
Two class responses	10
Final project	20
6-page essay	30

3. Class Participation, 3 Points Every Class, and Attendance

English courses are about more than reading and writing and the acquisition of information. The study of literature involves learning to think analytically and in conversation with others. I know well the uncertainty, anxiety, disagreement, and boredom that can lead to silence. I realize it is not easy for everyone to speak in class. Still, that is my goal—that we hear from everyone.

The subjects of crime, criminalization, imprisonment, and re-entry can be difficult to discuss. I set a high bar for thoughtful and civil exchange. We do not have to agree with one another—I welcome lively discussion and dissent—but we must be able to listen and respond meaningfully to one another. We will create together our guidelines for discussion during our first class. If you ever have any concerns, please let me know.

Class Participation

Always be prepared for class and bring with you the literary work under discussion.

From the beginning of the semester **until October 11**, for each class you should prepare in writing three points that you would like to make about the reading. What stood out to you? As an alternative, you can select three passages from the readings that you think are important.

There will be many ways to participate. Taking initiative in small groups will contribute toward participation. You are welcome to read from your written materials. At any point, you can ask me about your participation points.

Attendance Policy

Outside students, do your very best to not miss any classes. Unlike most undergraduate classes, we are only meeting once a week—and there may be cancellations that we cannot anticipate. If you miss a class, please make an appointment to speak with me. (See emergency policy below.)

For those traveling to Hazelton, punctuality is extremely important. **If you are not at the FCI by 8:45, you may not be able to gain entry to the class.**

Adverse Weather

In the event of inclement or threatening weather, use your best judgment regarding travel. Safety should be the main concern. If you cannot get to class, let me know as soon as possible.

If the facility goes on lockdown or the facility must cancel class because of weather, I will notify outside students as soon as possible and at least 1 hour before class starts, using MIX addresses.

Outside students, please check your MIX account regularly. Class may take place on campus if the facility is on lockdown.

4. Four Reader Responses: two analytical and two creative responses

You will write four 500-word reader responses. Two will be analytical and two will be creative. Due dates are on the syllabus.

Written work will receive a simple checkmark for a solid response and a checkmark minus for a response that needs more work. I will cover this more in class.

Analytical Writing. Analytical writing makes an argument and offers evidence to support that claim. It will help to focus your response on a specific scene, idea, image, or question. There is a sample analytical response at the end of the syllabus.

Reader responses must include at least **three direct quotations** from the literary text. Provide the page number in parenthesis after the quote, MLA-style. We will use the Modern Language Association's (MLA) documentation style. I will explain this in class. It's very simple!

Creative Writing. Two of your reader responses will be creative. You do not need to quote directly from the literary work for these responses, but it should be obvious how you are responding to the literature.

Below are ideas for creative responses, but you are NOT limited to these. Feel free to experiment.

- **Be the Author:** Write an additional scene to one of our works. Your scene should illuminate an important question or insight about the original. You can create a scene that would occur within, before, or after the fiction or nonfictional work.

- **Create a dialogue:** Imagine a conversation between two characters. The characters could be from the same or from different literary works. Again, be sure that your creative dialogue offers an important insight into the original.
- **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 creative interview should help us to define key terms, understand difficult 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 discuss a real question you have about the original and convey your interpretation.

If you have another idea for a creative response, just run it by me.

Inside students: written work must be typed or handwritten neatly. Print if possible.

Depending on the size of your handwriting, two handwritten pages will usually equal about one typed page.

Outside students: written assignments must be typed and uploaded on ECampus. Reader responses can be single-spaced.

Due dates for reader response are on the schedule. Outside students will post responses (1 page single-spaced typed) on ECampus before class time. Inside students will bring responses (approx. 2 pages handwritten) to class.

5. Two Class Responses

You will write **two responses to class discussions**. Like the Reader Responses, these will be approx. 500 words. Reflect on what happened in class. What did you notice? What new thoughts do you have about the discussion? Feel free to refer to our readings. Please write one before mid-semester (Oct 11) and one before the end of the semester.

6. Final Essay

At the end of the semester, you will write a 6-page essay about one or more of the literary works we have discussed. I will provide the assignment in writing down the road.

7. Final Project

For the final project, you will collaborate in small groups on a creative presentation that draws from our semester of readings. This presentation could be in the form of a play, a poem, a story, or a panel discussion. You might look at the options for the Creative Reader Response for ideas. The final project could also be a proposal for new programming at FCI-Hazelton. We will share strong proposals with the Inside-Out Think Tank.

Each group will present their work to the class in November.

8. English Major Program Goals / WVU + Hazelton Information

English Major 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.

WVU 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.

Outside students, if you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services. Accessibility Services is located in Suite 250 at 1085 Van Voorhis Rd (beside Applebee's and across from the Mountaineer Station transportation center). 304-293-6700; access2@mail.wvu.edu; <http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>.

Emergencies or Health Crises. Outside students, if you have an emergency or serious health problem in the course of the semester, once you have the opportunity, you should contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me. Please reserve the Dean's services for serious circumstances.

Intellectual Honesty

Plagiarism/Cheating. The following definitions are from the *West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog*. Please see the section on Academic Integrity and Dishonesty for the full definition and discussion of procedures.

Plagiarism: material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others . . . including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition.

Cheating: doing academic work for another student, or providing one's own work for another student to copy and submit as his / her own.

Scholastic dishonesty: involves misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; interfering with another's work.

Clear cases of plagiarism or cheating may result in an F for the course. If you have any question about how to document sources, please talk to me.



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

Need Writing Help? WVU students, 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

Inside students, if you need additional writing help, just talk to Alex, Rayna, or me.

Hazelton Security

At the beginning of the semester outside students will go through training regarding security. Failure to abide by the protocols of the program may lead to disciplinary actions and potentially expulsion from WVU as well as the potential for prosecution. Let's stay far from this territory.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Please arrive to class having read the material listed for that day. There may be circumstances beyond our control that will result in schedule changes. If class is cancelled, please continue with the reading on your own.

WELCOME + INTRODUCTIONS

Week of August 16

Separate class meetings
Outside students' security training and informational session
Inside students' informational session

August 23

Welcome and icebreaker. Review of syllabus and program parameters
Creation of discussion guidelines
Things It Might Help Me To Know (handout)
Wisława Szymborska, "Two Monkeys" (poem)
Langston Hughes, "Harlem" and "Justice" (poems)

VOICES FROM HISTORY

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States.

13th Amendment of the US Constitution

August 30

Bruce Franklin, Introduction to *Prison Writing in Twentieth-Century America* (1-17) (essay)
Fact Sheet, "Trends in U.S. Corrections," The Sentencing Project (2017)
Anonymous, "Autobiography of an Imprisoned Peon" from Bruce Franklin's *Prison Writing in Twentieth-Century America* (21-29) (personal narrative)
Douglas Blackmon, excerpt from *Slavery By Another Name* (book chapter)
Sarah Haley, excerpt from "Like I Was A Man': Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia," *Signs* 39.1 (2013), 1-7. (scholarly article)

Sept. 6

Kate Richards O'Hare, excerpt from *Crime and Criminals* (book chapter)
Dwayne Betts, "Only Once," *Yale Law Review* (essay)
Michel Foucault, excerpt from *Discipline and Punish* (book; handout—not in course packet)
1st Analytical Reader Response Due (to any of the readings so far)

TRANSFORMATIONS

Storytelling has never been mere entertainment for me. It is, I believe, one of the principle ways in which we absorb knowledge. –Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize Speech

Sept. 13

Ralph Ellison, excerpt from *Invisible Man* (novel)
Patricia McConnell, “Sing Soft, Sing Loud” (short story)
Ann Pancake, Interview on Appalachian fiction and identity

Sept. 20

Judee Norton, “Norton #59900” (short story)
James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (short story)
“Is Prison Really Punishment?” *Daily Athenaeum* 20 Feb 2014 (editorial; handout—not in course packet)

Sept. 27

Malcolm X, from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (memoir)
Jimmy Santiago Baca, “Coming Into Language” (essay)
Kathy Boudin, “Trilogy of Journeys” (poem)
2nd Creative Reader Response Due (to any readings since Sept. 13)

Oct. 4

John Wideman, *Brothers and Keepers* (1-120) (memoir)
Alligator Story
Discussion of final projects and final essay

Oct. 11

Brothers and Keepers (121-end)
Etheridge Knight, “Hard Rock Returns from the Hospital for the Criminally Insane” (poem)
Discussion of final projects and final essay
Last day to turn in Response to Class Discussion #1

FREEDOM SONGS

“A change is gonna come.” –Sam Cook

Oct. 18

Dwayne Betts, “At the End of Life, A Secret,” “Elegy Ending with a Cell Door Closing” (poems)
Emily Dickinson, 3 poems
Paul St. John, “Behind the Mirror,” from Chevigny’s *Doing Time* (essay)
Work on Final Projects
3rd Analytical Reader Response Due (to any readings since Oct. 4)

Oct. 25

Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (letter)
Michelle Alexander, excerpt from *The New Jim Crow* (book chapter)
Work on Final Projects

Nov. 1

Paul Butler, excerpt from *Let's Get Free: A Hip Hop Theory of Justice* (book chapter)
Ralph Ellison, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station"
Rose Gay, "A Small Needful Fact" (poem)
Work on Final Projects
Last day to turn in Response to Class Discussion #2

Nov. 8

Jarvis Jay Masters, from *That Bird Has My Wings* (essay)
4th Creative Reader Response Due (to any readings since Oct. 25)
Group Presentations

Nov. 15

Bryan Stevenson, Commencement Speech (speech)
Group Presentations
Final Papers Due

Thanksgiving Break

Monday, Nov 27 or Tues, Nov 28

- If possible, meeting with a few students to prepare for closing ceremony

Nov. 29

Closing Ceremony

Dec 6

Inside Students' Final Meeting

Dec 8

2:00 – 4:00 Outside Students' Final Meeting – Colson 2nd floor conference room

Sample Reader Response by a WVU Student

NAME _____

ENGL 275: Justice & Literature

Response Number Two

Books Instead of Bars: Malcolm X's Personal Reform

"You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge," Malcolm X writes in his autobiography (153). Malcolm X demonstrates that reading and writing rescued him while in prison. In 1946, Malcolm X was convicted on burglary charges and sentenced to ten years. However, he was paroled after seven years. Originally, he was sent to the Charlestown State Prison, but eventually he was transferred to the Norfolk Prison Colony. This prison had a library packed full of books. His story of being saved in prison (from "Satan" to "Saved") suggests a larger implication. It is possible that providing imprisoned people with the opportunity to read and write can be the path to rehabilitation and revival. The same is also true for those outside prison.

The key to Malcolm X's awakening was his transfer to the Norfolk Prison Colony. He describes the new prison as one of the most enlightened places he knew with the library being one of its best features. To begin his rehabilitation in prison, Malcolm X copied the dictionary down in his own handwriting. Copying words from the dictionary was not only a way for him to learn better reading skills, but it also helped him to improve his penmanship. He felt ashamed at his inability to make his first letter to Elijah Muhammad legible and understandable, which contributed to his desire to learn how to read and write better. However, he explains that the true desire came from his envy for Bimbi's vast amount of knowledge. For these reasons, Malcolm X went in pursuit of educating himself while in prison. He describes the effect of educating himself: "Many who hear me somewhere in person, or on television, or those who read something I've said, will think I went to school far beyond the eighth grade. This impression is due entirely to my prison studies" (152). Malcolm X has a lot of recognition because it was inside that he found rehabilitation through reading and writing.

Malcolm X's transformation has further implications for the larger concept of imprisonment. If the effects of education while in prison are so positive, why is it facilitated so little within the confines of prison? Norfolk Prison Colony clearly represented a different motivation. As Malcolm X states in regards to the millionaire who donated his library to the prison, "He had probably been interested in the rehabilitation program" (151). The Charlestown State Prison demonstrates a prison system focused on caging criminals, whereas the Norfolk Prison Colony is a system focused on rehabilitation.

According to Malcolm X, when a man is "behind bars, a man never reforms" (149). The actual bars get in the way of reflection and change because the person feels degraded and powerless. If education is the key, then why are those bars not being replaced with books? I never thought a prison without bars but there are models for that in other part of the world. (Scandinavia, for instance.)

For Malcolm X, a new world opened up to him through reading and writing, and the same could happen for many if they were given the opportunity. And those of us on the outside need to be doing the same work of reading and thinking and creating liberation.

Works Cited

Malcolm X. "From the Autobiography of Malcolm X." *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America*. Ed. H. Bruce Franklin. New York: Penguin Books, 1998. 147-155.