

# **FIELD X: AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE**

**Revised: December 2018**

**Effective: January 2020**

## **STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS**

The field exam is designed to measure candidates' potential to produce advanced scholarship and to teach college-level courses on African American literature. Therefore, answers on the written exam should display extensive and specialized knowledge of the field of African American literature, including the canon of primary texts, significant secondary scholarship, and major historical developments.

Specifically, answers should demonstrate expertise in:

- Foundational African American literary genres and their conventions, histories, and cultural significance (e.g. poetry, drama, fiction, autobiography, slave narratives, oral tradition, etc.).
- The historical and literary subfields that comprise the larger field of African American studies as well as the significance of those subfields (e.g. antebellum literature, Reconstruction, the “Nadir,” Naturalism, the Harlem Renaissance, Modernism, the Civil Rights era, the Black Arts Movement, women’s writing, Postmodernism, etc.).
- Established and current literary criticism and scholarship on African American literature, including recent shifts that re-conceptualize aspects of the field (such as transnational and hemispheric studies).

Answers on the written exam should also:

- Advance and develop substantial interpretive arguments that are firmly rooted in sophisticated analysis of primary texts and engage dynamically with secondary critical sources.
- Demonstrate an authoritative, convincing, and original individual perspective on the material.

The answers should also involve reasonable genre diversity in their coverage of primary texts. Across the course of the exam you should discuss texts from at least three of the following four genres: fiction, poetry, drama, and autobiography.

The examiners will ask questions that can—and should—be addressed with texts on the reading list. If relevant to a question, however, any texts in the field, whether studied independently or through course work, may be used by the candidate.

## READING LIST

### I. Primary Texts

#### A. African American Literature Before 1910

##### (Colonial, Antebellum, and Postbellum Literature)

- Phyllis Wheatley. "On Being Brought from Africa to America" (1773)  
Jupiter Hammon. "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatly" (1778)  
Selections from Henry Louis Gates, ed. *The Classic Slave Narratives*:  
    Olaudah Equiano. *The Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789)  
    Frederick Douglass. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845)  
    Harriet Jacobs. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)  
Nat Turner. "The Confessions of Nat Turner" (1831)  
Sojourner Truth. "Speech at Akron Convention" (1851)  
William Wells Brown. *Clotel, or, The President's Daughter* (1853)  
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. "The Slave Mother" (1854)  
Martin R. Delany. *Blake, or, The Huts of America* (1857)  
Harriet E. Wilson. *Our Nig* (1859)  
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. *Iola Leroy* (1892)  
Charles Chesnutt. *The Conjure Woman and Other Tales* (1899)  
Charles Chesnutt. *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)  
Booker T. Washington. *Up from Slavery* (1901)  
Paul Laurence Dunbar. *The Sport of the Gods* (1902)  
W. E. B. Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)  
Paul Laurence Dunbar. Selections from *Complete Poems* (1913) as follows:  
    "We Wear the Mask"  
    "When Malindy Sings"  
    "The Haunted Oak"  
    "The Colored Soldiers"  
    "Sympathy"  
    "Little Brown Baby"  
    "Dinah Kneading Dough"  
    "An Ante-Bellum Sermon"  
    "Frederick Douglass"  
    "When Dey 'Listed Colored Soldiers"

#### B. African American Literature 1910-1960

##### (The Harlem or "New Negro" Renaissance and Modernism)

- James Weldon Johnson. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912)  
Claude McKay. Selections from *Harlem Shadows* (1922) as follows:  
    "The Harlem Dancer"  
    "Harlem Shadows"  
    "If We Must Die"  
    "The Lynching"  
    "Africa"

“America”  
 Jean Toomer. *Cane* (1923)  
 Countee Cullen. *Color* (1925)  
 Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro* (1925)  
 James Weldon Johnson. Selections from *Complete Poems* (2000) as follows:  
     “O Black and Unknown Bards”  
     “The White Witch”  
     *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927)  
 Langston Hughes. Selections from *Collected Poems* (1995) as follows:  
     “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”  
     “Mother to Son”  
     “Jazzonia”  
     “Dream Variations”  
     “Johannesburg Mines”  
     “The Weary Blues”  
     “Cross”  
     “I, Too”  
     “Let America Be America Again”  
     “Mulatto”  
     “Christ in Alabama”  
     “Goodbye Christ”  
     “The English”  
     “Advertisement for the Waldorph-Astoria”  
     “Postcard from Spain”  
     “Madrid”  
     “The Bitter River”  
     “Visitors to the Black Belt”  
     “Note on Commercial Theatre”  
     “Trumpet Player”  
     “Theme for English B”  
     “Madam and the Phone Bill”  
     “Dream Deferred” (also titled “Harlem” in “Lenox Avenue Mural”)  
 Langston Hughes. “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926)  
 Nella Larsen. *Quicksand* (1928)  
 Zora Neale Hurston. “How It Feels to Be Colored Me” (1929)  
 Nella Larsen. *Passing* (1929)  
 Claude McKay. *Banjo* (1929)  
 Wallace Thurman. *The Blacker the Berry* (1929)  
 George Schuyler. *Black No More* (1931)  
 Sterling A. Brown. Selections from *Collected Poems* (1989) as follows:  
     “Strong Men”  
     “Ma Rainey”  
     “Children of the Mississippi”  
     “Mister Samuel and Sam”  
     “Cabaret”  
     “Slim in Hell”

“Master and Man”  
 “Remembering Nat Turner”  
 “Bitter Fruit of the Tree”  
 Zora Neale Hurston. *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934)  
 Arna Bontemps. *Black Thunder* (1936)  
 Zora Neale Hurston. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)  
 Melvin Tolson. “Dark Symphony” (1939)  
 Richard Wright. *Native Son* (1940)  
 Richard Wright. *Black Boy* (1945)  
 Ann Petry. *The Street* (1946)  
 Dorothy West. *The Living Is Easy* (1948)  
 Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man* (1952)  
 James Baldwin. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)  
 Gwendolyn Brooks. Selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 3rd ed. (2014) as follows:  
 “the mother”  
 “a song in the front yard”  
 “The Children of the Poor”  
 “The Lovers of the Poor”  
 “We Real Cool”  
 “The *Chicago Defender* Sends a Man to Little Rock”  
 “Malcolm X”  
 “Riot”  
 “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi”  
 Lorraine Hansberry. *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)  
 Paule Marshall. *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959)

**C. African American Literature 1960-Present  
(Black Arts Movement to Postmodernism and Beyond)**

Robert Hayden. “Middle Passage” (1962)  
 Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” (1963)  
 Amiri Baraka. *Dutchman* (1964)  
 Malcolm X with Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965)  
 Samuel Delany. *Babel-17* (1966)  
 Ann Moody. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968)  
 Toni Morrison. *The Bluest Eye* (1970)  
 Toni Cade Bambara. “The Lesson” (1972)  
 Alice Walker. “Everyday Use” (1973)  
 Albert Murray. *Train Whistle Guitar* (1974)  
 Ntozake Shange. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1976)  
 Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon* (1977)  
 Audre Lorde. Selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 3rd ed. (2014) as follows:  
 “New York City 1970”  
 “Coal”

“Power”  
 “Poetry Is Not a Luxury”  
 “125th and Abomey”  
 “Walking Our Boundaries”  
 “Zami: A New Spelling of My Name”  
 “Epilogue”  
 “Inheritance—His”  
 Octavia E. Butler. *Kindred* (1979)  
 Alice Walker. *The Color Purple* (1982)  
 Paule Marshall. *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983)  
 August Wilson. *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* (1984)  
 Jamaica Kincaid. *Annie John* (1985)  
 Rita Dove. Selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 3rd ed. (2014) as follows:  
 “David Walker”  
 “Parsley”  
 “Receiving the Stigmata”  
 “The Event”  
 “Motherhood”  
 “Daystar”  
 “The Oriental Ballerina”  
 “Pastoral”  
 “American Smooth”  
 “The Return of Lieutenant James Reese Europe”  
 “Hattie McDaniel Arrives at the Coconut Grove”  
 Toni Morrison. *Beloved* (1987)  
 August Wilson. *The Piano Lesson* (1987)  
 Gloria Naylor. *Mama Day* (1988)  
 Yusef Komunyakaa. Selections from *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 3rd ed. (2014) as follows:  
 “February in Sydney”  
 “Facing It”  
 “Sunday Afternoons”  
 “Banking Potatoes”  
 “Birds on a Powerline”  
 Randall Kenan. “The Foundations of the Earth” (1992)  
 Ernest J. Gaines. *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993)  
 Edwidge Danticat. *The Farming of Bones* (1998)  
 Percival Everett. *Erasure* (2001)  
 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Americanah* (2013)  
 Colson Whitehead. *The Underground Railroad* (2016)  
 Angie Thomas. *The Hate U Give* (2017)  
 Jesmyn Ward. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)

## II. Secondary Scholarship

William L. Andrews. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American*

- Autobiography, 1760-1865* (1986)
- Houston A. Baker, Jr. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987)
- Bernard W. Bell. *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987)
- Hazel Carby. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987)
- Barbara Christian. *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (1980)
- Angela Davis. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (1998)
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (1988)
- Paul Gilroy. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1993)
- Maryemma Graham, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel* (2004)
- Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, Jr., eds. *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* (2011)
- Adam Gussow. *Seems Like Murder Here: Southern Violence and the Blues Tradition* (2002)
- Lena M. Hill. *Visualizing Blackness and the Creation of the African American Literary Tradition* (2014)
- Joseph E. Holloway. *Africanisms in American Culture*. 2nd ed. (2005)
- bell hooks. "Postmodern Blackness" (1990)
- Nathan Huggins. *Harlem Renaissance* (1971)
- George Hutchinson. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995)
- George Hutchinson, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* (2007)
- Gene Andrew Jarrett. *Deans and Truants: Race and Realism in African American Literature* (2007)
- Deborah E. McDowell. "The Changing Same": *Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (1995)
- James Smethurst. *The African American Roots of Modernism* (2011)
- Hortense J. Spillers. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (2003)
- Robert Stepto. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (1979)
- Eric J. Sundquist. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993)
- Kenneth Warren. *What Was African American Literature?* (2011)
- Deborah Gray White. *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (1985)