



**Course Information:**

GENWS/ENGL 350: Special Topics: Gender and Literature  
Topic: Social Justice Literature & Visionary Fiction

UW-Madison Fall 2021

Tuesday and Thursday 11:00am-12:15pm, Sterling Hall 1333

3 Credit Hours with Optional Honors Component (45 hours of work per credit)

Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/273769>

*Credit Hour Workload:* This class meets for 75 minutes per class session, twice a week. Additional learning will occur via reading, writing, and group work. For a 3 credit hour course, students should expect 135 hours of labor over the course of the semester, approximately 9 hours per week on average.

**Instructor Information:**

Dr. Sami Schalk

Associate Professor

sdschalk@wisc.edu

Virtual Office Hours: Wednesdays 11-1pm on Zoom or by appointment. Schedule meetings at <https://drschalk.youcanbook.me/>

**Course Description**

What is the role of literature in contemporary social justice and activist movements? How can books allow us to question and explore the problems in the contemporary United States? How can writing raise awareness and create empathy in regard to issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability and more? How can literature allow us envision solutions and better futures? This course will focus on how creative texts can serve as a compliment to social justice activism. Students will have the opportunity to read, respond to, and produce visionary and speculative fiction. *Requisites: A previous GWS course or permission of instructor*

**Learning Outcomes**

- Understand the social and political potential of literature to impart knowledge about gender, sexuality, race, and other intersectional social issues
- Develop interdisciplinary techniques to blend research with creative expression
- Develop critical thinking and creative writing skills

**Required Materials**

- Octavia E. Butler *Parable of the Sower* (2019 edition only please)
- Kai Cheng Thom *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars* (2016)
- Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro *Bitch Planet Vol. 1: Extraordinary Machine* (2015)

- Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown *Octavia's Brood* (2015)

### **Course Policies**

*Universal Design and Disability Accommodations:* I believe everyone has a right to a quality education and that classrooms can adapt to students' needs. Everyone learns differently. If you have ideas on how you can best learn and express your learning in this class, if you have an undocumented disability, or if you have a change in disability status during the semester, I encourage you to meet with me as soon as possible to discuss a learning plan. If you have a documented disability, please provide me your accommodation information within the first two weeks of class. The University accommodation policy reads as follows:

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty, will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Questions about documenting your disability can be directed to the McBurney Disability Resource Center ([mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu](mailto:mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu), 608/263-2741).

*Diversity and Inclusion:* This is a course invested in justice which moves beyond notions of diversity and inclusion to seek systemic change to end oppression and liberate all people. I acknowledge as an educator that the University of Wisconsin-Madison is a place that has long been—and continues to be—hostile to marginalized people, especially people of color, disabled people and queer and trans people. The University statement on diversity and inclusion reads as follows:

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world. <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>

*Academic Integrity:* Students are expected to uphold University expectations for academic integrity by submitting only their own original works and ideas for all assignments in this course. Violations of academic integrity can result in a range of repercussions depending on the severity of the violation, from having to repeat the assignment to expulsion from the University. All academic integrity violations will be recorded and reported to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards (OSCCS). For more on academic misconduct procedures at UW-Madison see: <https://students.wisc.edu/student-conduct/academic-integrity/>

*Rules, Rights, and Responsibilities for UW students:*

During the global COVID-10 pandemic, we must prioritize our collective health and safety to keep ourselves, our campus, and our community safe. As a university community, we must work together to prevent the spread of the virus and to promote the collective health and welfare of our campus and surrounding community. For more see:

<https://guide.wisc.edu/undergraduate/#rulesrightsandresponsibilitiestext> and the Badger Pledge (<https://smartrestart.wisc.edu/badgerpledge/>)

### *COVID-19*

Official UW Statement reads: “Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms and get tested for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Students should reach out to instructors as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with their instructor concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course (either in-person or remote). The instructor will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.”

Further, I ask that we each be patient and understanding with each other and ourselves as we try to learn, teach, work and survive during a global pandemic. This will not be a “normal” semester for any of us and I want us all to do our best while recognizing that our best is going to vary from person to person based on our resources, support networks, personal obligations and health. I am prepared to move our class online if conditions require it. Please strive to take care of yourself and each other this semester.

### **Grading and Assignments**

This course is graded on the UW-Madison grading system: A (93-100%), AB (88-92%), B (83-87%), BC (78-82%), C (70-77%), D (60-69%), F (below 60%). The assignments are weighted as follows:

Participation & Attendance	15%
Social Justice Issue Essay:	5%
News Report:	10%
Activist Report:	10%
Research Report:	15%
Midterm Short Short Story	15%
Final Project Proposal:	5%
Final Project:	25%

*Participation & Attendance:* Participation in this course is a subjective evaluation of student engagement with the course including: contributing to discussions, completing and sharing creative writing activities, attending in-class workshops, asking questions, reading aloud, writing on the board during group work, and attending office hours to discuss readings. Participation is not about a particular quantity of comments or questions, rather about the quality of your engagement with the materials and your peers. Low attendance will significantly impact your participation grade, but there is otherwise no attendance policy. If you have an emergency, crisis, or illness that will significantly impact your attendance and participation for more than one class period, contact Dr. Schalk to set up an alternative learning plan. Participation & attendance are 15 percent of the final grade.

*Social Justice Issue Essay:* For this course you will choose one social justice issue that personally impacts you (this can be defined broadly). You will then research and write about that topic throughout the semester. You should be specific in your choices. For example, choose “police brutality” or “Confederate statues and building names” rather than “racism” or choose “sexual assault on college campuses” or “unhealthy beauty standards” rather than “sexism” or “feminism.” Choose something that will hold your interest for the entirety of the semester and is possible to write about in visionary fiction/speculative fiction form. Your first assignment is an essay in which you will identify your chosen social justice issue for the semester. In 2-3 double-spaced pages name the issue you will focus on and explain why you chose it. For example, you might talk about its personal relevance or about how you learned about this issue in another course and want to explore it more. This is an informal paper in which you should center your own experiences, passions, and thought process. The social justice essay is worth 5 percent of the final grade.

*News Report:* Read 3-5 news articles on your social justice issue from reputable sources (i.e. ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, BBC News, New York Times, Boston Globe, The Guardian, etc.). Write a 2-3 page, double-spaced, report summarizing current events, legal cases, or laws relevant to your topic based on these news stories. Note: You may read coverage of a single event from more than one source, but do try to cover at least two events/cases/laws. The news report is worth 10 percent of the final grade.

*Activist Report:* Research and report on 1 or 2 activist groups, individuals, or non-profit organizations working on your social justice issue. Write a 2-3 page, double-spaced, report explaining who the individuals/groups/organizations are and what they do or are currently working on regarding your social justice issue. The activist report is worth 10 percent of the final grade.

*Research Report:* Read 3-4 current academic articles on your social justice issue (less than 10 years old). Create an annotated bibliography (a paragraph-long summary of the article’s topic, arguments, methods, and conclusions) and a synthesized summary (a summary of what you learned from locating and reading the current academic articles/chapters, including any gaps in the existing research on your topic). The research report should total 3-5 pages, double spaced. It is worth 15 percent of the final grade.

*Midterm Short Short Story:* Students will develop a rough draft of a short short story during a two-part in-class visionary fiction workshop and will then be expected to revise and submit a final version as their midterm. The midterm short short story should be 1,000-1,500 words and based in the world collectively created in the visionary fiction workshop. The midterm is worth 15 percent of the final grade.

*Final Project and Proposal:* All students will be required to create a work of visionary fiction about their social justice issue for their final project. Students may work individually or with one to two partners who have similar or link social justice topics. Pair/group work is typically reserved for work that incorporates audio or visual elements in addition to writing. Examples of the final project include short story, a graphic short story, a script/film, or a mixed genre work. Written work should aim for the 8-10 page range, double-spaced, but may vary based on genre. For example, a graphic short story may have only one typewritten page of words that are spread out over 15 pages with illustrations. Each final project will also be accompanied by a 3-4 page artist statement in which the writer explains their artistic choices and the purpose/intention of their project. The artist statement serves as a self-analysis of the project and therefore should be specific in naming and explaining stylistic, plot, and content choices. The final project is worth 25 percent of the final grade.

All students must submit a 1-2 page proposal for their final project idea, detailing the genre of the final project, the general narrative/story concept, and a timeline for completion. For pairs or groups the proposal should also justify the need for multiple people on the project and detail the specific roles/labor of each person. The proposal is worth 5 percent of the final grade.

*Honors Students:* Honors students are expected to write one page above the maximum for each short assignment except the social justice topic essay. Honors students will also be held to higher quality standards for the final project.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1:

#### Thursday, September 9, 2021

- Welcome to the course
- Read in class: Hamid and Prose "Does Fiction Have The Power to Sway Politics?" from New York Times on February 17, 2015 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/22/books/review/does-fiction-have-the-power-to-sway-politics.html>)

### Week 2:

#### Tuesday, September 14, 2021

- Michael Henne "Narrative and Power" from *The Power of Story* (p1-42)
- Jonathan Gottschall "Why Fiction is Good for You" in *Boston Globe* on April 29, 2012 (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2012/04/28/why-fiction-good-for-you-how-fiction-changes-your-world/nubDy1P3viDj2PuwGwb3KO/story.html>)

#### Thursday, September 16, 2021

- Walidah Imarisha "Introduction" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 3-6)
- adrienne maree brown "Outro" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 279-281)
- Bao Phi "Revolution Shuffle" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 7-14)

### Week 3:

#### Tuesday, September 21, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (Chapters 1-7)
- *Social Justice Topic Essay due*

#### Thursday, September 23, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (Chapters 8-14)

### Week 4:

#### Tuesday, September 28, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (Chapters 15-19)

#### Thursday, September 30, 2021

- Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (Chapters 20-25)

### Week 5:

**Tuesday, October 5, 2021**

- Visionary Fiction Workshop Part 1: World Building
- *News Report due*

**Thursday, October 7, 2021**

- Visionary Fiction Workshop Part 2: Character Development

**Week 6:**

**Tuesday, October 12, 2021**

- **No class: Work on midterm**

**Thursday, October 14, 2021**

- David F. Walker "The Token Superhero" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 15-22)
- adrienne maree brown "the river" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 23-32)
- *Midterm Short Short Story due*

**Week 7: Tuesday, October 19, 2021**

- Matthew P. McAllister, Edward H. Sewell, Jr., and Ian Gordon "Introducing Comics and Ideology" from *Comics and Ideology* (2001)
- Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro *Bitch Planet: Extraordinary Machine* Book 1, Issue 1

**Thursday, October 21, 2021**

- Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro *Bitch Planet: Extraordinary Machine* Book 1, Issues 2-5

**Week 8:**

**Tuesday, October 26, 2021**

- Gabby Rivera *bb free* (Canvas)

**Thursday, October 28, 2021**

- **No class: Brain break! Catch up on reading, rest, and do self-care.**
- *Activism Report due*

**Week 9:**

**Tuesday, November 2, 2021**

- Waldish Imarisha "Black Angel" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 43-56)
- Morrigan Phillips "The Long Memory" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 57-78)

**Thursday, November 4, 2021**

- Mia Mingus "Hollow" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 109-122)
- Tara Betts "Runway Blackout" in *Octavia's Brood* (p 167-176)

**Week 10:**

**Tuesday, November 9, 2021**

- *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars* (pg 1-59)
- *Research Report due*

**Thursday, November 11, 2021**

- *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars* (pg 60-130)

**Week 11:**

**Tuesday, November 16, 2021**

- *Fierce Femmes and Notorious Liars* (pg 131-188)

**Thursday, November 18, 2021**

- "San Junipero" *Black Mirror* Season 3 Episode 4 (Netflix)
- *Final Project Proposals Due*

**Week 12:**

**Tuesday, November 23, 2021**

- **No Class: Fall holiday**

**Thursday, November 25, 2021**

- **No Class: Fall holiday**

**Week 13:**

**Tuesday, November 30, 2021**

- Storyboarding workshop

**Thursday, December 2, 2021**

- **TBD**

**Week 14:**

**Tuesday, December 7, 2021**

- Peer workshop of first drafts

**Thursday, December 9, 2021**

- Revision workshop

**Week 15:**

**Tuesday, December 14, 2021**

- **No class:** Work on revisions for final submission. Dr. Schalk will be available during class time via the Zoom office hours link.

**Week 16:**

**Friday, December 17, 2021**

- **Final Papers/Projects due by midnight**