Welcome to African American Literature and Composition ACC, a rigorous college-credit course for seniors interested in a disciplined study of African American literature and its cultural and historical context.

You will be reading *Cane River* this summer. **Please don’t be intimidated by its length!** It's a compelling read more along the lines of popular fiction than classic literature, and it introduces several themes vital to the course. If you have any concerns or questions, please come visit me in room 226.

**About the novel:**
*Cane River* is historical fiction based on author Lalita Tademy’s extensive research into her genealogy. It traces four generations of women, from her great-great-great-great grandmother Elisabeth, to her great-grandmother Emily. Spanning from the early 1800s to the early 1900s, the novel takes place in a rural Creole community near Louisiana’s Cane River and chronicles lives that begin in slavery, endure the Civil War, and struggle with the dangerous post-emancipation years. The Louisiana setting is unique in its community structure and culture of French and English-speaking slaves, free people of color (*gens de couleur libres*), and whites. *Cane River* is an accessible, engaging text that explores the complex relationships among slaves and slave-owners; the challenges that black women had in maintaining family ties when children and partners could be sold away; and their fight to maintain dignity, identity, and independence despite overwhelming obstacles.

**How It Works:**
- Check the book out from the WGHS library (beginning the week of 5/20) before leaving for break, and read it over the summer. (It is not necessary to purchase your own copy.)
- As you read, observe and think about the important elements of the text. Consider taking **handwritten** notes or keeping a double-entry journal to help track your thinking. Guidance for note-taking is at the end of this handout. For this particular book, I **highly recommended** that you keep a list of characters and their roles and relationships. Make frequent use of the genealogical charts that Tademy provides.
- Be ready to spend the first two weeks of class working with the text, including a written assessment. (Although taking notes or keeping a journal is optional, students who complete this handwritten work will be allowed to use it on the written assessment.)
- Most of all, **enjoy yourself!** While I want you to be prepared for the beginning of the school year, the goal of this assignment is for you to find pleasure in the act of reading.

*I am looking forward to working with you next year!*
Ms. Gray (Room 226) - gray.sarah@wgmail.org
Guidelines for Notes and Double-Entry Journals

As you read, you can respond by taking notes or keeping a double-entry journal. Consider this as an ongoing conversation with your book—after all, powerful readers must critically think about what they read while they read so they can more thoroughly engage with those ideas after they read. Use your writing to record thoughts or wonderings.

Typical note-taking strategies include:

- Define unknown vocabulary.
- Comment on lines or passages you think are especially powerful or meaningful.
- Make connections to previous scenes in the text; to the world (other texts, films, current events, history); and to self (your own thoughts and experiences).
- Ask and/or answer questions.
- Record confusions as well as times when those confusions are clarified.
- Make predictions on what will happen next.
- Restate or summarize difficult sentences, paragraphs, or ideas. (Putting it in your own words demonstrates your understanding.)
- Comment on emerging themes and/or motifs and symbols.

Suggested procedure for double-entry journals:

- As you read, choose lines and passages and record them in the left-hand column on the provided chart. Look for direct quotes that seem significant, powerful, thought-provoking, or puzzling. (If a quote gets too long, write its introductory lines.) In the right column, write your response to the text.

Sample Journal Entry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Your response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>page 1</td>
<td>“Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don’t know. I got a telegram from the home: ‘Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.’ That doesn’t mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday” (Camus 1).</td>
<td>The first lines of the novel are shocking because they are so blunt. Since I’ve never taken a French class, I had to look up what ‘maman’ meant. The closest English translation is ‘mom’. Referring to one’s mother as ‘mom’ shows a softer, closer relationship than the formal connotation of ‘mother’ that is used in the telegram. But, the son doesn’t know for sure which day his mom died—some might think that is careless or even cruel.</td>
</tr>
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