

Emerging Narratives: Black Queer Youth in Literature and Theory

INST 2500 Spring 2024

Mon/Wed 2pm-3:15pm

3 credits

Instructor Information

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Political and Social Thought Major, African-American/African Studies Major

Contact: [REDACTED]

Office Hours: Office 149B – Student Activities Center, Newcomb Hall (by appointment)

Course Description

What stories are waiting to be told about the lives of Black queer youth? How can we navigate the complexities of identity, self-discovery, and belonging through the lens of Black queer theory and young-adult literature? This course offers a transformative exploration of the vibrant literary stories that are situated at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and age. In this course, we will dive deep into a diverse selection of young-adult literary works – from Kacey Callender’s *Felix Ever After* to Akwaeke Emezi’s *Pet* – spotlighting queer Black characters and their stories. These stories serve as windows into the complex experiences of Black queer youth, as they navigate the intricate web of their identities. We’ll uncover the challenges, triumphs, and resilience that define their journeys. Our exploration will extend beyond the pages of these novels. We will situate these works within the dynamic field of Black queer studies, a discipline that intersects with a range of critical modes of study, including Black studies, queer studies, childhood studies, gender studies and more! Through engaging discussions and thoughtful analysis, you’ll gain a comprehensive understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of Black queer studies, its importance to the literary world, and its real-world implications.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be empowered to...

- Examine and interpret how key ideas within the fields of Black queer studies, LGBTQ childhood studies, and more from Black Queer Theory are skillfully explored and

expressed through a wide array of literary works, gaining an appreciation for their social significance.

- Research and connect interdisciplinary concepts, including those from Black queer studies, childhood studies, queer studies, gender studies, and related fields.
- Compare and contrast the intricate and multifaceted experiences of Black queer youth in young-adult literature at the intersection of their race, sexuality, gender, and age.
- Combine key themes presented in novels surrounding Black queer characters, contrasting and comparing how experiences of theirs are unique and or different to experiences that we are familiar with.
- Critically reflect on your own identities and social positionality and situate your perspectives largely in relation to the lived experiences of queer Black youth.
- Recognize the value of young-adult novels to larger discourses in society around LGBTQ rights, Black rights, and protecting our youth.

Course Materials

You are required to have access to the following novels:

- Petrus, Junauda. *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them*. Penguin, 2020.
- Johnson, George M. *All boys aren't blue: A memoir-manifesto*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR), 2020.
- Callender, Kacey. *Felix Ever After*, New York, Balzer + Bray, 2020.
- Johnson, Leah. *You Should See Me in a Crown*. New York, Scholastic Press, 2020.
- Emezi, Akwaeke. *PET*. Faber & Faber, 2019.

Other readings for the course will be provided by me and can be found on Canvas.

Course Activities

Key Word Presentation: As part of our exploration of Black Queer Theory, you will give a short 5-7 minute presentation about a specific word or concept in Black Queer Theory or other relevant disciplines that connect to what we're discussing in class. This approach will empower you to dive deep into complex topics by doing research and then sharing what you've learned with your classmates. This will help create lively discussions and make it easier to break down and unpack complex theory together! This assignment will count towards 15% of your final grade.

Participation: The focus of this course extends beyond queer literature and theory to considerations of the social, cultural, and political contexts of the texts. Effective

engagement with these issues in our class can only happen through your active, vocal participation. This may be challenging at first, but keep in mind that the more you speak, the more lively and productive our classes will be. I understand public speaking can be tough, so engaging with the course outside of the classroom, through office hours or relevant events around, can also be counted toward participation. Participation will count towards 15% of your final grade.

Book Review: You will craft a thoughtful and insightful 2-3-page book review on one of the novels we read in class. This will encourage critical engagement with one of the course texts, enabling you to practice close reading, analyze themes, and reflect on the text's significance, both personally and within the broader political and social context of the world. This assignment will count towards 20% of your final grade.

Blog Posts: In preparation for class discussions, you will submit weekly blog posts, which will serve as a platform for you to articulate your thoughts around course readings, express personal insights, and draw connections to outside knowledge and experiences. This will encourage reflection and active involvement with the material that will be helpful in classroom discussions. Completion of these assignments will count towards 15% of your final grade.

Final Project: Throughout the semester, you will work toward a final project of your choosing. This project will serve as an opportunity for you to showcase your understanding of Black queer theory and key takeaways from the novels read throughout the course. It will reflect your unique perspective as well as demonstrate your learning growth throughout the semester. This assignment will count towards 30% of your final grade.

Calendar Overview

A tentative schedule of topics, reading assignments, and due dates is shown below. Nothing will be made due earlier than indicated but some things may be pushed back or eliminated altogether, depending on time. All changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.

Date	Topic	Readings and Activities	Assignments
1/17/2024	Introduction to course	None	None

Theme 1: How can we begin to understand the Black queer youth experience through memoir?			
1/22/24	Introduction to novel	<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> (pgs. 1-60)	Blog Post due Sunday 1/21 at 11:59pm
1/24/24	Black queer Boyhood and coming of age	<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> (pgs. 61-121)	None
1/29/24	Black queer Boyhood and coming of age	<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> (pgs. 122-181)	Blog Post due Sunday 1/28 at 11:59pm
1/31/24	Black queer Boyhood and coming of age	<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> (pgs: 182-241)	None
2/5/24	Wrapping up	<i>All Boys Aren't Blue</i> Finish novel	Blog Post due Sunday 2/4 at 11:59pm
Theme 2: How does social perception and othering impact Black children's decision to embrace their sexual identity?			
2/7/24	Intersectionality	<i>You Should See Me in a Crown</i> (pgs. 1-56)	None
2/12/24	Intersectionality	<i>You Should See Me in a Crown</i> (pgs. 57-112)	Blog Post due Sunday 2/11 at 11:59pm
2/14/24	Intersectionality	<i>You Should See Me in a Crown</i> (pgs. 113-168)	None
2/19/24	Politics of "Coming Out"	<i>You Should See Me in a Crown</i> (pgs. 169-224)	Blog Post due Sunday 2/18 at 11:59pm
2/21/24	Politics of "Coming Out"	<i>You Should See Me in a Crown</i> (pgs. 225-280)	None

2/26/24	Wrapping up	<i>You Should See Me in a Crown</i> Finish novel	Blog Post due Sunday 2/25 at 11:59pm
Theme 3: What are the complexities of Black queer identity formation and how do Black queer youth come to understand their identities?			
2/28/24	Intersectionality and introduction to <i>Felix</i>	<i>Felix Ever After</i> (pgs 1-61)	None
3/4/24 and 3/6/24	SPRING BREAK NO CLASS		
3/11/24	Black trans identity construction	<i>Felix Ever After</i> (pgs. 62-243)	Blog Post due Sunday 3/10 at 11:59pm
3/13/24	Black trans identity construction	<i>Felix Ever After</i> (pgs 244-305)	None
3/18/24	Wrapping up	<i>Felix Ever After</i> Finish novel	Blog Post due Sunday 3/17 at 11:59pm
Theme 4: How are the young Black queer bodies disciplined? How does this impact their material experience of youth?			
3/20/24	Introduction to novel	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> (pgs 1-52)	None
3/25/24	Disciplining of the Black queer body	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> (pgs 53-104)	Blog Post due Sunday 3/24 at 11:59pm
3/27/24	Disciplining of the Black queer body	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> (pgs 105-157)	None
4/1/24	Materiality of Black queer childhood	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> (pgs 158-208)	Blog Post due Sunday 3/31 at 11:59pm

4/3/24	Materiality of Black queer childhood	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> (pgs 209-260)	None
4/8/24	Wrapping up	<i>The Stars and the Blackness Between Them</i> Finish novel	Blog Post due Sunday 4/7 at 11:59pm
Theme 5: How can novels creatively imagine new possibilities for Black queer children and what is the importance of these stories?			
4/10/24	Introduction to novel	<i>PET</i> (pgs 1-52)	None
4/15/24	Black speculative fiction	<i>PET</i> (pgs 53-104)	Blog Post due Sunday 4/14 at 11:59pm
4/17/24	Black queer possibility	<i>PET</i> (pgs 104-156)	None
4/22/24	Wrapping up	<i>PET</i> Finish novel	Blog Post due Sunday 4/21 at 11:59pm
4/24/24	Peer review for final project		None
4/29/24	Wrapping up course!		Final Project due at 11:59pm

Assessing Credit

Since this course is Credit/No Credit, all assignments will be graded based on whether you meet the criteria outlined. All assignments must meet the following to gain Credit for this course:

- Completed on time and in the correct format
- Responds fully to prompt or questions
- Demonstrates engagement with and analysis of topic
- Writing is clear and comprehensible

Each assignment is unique, and there may be opportunities for you to develop your own criteria for more creative assignments. These cases of additional criteria will be communicated in a timely manner as they come up throughout the semester.

Assignment	Criteria for Credit
Participation	<p>Attendance: Students are granted three free absences.</p> <p>Participation: Active engagement, talking in class discussion, and completing in-class assignments and activities.</p>
Weekly Blog Post	<p>See assignment-specific rubric for detailed criteria.</p> <p>You will be graded based on completion; however, it is expected that these responses and posts are thoughtful and show that you are reflecting on various themes in the texts, citing specific moments highlighted in the assigned readings and bringing in outside examples or personal reflections.</p> <p>Assignments due at 11:59pm on Sunday nights.</p>
Keyword Presentation	<p>Presentations must have the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Definition a keyword for the course first in your own words ● Definition of how the term has been used in scholarship ● Demonstration how you see the keyword at work in the text we're reading on that day ● Is 5-7 minutes <p>Due at 11:59pm the night before your scheduled presentation.</p>
Book Review	<p>Book reviews must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2-3 pages of double-spaced writing ● Attention-grabbing introduction

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Effective and efficient summary of main ideas and themes ● Strong persuasive argument with recommendation to read/not read novel ● Cohesive and grammatically sufficient essay <p>Due no later than two days after we have finished the novel in the course calendar at 11:59pm.</p>
Final Project	See assignment-specific rubric for detailed criteria.

Course Policies

Attendance

Given the collaborative learning environment of the course as we engage with and interpret new experiences in literature, attendance is required. Over the course of the semester, you are allowed three "free" absences classes for any reason. After these three classes, if you have extenuating circumstances or are otherwise unable to attend a class session, please notify me as soon as possible.

Late Work

This course is designed to emphasize collaborative and collective learning through discussion. With this in mind, all discussion posts and assignments are due on the given date at 11:59pm. To provide flexibility for the things that naturally come up during a semester, you will receive 3 "tokens." Tokens are nonreturnable and nonexchangeable. Each time you submit a token, you must fill out a form (posted to Canvas) with the date and reason for using the token. Tokens may be used for the following:

- Extension on an assignment (the token must be submitted in advance of or on the due date (you will determine the new due date))
- Revision of blog post
- Redo of an assignment

Please do your best to complete your work on time so that you can engage in class activities, like discussion and peer review, and so that you don't fall behind in the course. I'm here for you and I hope these tokens will provide some relief, but if you find yourself

needing further accommodation, please let me know and we can discuss further options and resources.

Honor/Academic Integrity

As students at UVA, we rely upon and should work toward maintaining a community of trust. We endorse and uphold the University's Honor principle that students will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor shall they tolerate those who do. We recognize that even one honor infraction can destroy an exemplary reputation that took years to build. Acting in a manner consistent with the principles of honor benefits every member of the community while enrolled in the University and in the future. I trust you all to comply fully with all provisions of the UVA Honor System. By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by and uphold the Honor System of the University of Virginia, as well as the following policies specific to this course:

- When collaborating with others, do not copy answers from another student.
- Always cite any resources or individuals you consult to complete an assignment. If in doubt, cite the source.

If you have a question about what is or is not permitted on an assignment, please reach out to me or consult UVA's Honor policy here:

<https://honor.virginia.edu/frequently-asked-questions>.

Accessibility

UVA is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may also want to meet with the Student Disability Access Center (SDAC), to request an official accommodation. You can find more information about SDAC, including how to apply online, through their website at sdac.studenthealth.virginia.edu. If you have already been approved for accommodations through SDAC, please make sure to send me your accommodation letter and meet with me so we can develop an implementation plan together.

Support and Resources

Textbook Access Office: The Textbook Access Office is a program for low-income and first-generation students to request specific titles and check out textbooks free-of-charge. Students can borrow textbooks that are to be returned at the end of the semester and/or receive grants for loanable textbook purchases. For more information, please visit

<https://www.uvstudco.com/> or and contact the TAO Director at studco-textbook-access@virginia

The Writing Center: Located in 314 Bryan Hall, provides experienced tutors who'll work with you individually by discussing drafts of your papers in detail. Visit their website for instructions on how to make an appointment
<http://professionalwriting.as.virginia.edu/welcome-writing-center>

Women's Center: The Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center is located at 1400 University Avenue and provides a number of resources to students of all genders. Inside the center there are study spaces, a library, a meditation room, group workshops, psychological and counseling services, and a staff prepared to discuss any and all issues with you. Learn more at <http://womenscenter.virginia.edu/>.

LGBTQ Center: "Located in the center of Grounds, in the Lower Level of Newcomb Hall, the LGBTQ Center is both a physical space and a programming center for the university. Whether you're questioning, coming out, LGBTQ-identified, or an ally, the LGBTQ Center has something for you." To learn more, visit <http://www.virginia.edu/deanofstudents/lgbtq/>.

Office of African-American Affairs (OAAA): Located behind Bryan Hall, OAAA is committed to providing space and programming for Black students on grounds. The office provides counseling, one-on-one mentoring, advising, resources for building community, and community outreach opportunities. For more information, visit <http://oaaa.virginia.edu/>.

Counseling and Psychological Services: Commonly known as CAPS, this service is an invaluable one and a great network of which to take advantage if you find it necessary or desirable. CAPS is located at the Student Health Center, 550 Brandon Avenue. More information is available here <http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/caps.html>

Community Norms

As we will be dealing with sensitive subjects in class, we will work together to establish community norms at the beginning of class to ensure that the classroom is an inclusive space for all. We will be challenging ourselves and talking through sensitive and sometimes uncomfortable topics, but this space will remain both respectful and intentional to ensure that all feel welcome.