

Blueprints for Healing: Toni Morrison & the Balm of Black Women Writing

4 monthly sessions: Saturdays, Feb 22, Mar 14, Apr 18, May 16 | 2:00–4:00 p.m.

Led by Yolanda Wisher, Philadelphia Poet Laureate Emerita and Trapeta B. Mayson, LCSW, Poet

As a novelist, essayist, and author of children's books, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison (1931-2019) unapologetically wrote the Black experience into a tradition of American letters that often rendered it invisible or caricatured. As a book editor and professor, she nurtured the careers and stories of other Black writers. Her eleven novels reconstruct and reimagine cultural memory in the face of slavery, violence, poverty, and migration. With lyrical beauty and cinematic vision, Morrison's work unearths and alchemizes the epic stories buried beneath personal and generational trauma. This course will explore counternarratives of trauma and healing in Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Beloved* as well as three novels by Black women writers influenced by Morrison's life and work: *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara, *Corregidora* by Gayl Jones, and *Meridian* by Alice Walker. These groundbreaking novels uniquely underscore the political and spiritual struggles of Black women in search of freedom throughout different time periods in U.S. history. Alongside spirited and weighty discussion of the books and related film and video excerpts, students will delve into their own narratives through poetry and letter writing.

Saturday, February 22, 2020

Reading due: *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Film due: *Beloved* by Jonathan Demme (1998 film)

In-class writing

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Reading due: *Meridian* by Alice Walker

In-class writing

Saturday, April 18, 2020

Reading due: *Corregidora* by Gayl Jones

In-class writing

Saturday, May 16, 2020

Reading due: *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara

Film due: *Daughters of the Dust* by Julie Dash (1991 film)

In-class writing

About the instructors

Yolanda Wisher, Philadelphia Poet Laureate Emerita, is the author of *Monk Eats an Afro* (Hanging Loose Press, 2014) and the co-editor of *Peace is a Haiku Song* (Philadelphia Mural Arts, 2013) with mentor and first Philadelphia Poet Laureate Sonia Sanchez. Wisher was named the inaugural Poet Laureate of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania in 1999 and the third Poet Laureate of Philadelphia in 2016. A Pew and Cave Canem Fellow, she was a Writer in Residence at Hedgebrook and Aspen Words and the 2017-2018 CPCW Fellow in Poetics and Poetic Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. A former high school English teacher, she has

been active in Philadelphia's artistic and cultural sphere for two decades. Wisler founded and directed a Germantown neighborhood poetry festival, worked as Director of Art Education for Philadelphia Mural Arts, and has spearheaded numerous community-driven programs with partners such as The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Rosenbach Museum and Library, Historic Germantown, and the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. Wisler currently works as the Curator of Spoken Word at Philadelphia Contemporary and regularly performs a unique blend of poetry and song with her band The Afroeaters. She is part of the first cohort of artists with studios at the Cherry Street Pier, where she recently launched the School of Guerrilla Poetics, a training ground for folks interested in nurturing and mobilizing communities through poetry. Wisler lives in Germantown.

Trapeta B. Mayson reads her poetry widely and works extensively facilitating poetry and creative writing workshops. Her work sheds light on and honors the immigrant experience as well as amplifies the stories of everyday people. She is a recipient of a Pew Fellowship in Literature, Leeway Transformation Award, Leeway Art and Change Grant and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Grants. Her work was also nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize. She is a Cave Canem and Callaloo Fellow and a 2019 Aspen Words Emerging Writer's Fellow with the Aspen Institute. She is the author of *She Was Once Herself* and *Mocha Melodies*. Trapeta also released two music and poetry projects, *SCAT* and *This Is How We Get Through*, in collaboration with internationally acclaimed jazz guitarist, Monnette Sudler. Her other publications include submissions in *The American Poetry Review*, *Epiphany Literary Journal*, *Aesthetica Magazine*, *Margie: The American Journal of Poetry* among others. Trapeta is a native of Liberia. Currently residing in Philadelphia, she is a graduate of Temple University, Bryn Mawr Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research and Villanova University School of Business. Currently working in the social services field, she is also a member of several local organizations where she uses the arts to mobilize, build community and create change.