

Honors 220: The Handmaid's Tale: Dystopian Fiction, Film, and the Bible

Time: W 4pm – 4:50pm
Room: Burris 201
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Office Hours: MWF 8am-9pm;
MW 1pm-4pm

Description: Students in this class will read Margaret Atwood's classic text, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and a selection of biblical texts that inspired this novel. Then, we will compare Atwood's dystopian fiction to clips from the television series produced by Hulu. Topics of interest in this Honors course include religion, gender, race, sexuality, and politics. In this discussion based seminar class, students will hold *The Handmaid's Tale* in one hand and the Bible in the other, while analyzing film interpretations of both these important texts.

Objectives:

- Critically read and reflect upon a classic feminist dystopian text and selections from the Bible
- Analyze film clips and compare the depictions to that of the book and the Bible
- Lead a class discussion based on a topic of importance to the course

Textbooks:

- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor Books, 1986. (Both the hard copy and Kindle are acceptable but students should be able to access it easily in class.)
- A Bible (any version is acceptable; Oxford Annotated Study Bible NRSV suggested); you may also use an online or app version of the Bible if you choose.
- Other articles will be assigned during the semester and made available via Canvas

Course Requirements / Expectations:

Attendance & Participation (30%): In order to succeed in this course, students must be present in class, arrive on time, and not leave early or during class (unless there is an emergency). If there are extenuating circumstances that lead to a student missing class, this must be discussed with the professor as soon as possible. There is no need to bring in notes from your doctor, etc. for absences unless requested. Students are expected to have read the assigned readings for the day and to be awake and attentive during class. While students are not required to speak in every class, active participation during class or group discussions is encouraged and therefore rewarded. The student's participation grade for the course will reflect both passive and active forms of participation as well as how well prepared the student was for class including completing the reading due for that day. **NOTE:** Cell Phone/Laptops: The use of electronics is permitted in this class only when the student is using them to assist learning and is actively participating in the class. The professor reserves the right to restrict this privilege at any point during the semester if students abuse this privilege.

Leading Discussions (30%): For this honors course, students will be assigned groups according to their subjects of interest and will be assigned a class period to lead the discussion based on this topic. Students will also choose a relevant article for the class to read before class for the day. Topics of possible discussion include: Gender, Sexuality, Feminism, Race, and Politics. Class

sessions should include references to the Bible, the book, and the television series as well as relevant cultural conversations.

Written Reflections (40%): Throughout the semester, five written reflections will be due that the students will write before class and turn in on Canvas. Prompts for these 2-page reflections are included below in the course schedule.

Grading Scale: This course is a Pass/Fail course. Students who complete the requirements of the course to the approval of the professor will receive a passing grade for this honors course.

Statement of Academic Integrity:

Membership in the Wingate University is a privilege conferred by reason of demonstrated merit and sustained by a continuing commitment to high standards of performance and conduct. The University expects that all members of the community will voluntarily conduct themselves in a manner reflecting respect for all other members of the community. It is the responsibility of all Wingate University students to abide by the Honor Code. Failure to do so will result in consequences outlined in the Wingate University Student Handbook.

The Wingate University Honor Code states that:

- Wingate University students do not lie, cheat, steal, plagiarize, nor do they tolerate in their company the presence of one who does.
- Wingate university students conduct themselves at all times in a manner that is conducive to the maintenance of a strong, positive environment for study and learning.
- Wingate University students obey the rules and regulations of the University as outlined in the *Student Handbook*.

Disability Statement:

If you have a disability and require accommodations, you are encouraged to let the professor know at the beginning of the semester. In order to receive accommodations you must also register for disability support services by contacting Kristin Wharton at 704-233-8366 or through email at kwharton@wingate.edu. All communication will remain confidential.

Additional Information:

There will be material discussed and addressed in this course that is sensitive in nature, and may be difficult for some students to read and/or discuss. Topics including rape, violence, murder, and death come up occasionally, as stories about these issues are found within the Bible. If at any time a student needs to leave the class due to the topic being discussed, if the topic, discussion or video is triggering in any way, that is perfectly acceptable. It should also be noted that all employees at Wingate University are mandatory reporters, which means we are required to report any incidents of sexual assault, sexual exploitation and partner or relationship violence to the university's Title IX Coordinator.

Course Schedule:

January 9

Introduction to the Course and Margaret Atwood

- January 16 First half of the *Handmaid's Tale* completed (Chapters 1 -9, or pages 1-147). Also read: Genesis 1-3 and 29-30.
- January 23 All of *The Handmaid's Tale* completed by this date. **Written Reflection #1:** Write an Amazon/Good Reads review for this book or for the Hulu show (*only* write on the show if you have read the book and watched both seasons). Extra Credit given if you post this online!
Also read: Genesis 16-20 and this blog by Alison Joseph, [The Handmaid's Tale as a Legitimate Reading of Genesis](#).
- January 30 Read: Ephesians 5:21—6:9 and Colossians 3:18—4:1 and this article by Carolyn Osiek on [Household Codes](#) and this one on [Slavery in the New Testament](#) by Katy Valentine.
- February 6 Read the Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1-11 / **Written Reflection #2:** Choose one quote from the book and reflect upon it. Why are you drawn to it? What do you think is the meaning(s) behind this quote?
- February 13 The “Marthas” / Read: Luke 10:38-42 and John 11; Article TBD
- February 20 The “Jezebels” / Read: 1 Kings 16-21 / 2 Kings 9
Written Reflection #3: Complete a character analysis of one character from the book. If you choose, you may also incorporate aspects of the character in the film as well, in a comparative way.
- February 27 Virgin vs. Whore / Read: Luke 2 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15; Article TBD
- March 6 Biblical Interpretation / **Written Reflection #4:** Choose one biblical reference used or mentioned in the book or film that has not been discussed in class and analyze the use of it in your reflection, using the strategies we have referenced in class. Be prepared to share your choice and interpretation in class.
- (Spring Break – No Class)
- March 20 Gender & *Handmaid's Tale*; Discussion led by group; Reading TBD
- March 27 Sexuality & *Handmaid's Tale*; Discussion led by group; Reading TBD
- April 3 Feminism & *Handmaid's Tale*; Discussion led by group; Reading TBD
- April 10 Race & *Handmaid's Tale*; Discussion led by group; Reading TBD
- April 17 Politics & *Handmaid's Tale*; Discussion led by group; Reading TBD
- April 24 **Written Reflection #5:** *Is the dystopian world depicted by the book/film of the Handmaid's Tale a possibility in our world today?* In Class: Discussion on this subject