

# Adapting a Literature module: individual activity

**Collection:** Course design

**Resource:** Adapting a module

## Approximate duration

One hour to 90 minutes

## Learning outcomes

Upon completion of this activity you will have

1. Acquired nuanced insight into the specific teaching skills demanded at once by the subject and by your student constituency.
2. Considered and chosen an extended repertoire of tools and media for engaging students and thereby have more options to choose from in your teaching.
3. Acquired a pragmatic, usable, understanding of the formative relations between assessment and curriculum.
4. Developed your critical understanding of curricula.
5. Potentially acquired the confidence to propose and argue to colleagues for a new module or form of assessment, or of teaching.

## Introduction

The starting point for this activity is a module designed and taught by a member of the Subject Centre staff, but it could be any module, taught anywhere. Newly appointed lecturers often 'inherit' modules designed and taught for years by other people. Sometimes you aren't allowed to change anything; at other times there are specific circumstances that have changed and accordingly you are required to make some adjustments. Even with modules that you design yourself, after a programme re-



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validation or other institutional-wide changes, or when you move to a new university, the occasion will likely arise where you are asked to modify the way you teach and assess on a particular module.

For this activity don't worry if African American literature is not your area of expertise. Instead focus on the elements common to all modules such as the module description, the learning outcomes, the module requirements, the amount and schedule of reading, and the assessment(s).

As this activity involves work on all the different aspects of course design, you may find it useful to have already worked through activities in other areas of 'The Pool', in particular, Assessment, Small Group Teaching and Large Group Teaching.

## The activity

The activity is comprised of four steps and an optional fifth step which invites you to repeat the whole activity from a different standpoint.

1. Read the module description for the module 'Introduction to African American Literature' below.
2. Consider the three teaching contexts (A, B, and C) which are listed after the module description. Choose one to work with.
3. Imagine that you have to teach 'Introduction to African American Literature' in the context you have chosen. How would the details of the module description have to be changed or adapted to meet the requirements of the context in question? Jot down some initial thoughts.
4. Edit the module description according to the notes you made in step 3.
5. Repeat the activity (steps 1-4) using a different context.

### **Introduction to African American Literature**

#### **Module Description**

This module will explore multiple forms of black literary production from the late 18th Century through to the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Course readings will emphasise some of the ways African American literature is



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constructed by and through concepts of class, gender, sexuality and migration. We will consider how African American literature contributes to processes of nation building and the development of national identity. What are some of the key elements of 'the' African American literary tradition? How is African American literature in conversation with other forms of material production such as visual art, music, and film? How have particular historical eras helped to shape black literary production in the U.S.? Which tools are needed in order to effectively and thoroughly interpret African American literature? These are some of the questions that will guide lecture and seminar sessions. Readings will include poetry, essays, autobiography, novels and the spoken word.

One of the defining features of African American literature is its dual role of imaginative act and historical documentation for a group that has often been denied a public voice. This module aims to provide an introduction to the study of literature and culture as well as an introduction to African American literary forms and creative expression.

### **Learning Outcomes**

On completion of the module students will be expected to have

1. Demonstrated and applied a basic knowledge of African American Literary forms and theories such as the slave narrative, the idea of double consciousness and the uses of vernacular language.
2. Distinguished between major periods of African American literary production, such as Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement and also understood these periods as part of wider historical contexts.
3. Demonstrated basic skills of literary analysis such as close reading, understanding the stylistic structure of language and discerning authorial point-of-view.
4. Discussed the literary features of assigned readings, eschewing the reading of texts as transparent transcriptions of reality, and learned how to interpret them as mediated representations.

### **Format**

Weekly one-hour lecture followed by a one-hour seminar.

### **Assessment**

- Class participation (10%)
- 1,500 word essay (40%)



- Final exam (50%)

### **Required texts**

- Henry Louis Gates, jr. and Nellie McKay (eds.), *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

### **Lecture and seminar schedule**

1. Issues in the study of African American literature and culture
2. Poetic structures: Phillis Wheatley and Langston Hughes
3. The slave narrative: writing a people into a nation
4. Reconstruction and the project of uplift
5. The Harlem Renaissance and the uptown aesthetic
6. The vernacular tradition: writing the oral text
7. The great migration and the era of reluctant integration
8. Civil Rights and Black Power
9. The people who could fly: postmodernist tendencies
10. Revision lecture

### **Teaching Context A**

'Introduction to African American Literature' is to be taught as a compulsory introductory module in the first year of an English degree at a post-1992 university. There are a large number of students in the first year, many of them local, from a wide range of social and ethnic groups, and of very mixed ability. Other modules in the first year cover literary theory, play-writing and study skills. Staffing problems mean that this module will have to be taught exclusively in very large groups.

### **Teaching Context B**

'Introduction to African American Literature' is to be taught as a third-year optional module on the English degree in a Russell Group university with a strong research reputation. Previous years have covered a wide range of literature from all periods, though not, up to now, African American literature. The module will be in competition with modules on a wide range of other topics, and you expect to recruit about 10 students.



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## Teaching Context C

'Introduction to African American Literature' is to be taught as a second-year compulsory module at a university in a large city with a strong cultural life. Most students following English modules are doing combined degrees involving Film Studies and/or Creative Writing. Slave narratives have already been studied over the course of a single week on a first-year 'Introduction to Narrative' course. There will be about 20 students in the module.

## Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>

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## Resources in the Course design Collection

- Course design: introduction to the collection
- Designing an English degree programme: resource overview
  - Designing in employability: individual activity
  - Designing in employability: group activity
  - Managing transition from A Level: individual activity
  - A delicate balance: group activity
  - A delicate balance: individual activity
- Designing an innovative English Literature module: resource overview
  - Location, location, location: individual activity
  - Location, location, location: group activity



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- Questions, questions
- Integrating research into a module: individual activity
- Integrating research into a module: group activity
- Filling the gaps: resource overview
  - Filling the gaps between sessions: individual activity
  - Filling the gaps between sessions: group activity
- Adapting a module: resource overview
  - **Adapting a Literature module: individual activity (\*you are here)**
  - Adapting a Literature module: group activity
  - Pacing it out: individual activity
  - Curriculum framing
- Mapping and applying desirable student attributes: resource overview
  - Imaginary modules: individual activity
  - Imaginary modules: group activity
- Designing a creative-critical module: resource overview
  - Thinking about modules: individual activity
  - Thinking about modules: group activity

