



**LIBA 497 Seminar**  
**Family Matters:**  
**The Family Metaphor in Literature and Society**

Fall 2009 MWF 1:00-1:50 p.m.  
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Office: LA 3041 MWF 11:00-12:00, 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

*Goals:* Conduct in-depth discussion and analysis of the use of family metaphors in works of fiction and non-fiction. Develop cultural contexts for this analysis. Gain greater understanding and appreciation of family literature.

**Texts to be purchased:**

E.L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*  
William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*  
F. Scott Momaday, *The Names*  
Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family*  
Toni Morrison, *Paradise*  
Joyce Carol Oates, *We Were the Mulvaneys*

**Additional readings** on e-reserve

Our Blackboard course materials (at <https://bb.usi.edu>) include a listing of relevant print sources at Rice Library (under "Course Documents") and "External Links" to useful Web resources as well as study guides for each novel.

**GRADES:** Your course grade will be determined as follows:

*Five reflective or interpretive responses (500 words each)	100 points
*Five article reviews (500 words)	100 points
*One research paper (2,000-2,500words)	200 points
*Research Presentation	50 points
*Proposal and annotated bibliography	50 points

451-500=A, 426-450=B+, 401-425=B, 376-400=C+, 351-375=C, 326-350=D+, 301-325=D, <300=F

**Attendance:**

I take attendance regularly because your success in this course demands that you be in class (from the beginning to the end of each class period). You should be aware that missing class means that you cannot participate in class discussions and other in-class activities and that you will, thus, lose points. If you miss class, for whatever reasons, you are still responsible for material covered that day. Each student will be allowed to miss three classes without penalty. Each absence (for any reason) above three will reduce the student's point score by ten points.

*Special Notice:* If any member of the class has a disability, please advise the instructor of desired accommodations by the end of the first week of class or as soon as you have written documentation. The instructor will work with you and the staff

of the Disability Support Services to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to perform and participate in class.

**Class Etiquette:** Since I respect you and value my profession, I will come to your class on time, and I will be prepared for your class. I will expect you to do the same. Discussion will focus on key texts; therefore, you must bring your textbook to class. If you need to eat or drink, please do so neatly and quietly. Engaging in activities unrelated to our class (and this includes sleeping) is unacceptable. Please turn your cell phone off and place it in your bag. You will not need it during class. Unless you're taking notes on your laptop, please put it away as well.

**Class Preparation and Written Assignments:** To benefit the most from this course, you must set aside enough study time to go over the assigned readings very carefully, think about them, and begin to make connections between them. If, at any point in the semester, you feel you need help, please, come to my office and talk to me.

Since we need to establish cultural contexts for each novel, I will ask you to submit five **critical review essays** throughout the semester. Choose texts for review from the course bibliography. Conversely, if you find an interesting-looking article, propose to add it to the list. We will look at suitable review formats in class. As the review writer, you will serve as an important resource during our class discussion.

To conclude discussion of each novel, I will ask you to submit one reflective or interpretive **reading response**. These written responses to our readings will allow you to deepen your understanding of the texts and the issues they present to us. No research is necessary for these responses, but please do not merely regurgitate what's already been said in class. For instance, you might reflect on your reactions to Marianne's mental breakdown in *We Are the Mulvaneys*. In an interpretive essay, you could focus on a narrow thematic aspect of a novel and explore its meaning; for instance, in *Ragtime*, you could examine the significance of the disappearing fathers. Or, in *Paradise*, you could ask yourself what the "oven" at the town center signifies.

Type these responses following standard format, about 250 words per page. Your writing should represent your best critical and creative effort. We will look at examples of appropriate responses in class. The point is to react to, analyze, and interpret what you have read, establishing connections to class discussion or to related (contemporary) issues. I'm not interested in reading a long plot summary or ideas copied from *SparkNotes*. If you need assistance with your writing, stop at the Writing Room in ED 1102. You can sign up in person or get a referral from me.

Finally, you will submit a **research paper** on a topic of your choice. This paper should reflect our work in this **capstone/synthesis** course. This means that you should draw on everything you have learned in the last four years, particularly on the content of your core classes. Here are some suggestions for paper topics.

-a traditional research paper elaborating on any of the areas discussed in class

- a revisionist reading from a family studies perspective of any novel or related set of novels
- an examination of contemporary TV shows or movies from this perspective (*Leave it to Beaver, The Brady Bunch, The Simpsons*)
- an examination of the depiction of the American family in commercials
- If you have some experience with ethnographic research, you might investigate your own family story. Conversely, you could pick an aspect of family studies that interests you and conduct a survey among friends and or family members to answer your questions.
- an investigation of families in utopian communities, such as our Harmonists
- the economics of family life (census.gov!)

To monitor the progress of your work, I will ask you to submit a topic proposal at midterm. During our final exam period, we will share the results of your research in short presentations.

To complete this paper, use a variety of books and journal articles, and reliable Internet sources, such as the “external links” provided on Blackboard, not *Wikipedia*. **These sources should reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the course.** Document sources carefully within the text of the paper (**including** page numbers for printed matter and appropriate references to materials consulted online) and in a bibliography at the end of the paper. All work submitted for this course must be your own and written exclusively for this course. If you are unsure about all of this, work through the interactive Plagiarism Court activity at [fairfield.edu/documents/Library/plagicourt.swf](http://fairfield.edu/documents/Library/plagicourt.swf). E-mail the quiz to me when you feel that you have mastered the material. Talk to me if you have any questions!

Consult the entry on "Plagiarism" on page 43 of your college bulletin: “The University considers plagiarism a form of academic dishonesty, and proof of plagiarism may subject a student or student organization to disciplinary action as outlined in the University of Southern Indiana Student Rights and Responsibilities.” Because plagiarism is a serious offence, I will prosecute each case I detect as follows: a first offense means a 0 on the assignment; a second offense means an F for the course.

**Blackboard Discussion Forum:** If you wish to participate more actively than our class setting permits, plan to visit our Blackboard site at least once every week to publish your responses to reading assignments and/or to continue class discussion. Postings should consist of at least one well-developed, thoughtful paragraph (possibly excerpts from your commentaries). Please don’t repeat what’s already been said in class. Don’t offend your classmates, and don’t purposely post nonsense. I will not formally grade your postings, but I will credit your willingness to participate in this public forum.

## Tentative Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction to the course; images of the family in the visual arts and popular media; overview of family history and anthropology.

Week 2: Read and discuss selections by Rousseau, Claude-Lévi Strauss, Engels, Patricia Collins, and Jay Miller (on e-reserve).

### Psychology and the Family

Week 3: Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*

Week 4: Freud's "Family Romance" – selected poetry by Sylvia Plath

### Family and History

Week 5: Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Week 6: *Paradise* cont.; selections from Ariès

Week 7: *Absalom, Absalom!* Family memories and nightmares.

Week 8: Faulkner cont.; discuss research projects and submit proposals incl. a brief annotated bibliography

### Difficult Genealogies

Week 9: Ball's *Slaves in the Family*

Week 10: Momaday, *The Names*

Week 11: Selections from Miles's *Ties that Bind*

### Politics and the Family

Week 12: Donzelot selections for background; Doctorow, *Ragtime*

Week 13: Patricia Collins, "Gender, Race, and Nation"; *Ragtime* cont.

### Family and Narrative

Week 14: *We Were the Mulvaney's*; reconstructing the family's memory

Week 15: *We Were the Mulvaney's*; semester review;

Week 16: Final Exam Period on 15 December, 1-3 p.m. Research presentations.