

Speculative Fiction, Spring 2021

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Office hours are **online** and **by appointment**. E-mail me to set up a time, **TWRF, 2:15 to 5:00 PM**.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood.
- *Wild Seed*, Octavia Butler.
- Additional readings distributed digitally.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Encompassing genres ranging from science fiction to fantasy and horror, “speculative fiction” is a term meant to be inclusive of all forms of literature which play with and/or exceed our expectations of “realistic” narratives. This does not mean this kind of literature is a retreat or escape from our reality; indeed, speculative fiction is one of our most powerful tools for considering profound contemporary and historical questions, from the political to the philosophical to the deeply personal, and how all three intersect. This course focuses on some of the most challenging and provocative explorations undertaken by fiction - examinations of human civilization and technological development, memory and identity, history and its legacies of exploitation - which topics are especially suitable for treatment in speculative experiments. We’ll read these fictional texts alongside critical essays, as well as writing essays of our own, to participate in the energetic discussion which springs up around the very best speculative fiction.

A **major focus of this course is critical reading**: the ability not only to **understand what the text says**, but also to **interpret what the text does on a deeper level**. To do so we will examine **how each text was received in its historical moment** as well as determining **what we can take from it today**. Your insights and interpretations will be the building blocks of our class sessions; it will be a dialogue with the past and a meditation on the present. You will be expected to articulate your perspective on the texts and engage with other perspectives in a respectful and productive manner. In addition, we will develop the skills research and analytical writing, preparing you for complex intellectual tasks useful both in academic and professional settings.

## COURSE GOALS

- Develop critical thinking and critical reading skills
- Engage with critical literary articles and apply their insights
- Recognize the ways in which literature can be used to explore our world and ourselves
- Analyze literary texts both orally and in writing
- Develop strategies for effective academic writing

## Topics by Week

Weeks 3/15, 3/22, 3/29, 4/5, 4/12 *Oryx and Crake*

Weeks 4/19, 4/21, 4/26, 5/3 *Wild Seed*

\*\*\*\*Paper due 5/15 before 11:59 pm\*\*\*\*\*

## ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

Participation - 35%

Daily Reading Notes and Responses - 35%

Analytical Essay - 30%

Grading: A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ starts at 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D\* 69 and below

**Participation (35%):** Your participation in each class session will be vital for the overall experience. Come to every class on time, prepared with your reading notes and your book, and be ready to contribute to our discussion. You will be expected to play an active role in each session, sharing your ideas, building on those of other students, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. Participation is mostly based on you verbally engaging in class discussion. Behaviors that damage your participation grade include lateness, having your cell phone out, disruptiveness, absences, not bringing your texts to class, and not regularly participating in class discussion or other class activities.

**Daily Reading Assignment (35%):** For every reading assignment, you will be asked to compose a response. This will include a.) a quotation of interest from the text, b.) a question to contribute to the discussion and c.) an analysis of some aspect of the text, which must make a claim that is then supported by textual evidence. Make sure to bring your response into class each day, in a form which can be handed in, and with your full name at the top. I will grade these chiefly on their completeness, as long as they show adequate effort and thoughtfulness. They should also be legible! **For full credit, provide at least one half a notebook page of analysis for each text (you will lose points if your analysis is short).**

Reading notes need to contain the following: your analysis of the way the writer communicates a particular concept or theme using elements of the text (language, symbol, allegory, setting, motif, etc.). Ask yourself: What is the text doing on a deeper level? How does it communicate and execute that concept through various elements within the play or poem?

**\*\*\*\*\*Make sure all of the words and ideas in your reading notes are your own. Using someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism.\*\*\*\*\***

**Analytical Essay (30%):** This 4 page paper (at least 1250 words) is an exercise in analysis: you will make an insightful and analytical claim about the text and then prove it by analyzing evidence from the text (connect the evidence to your claim). Your analysis should go below the surface: try to say what other readers might not notice. You will show how the text or texts communicate a particular concept or theme using elements of the story, such as symbolism, motif, setting, characters, narration, and/or point of view. For instance, you could argue in *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin uses the ocean to represent the struggles and stakes of acquiring a sense of independent personhood; you would then prove this claim by analyzing evidence of this concept in the text, closely reading the sections where the text describes the ocean and the main character's interactions with it. You will also need to address the significance of this theme or concept in the story and beyond it. You may, if you'd like, perform a comparative analysis, in which you analyze two of these works in relation to one another. If you choose to do so, make sure that your thesis provides a unified argument; avoid the pitfall of parallel analyses, and allow the texts to produce a single synthetic thesis.

For both papers, you will need to use **MLA citation** to cite the literary works both in-text and in a Works Cited page. We will go over this in class, but if you have questions please ask me or visit the OWL Purdue website. **Most importantly, make sure the words and ideas in your paper are your own.**

## COURSE POLICIES

**ATTENDANCE:** Regular and punctual class attendance is expected and required of all students. If you are not in class when it officially begins, you will be marked tardy. If you show up to class ten or more minutes late, you will be marked absent for the day. You will also be marked absent if I see you sleeping.

**LATE WORK:** Late assignments will not be accepted without prior discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. I will collect your reading assignments in class and major papers will be turned in electronically, unless otherwise stated; if I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we have not discussed a plan for, you will not receive credit for it. A plan for late submission will be a rare dispensation, and one that must be approved by me at least 48 hours before the due date. **If you must miss a class, plan ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the rare case of an excused absence (those deemed so by the school), you will need to contact me via email to make arrangements to get your missed work in.

**TECHNOLOGY:** Please render your cell phones silent before you enter class, put them out of sight, and refrain from using them in class. Keep other electronic devices, such as laptops and iPads, in your bag and off your desk. **Exceptions can be made upon request.**

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

You are responsible for the integrity of your work and you are required to produce work that is academically honest. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. Submitting someone else's paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. Attempting to take credit for someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism. Direct and indirect plagiarism, both of which we will discuss in class, are unacceptable and have serious academic consequences. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, contact me and we can sort it out. Please refer to the student handbook for additional information, including information that is new this year.

## LITERATURE NOTE

Important literature is often about the deepest and most difficult struggles of humans to live authentically in a complex world. Through the thoughts and experiences of literary characters, we can examine and evaluate our personal responses to life's mysteries, complexities, disappointments, and joys. In addition, we begin to understand how a writer, in his or her own struggle to experience creatively, has responded to the social, political, and artistic environment of his/her times. The English Department at the Academy selects reading material that reflects these human struggles, has endured the test of time, and has earned a respected place in the universe of letters. The instructors will often include recently published poems, stories, and articles that reflect the diversity of contemporary cultures and experiences.

**If, because of the powerful nature of the reading experience, you are unable to read and study a specific text with reasonable analytic objectivity, please confer with your instructor.** Alternative texts are available.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university

resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>. As such, it is important to ensure that your comments and behavior in class is respectful and inclusive. Discriminatory comments or behavior will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action, in accordance with Indiana Academy and Ball State University policy.

## MASK POLICY

The Indiana Academy will follow [Ball State University's mask policy](#). Effective July 1, 2020, all people on campus—including faculty, staff, students, vendors, contractors, suppliers, and visitors—should wear face masks (covering nose and mouth) while inside campus buildings. Face masks are specifically required in the following situations:

1. When in the presence of others (indoors or outdoors) and physical distancing is difficult to maintain, such as in hallways, elevators, stairs, public spaces, and common areas;
2. When in a classroom or laboratory;
3. When using campus transportation (such as a shuttle bus);
4. When multiple individuals are in a University vehicle.

Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to bring their own mask. Masks will be provided to anyone who is unable to bring a mask or their mask is damaged.

Non-compliance: If a student declines to wear a face mask as required, the student will be referred to the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Residential Affairs. If the situation occurs in a classroom or other academic setting, it is considered a classroom management issue, and the teacher will remind the student of the requirement and give the student a chance to comply with it prior to referring the matter to the Director of Academic Affairs or the Director of Residential Affairs. Wearing masks is crucial to preventing the spread of COVID-19 to others.