

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
COURSE OUTLINE

COURSE TITLE: Teaching Caribbean Poetry  
COURSE CODE: EDLA3111  
DURATION: 39 hours  
NO. OF CREDITS: 3  
LENGTH OF COURSE: ONE SEMESTER  
PRE-REQUISITES: Any Level 1 poetry course

#### RATIONALE

Teachers in the Caribbean and UK face some challenges in the teaching of poetry as indicated in the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) UK, and Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) reports on achievement in this area. The difficulties have been reflected in teachers teaching rigidly to the tenets of the relevant national curriculum, but often without flair, enthusiasm and confidence; concentrating on students passing exams rather than gaining a rich understanding of, and passion for, poetry; and even avoiding teaching poetry (or aspects of it they find too demanding). Cremin et al in UK (2008, 2009,) noted the considerable insecurity of teachers' subject knowledge in relation to poetry. One result of this relative lack of expertise is that school students tend to be negative, at worst, or cautious, at best, about poetry. Instead of personal responses to the meaning and musicality of the poem, students tend to focus on limited academic approaches such as 'hunting the device' i.e. looking out for figures of speech and thereby losing both the sense of the poem and the pleasures it offers. Conversely, some students treat the poetry experience, as a sort of 'outpouring' of pent-up emotions, without understanding of the patterns in language that might trigger such effects- in fact the necessity for analysis, refined and extended by deeper and wider encounters with poetry. Teachers need greater exposure to a range of poetry that they can access with students.

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to promote a better understanding and appreciation of Caribbean poetry and the issues surrounding the learning and teaching of this area of the English curriculum in schools. It offers support to teachers by expanding their knowledge base and developing their confidence with poetry as they inspire and educate their students. It thus seeks to encourage and develop teachers' personal, analytical and pedagogical responses to Caribbean poetry.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course the participants will be able to:

- Critically analyze major themes in Caribbean poetry through the study of key poets

- Critically appraise their responses to Caribbean poetry and discuss how these impact on their teaching
- Evaluate the place of Caribbean poetry on the GCSE/CSEC syllabus
- Develop lesson plans that provide opportunities for students to explore themes of Caribbean poetry, such as the environment and sustainable development, gender, migration, diaspora politics and communities.
- Examine issues surrounding Caribbean poetry, including choice of texts and poets
- Review the views on Caribbean poets represented on the UK's Online Poetry Archive

## CONTENT:

1. The Role and Scope of Caribbean Poetry
  - The history of the Caribbean and its influence in shaping the form and content of Caribbean poetry
  - An overview of the history of Caribbean poetry
  - Caribbean poetry and the Environment
  - Caribbean poetry in the English classroom (An Introduction)
2. The Music of Caribbean Poetry
  - Caribbean 'forms' of music and their connection with Caribbean poetry
  - Sustaining the interest levels of students in the English classroom through the use of poems that are presented through music
  - Approaches and techniques to utilize when encouraging students to engage with these 'forms'
3. 'Nation Language' and Caribbean Poetry
  - Languages of the Caribbean and their impact on the form and content of Caribbean poetry
  - Introduction to the presentation and use of 'nation language' in particular poems
  - Creole Languages: how they are perceived and received in the English classroom
4. Roots, Africa, Slavery: Poetry of Resistance and Oppression
  - Recurrent themes of resistance and oppression in Caribbean poetry and how to promote meaningful student responses to these impulses
  - The use of context in the effort to promote student appreciation of poems that exist within this category
5. Odysseys/ 'Islands in the Sun'
  - The poetry of Derek Walcott
  - Helping students to meaningfully engage with the use of language, the presentation of themes and the influential presence of history in Walcott's poetry
6. Views of the Caribbean from "Inglan" – British Caribbean Poetry
  - Issues surrounding the teaching of British Caribbean poetry
  - Focused study of selected poets: John Agard, Fred D'Aguiar, James Berry, Valerie Bloom, Grace Nichols, Archie Markham, Benjamin Zephaniah

- Understanding and interrogating the influence of ‘British systems’ on the CSEC syllabus/ Issues arising from teaching Caribbean poetry in the UK
7. Contemporary Caribbean Poetry
    - Focused study of selected poets: Edward Baugh, Kwame Dawes, Lorna Goodison, Kei Miller, Mervyn Morris, Velma Pollard, Jennifer Rahim, Dennis Scott, Olive Senior, Tanya Shirley
    - Contemporary Caribbean poetry and the teaching of poetry in the English classroom
  8. Evaluation and Assessment
    - Evaluation and Assessment of the teaching of Caribbean poetry in the English classroom

#### METHODOLOGY:

3 contact hours per week in the form of lectures, seminars, group work supported by visiting poets and interaction through the Online Poetry Archive

#### EVALUATION:

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| 60% | PORTFOLIO: To include: 5 reflective pieces (20%), peer response journal (10%), and one unit plan devised and located within a GCSE/CSEC syllabus (30%). |
| 40% | FINAL EXAM (2 hours)  |

#### REFERENCES

Critical Reading (Critics on the poets)

##### Highly Recommended

- Breiner, L. 1998. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bryan, B. 1995. The Role of Context in Defining Adolescent Responses to Caribbean Poetry. *English in Education*, 29 (1): 42-9.
2010. *Between two Grammars: Language Learning and Teaching in a Creole –speaking Environment*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publications.
- Dabydeen, D et al. 2007. *The Oxford Companion of Black British History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dawes, K. 1999. *Natural Mysticism: Towards a New Reggae Aesthetic*. Peepal Tree Books
- Dieffenthaler, I. 2009. *Snow on Sugarcane: the Evolution of West Indian Poetry in Britain*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Milner J and Milner L. 2007. *Bridging English*. New York: Prentice Hall

Paul, A. (ed) 2007. *Caribbean Culture*. Kingston UWI Press

Peck, J. 1988. *How to Study a Poet*. Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Pollard, V. 1991. "Mothertongue Voices in the Writing of Olive Senior and Lorna Goodison".  
In *Motherlands*, Susheila Nasta, editor, The Women's Press, London  
(2003) *From Jamaican Creole to Standard English*, New York: Caribbean Research  
Center, Medgar Evers College.

Rohlehr, G. 2007. 'A Scuffling of Islands: Essays on Calypso'. *The Caribbean Integration process: A People-Centred Approach*, eds, K. Hall and M. Chuck-Sang, 48-121. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.

Tolan J. 2010. 'Between Worlds: Poetry, Ethnicity and Class'. *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, Vol. 17 (4): 353 – 362.

#### Recommended

Allsopp, R. 2003. *The Dictionary of Caribbean Usage*, Kingston: University of West Indies Press.

Brathwaite, E. 1984. *History of the Voice*, London: New Beacon Books.

Young, R. 2003. 'Introduction' in *Postcolonialism – A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### Poetry (to be selected from this list)

Agard, John (2008) *The Young Inferno*\* (illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura) London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

----- (1996) *Get Back, Pimple!*\* London: Viking.

----- (1984) *I Din Do Nuttin*\* London: Bodley Head.

----- (2009) *Alternative Anthem: Selected Poems* (with DVD) Tarsset: Bloodaxe.

Brown, S. McWatt, M. (eds) 2005. *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berry, James (ed) (1984) *News for Babylon: The Chatto Book of West Indian-British Poetry*, London: Chatto & Windus.

----- (2004) *Only One of Me: Selected Poems for Children*\*, London: Macmillan.

----- (2007) *Windrush Songs*, Tarsset: Bloodaxe.

Bloom, Valerie (2003) *Whoop an Shout!*\* London: Macmillan.

Brathwaite, Edward Kamau (1967) *Rights of Passage* Oxford: OUP.

Breeze, Jean Binta (2006) *The Fifth Figure* Tarsset: Bloodaxe.

Burnett, Paula (ed) (1986) *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*, London: Penguin.

Dabydeen, D. (ed) (1984) *A Handbook for Teaching Caribbean Literature*, London: Heinemann.

D'Aguiar, Fred, *Mama Dot* (1985) London: Chatto.

----- (2001) *An English Samplar* London: Chatto.

Dawes, Kwami (ed) *Red: Contemporary Black British Poetry* Leeds: Peepal Tree.

Goodison, Lorna (2006) *Goldengrove: New and Selected Poems*, Manchester: Carcanet.

Johnson, Linton Kwesi (1980) *Inglan is a Bitch London: Race Today*.

----- (2002) *Mi revalueshanary fren* London: Penguin.

Markham, Archie (2002) *Rough Climate* London: Anvil.

Miller, Kei (ed) (2007) *New Caribbean Poetry: An Anthology*, Manchester: Carcanet.

----- (2010) *Light Song of Light*, Manchester: Carcanet.

Morris, Mervyn (2009) *I been there, sort of: New and Selected Poems*, Manchester: Carcanet.

----- (ed) (1982) *Louise Bennett : Selected Poems, Jamaica: Sangster's Book Stores Ltd*.

Nichols, Grace (2010) *I Have Crossed an Ocean: Selected Poems* Tarsset: Bloodaxe.

----- (2006) *Everybody Got a Gift: New and Selected Poems\** London: A & C Black.

Rahim, Jennifer (1999) *Between the Fence and the Forest* Leeds: Peepal Tree.

Sissay, Lemn (ed) (1998) *The Fire People: a collection of contemporary Black British Poets*, Edinburgh: Payback Press.

Smartt, Dorothea (2001) *Connecting Medium* Leeds: Peepal Tree.

Walcott, Derek (2007) *Selected Poems* (edited and with Introduction, Eddie Baugh). New York: Macmillan

Zephaniah, Benjamin (1996) *Propa Propaganda* Tarsset: Bloodaxe.

----- (2000) *Wicked World\** London: Penguin.