

CCCX 215

Creative Communities: People, Power, and Narrative - The Bronzeville Writers

Model contributed by Jeanne Petrolle

People, Power, and Narrative: This course focuses on stories people tell about themselves and their communities. By collecting, analyzing, and retelling stories, students will develop a sharper understanding of how and why people use stories to make sense of their lives and local environs. Students will learn about life stories, help make hidden stories visible, and establish connections between diverse stories and diverse communities. Through the process of discovering, understanding, and relaying narratives, students will establish deeper ties with their own communities at the college and in the city.

The Bronzeville Writers: The Chicago Black Renaissance--an upsurge of artistic, commercial, and political productivity in the late 1910s and 20s, was focused in Bronzeville, a vibrant neighborhood on Chicago's South Side named for the beautiful bronze-like color of dark skin. Writers like Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, and Margaret Walker strolled South Parkway Avenue--now called Martin Luther King Junior Boulevard--taking inspiration from the place and people of this neighborhood. Benny Goodman, Cab Calloway, Eddie Condon, and Louis Armstrong played the Savoy Ballroom, at South Parkway and 47th. Near the Savoy, the architecturally ornate Regal Theater provided black artists and audiences a magnificent venue for cinema and stage performance. Black journalists founded *The Chicago Whip* and the *Chicago Defender*, newspapers to serve and celebrate the black community. Black modernist painter Archibald Motley, who graduated from the School of the Art Institute in the 1910s, captured the vitality of jazz-era Bronzeville on canvas. As the Renaissance blossomed into the 1930s and 40s, W.E.B. Dubois commented that Chicago had produced a "different kind of Youth," meaning that the Bronzeville Writers, who emerged from the South Side Writers Group, had produced a new, distinctively black "aesthetic consciousness." In this course, while practicing the power of creative community ourselves, we will learn the history of Chicago's Black Renaissance and explore the distinctively black aesthetic consciousness of the Bronzeville writers.

CCCX 200 Learning Outcomes: In the Creative Communities course, students will:

- Develop and apply principles, skills, and vocabulary common to engaged creative practices.
- Develop and deepen their understanding of the city of Chicago as a socially and artistically relevant location in a global world.
- Research, document, and critically reflect on the creative ecosystem of a community, with consideration to urban context.

CCCX 215 Learning Outcomes: Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Describe how stories matter to diverse communities;

- Critically analyze narratives and their social significance;
- Interpret how telling and retelling stories shapes identity and community;
- Understand how stories reiterate and resist historic forms of oppression.

Class schedule and format

Week 1 F2F: Instructor uses 3 short videos and 1 short podcast to introduce new material (Bronzeville Writers/Chicago Black Renaissance/); Instructor presents new critical thinking tool (Two-Column Response) and students practice using it; Instructor presents course's key concepts (community, narrative) using CCCX videos; Instructor and students inventory student skills/talents/communities through survey; Small working groups form, based on skills distribution and/or shared interests/communities; Groups prepare to collaborate remotely by choosing a convener, a reporter, and their method of contact.

Week 2 online: Students engage course topic more deeply by accessing longer podcast and videos about Bronzeville writers; Students use the critical thinking tool they learned in the F2F session; Students submit a Two-Column Response (TCR) online; Students use Discord, Canvas Groups, or Zoom to facilitate online/remote collaboration; Students complete a brainstorming exercise that prepares them for next-level face-to-face small-group work; Students submit their brainstorming exercise online

Week 3 F2F: Large-group discussion used to troubleshoot challenges of online work; Students reconnect in person to continue collaboration and initiate project planning; Students have in-person face-to-face project-planning time; Students access instructor support for project development; Instructor presents collection of Archibald Motley paintings; Instructor facilitates F2F conversation about paintings; Instructor previews upcoming week's small-group and individual assignments, explaining HT ace a two-column response (TCR) and providing samples of top-quality TCRs.

F2F Activities: Instructor Introduces New Material by Mini-Lecture, Icebreaker Activities, Early Social Bonding/Small-Group Formation, Interaction with Guest Speakers, Instructor Models Critical Thinking through Large-Group Discussion of Texts, Instructor Checks in on State of Collaboration in Small Groups, Instructor Helps Students Troubleshoot Challenges/Obstacles to Online Work, Instructor Helps Maintain Social Bondedness of Intellectual Community, Students Share Progress and Products of Their Collaboration

Online Activities: Students Work With New Material More Extensively, Students Access Additional Course Materials Online, Students "Consume" Course Content Online, Students Submit Assignments Online, Students Participate in Online Discussions About Course Materials, Students Work Online/Remotely in Groups, Students Work Collaboratively Online to Complete Clearly-Articulated Group Tasks, Instructor Streams Live on Instagram from Bronzeville Neighborhood so Students Can Virtually Visit Bronzeville Safely Despite Pandemic

Course-specific organization, examples and ideas

People, Power, and Narrative: The Bronzeville Writers & The Chicago Black Renaissance

I. Week 1—F2F—Welcome – Where Is Bronzeville? What Was the Chicago Black Renaissance and What Is the Chicago Black Renaissance Today?

- A. **In Class:** Introductions, expectations, syllabus, power point presentation by instructor about Chicago Black Renaissance, skills and talents survey, group formation/planning, presentation of project instructions
- B. **Key themes:** What is a creative community? What are your creative communities?
- C. **Listen:** The Fire This Time (podcast)
View: Chicago Black History Tour (video) & Bronzeville audio drama trailer (video)
CCCX-200 Videos about Community
Read: Assignment Instructions for Two-Column Response (TCR)
Respond: Practice Two-Column Response (TCR) format
Act: Meet and greet in community; Inventory skills, talents and growth areas; decide how your small group will communicate between face-to-face sessions, select “Convener” & “Reporter,” and any other roles you consider useful

II. Week 2—Online—What stories does White America tell about black people? What stories are Bronzeville writers telling about white America?

- A. **Online:** Listen to podcast, watch videos, read poem, meet virtually in small group, produce a list of group interests/significant locations/project ideas
- B. **Key themes:** What is narrative? How does narrative build community? What narratives are you following right now? What narratives would you like to change or build?
- C. **Listen:** Confronting the Warpland (podcast) (Bronzeville podcast, if desired. TRIGGER WARNING: This audio drama contains the n-word and contains representations of black men as “dangerous” and “criminally genius.” Also contains college-educated middle-class black characters.)
View: Bronzeville podcast trailer w/Laurence Fishburne and Larenz Tate & The Grid: Bronzeville & Chicago Black History Tour
Read: “Riot,” Gwendolyn Brooks
Respond: Two-Column Response (TCR #1)
Act: Have 1 small-group zoom or discord meeting or discussion thread; Convener convenes, reporter reports, brainstorm a list of possible group projects.

III. Week 3—F2F—What stories does Gwendolyn Brooks tell about Bronzeville? What stories do Archibald Motley’s paintings tell about Bronzeville?

- A. **In Class:** Reports from students who listened to Bronzeville podcast, updates from small-groups, mini-lecture/PowerPoint presentation about painter Archibald Motley, Reader’s Theater performance of Brooks’s poem Bronzeville
- B. **Key themes:** What stories do the poets on the podcast “Confronting the Warpland” tell about Bronzeville? What story is Gwendolyn Brooks telling about Bronzeville? What was/is the effect of Brooks’ stories on Bronzeville? How do paintings tell stories? What is the effect of Motley’s paintings on YOUR understanding of Bronzeville?
- C. **Listen:** Reader theater-style reading of “Streets of Bronzeville”
View: Motley paintings, while listening to Earl Hines, Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington
Read: In-class writings in response to Motley’s paintings, Brooks’s poem
Respond: In-class writings in response to Motley’s paintings, Brooks’s poem
Act: Meet up with your small-group members and continue the project-

planning process.

IV. Week 4—Online—What stories do writers tell about Gwendolyn Brooks? What is “legacy”? What is Gwendolyn Brooks’s legacy?

- A. **Online:** Listen to podcast, watch videos, read poem, meet virtually in small group, develop and submit progress report about group project
- B. **Key themes:** How do creative communities work? What are the effects of creative communities on individual creatives? How do works by Brooks, Madhubuti, and Motley “talk” to each other? Whose work do you want to “talk to”?
- C. **Listen:** Not Detainable: A Discussion of Gwendolyn Brooks’s “Riot” podcast
View: Archibald Motley: A Stroll, Parts I & II videos
Read: Introduction to Haki Madhubuti & Haki Madhubuti’s “Gwendolyn Brooks” & Brooks’s poem “A Street in Bronzeville”
Respond: TCR #2
Act: Have 1 small-group zoom or discord meeting or discussion thread; Convener convenes, reporter reports, either continue brainstorming a list of possible group projects or begin writing a description of your project

V. Week 5—F2F—What is the Great Migration? How do Jacob Lawrence’s paintings tell the story of the Great Migration? How is the story of the Great Migration related to Bronzeville?

- A. **In Class:** Instructor presents mini-lecture/PowerPoint about Jacob Lawrence’s paintings
- B. **Key themes:** Where in Bronzeville poetry do you see references to the Great Migration? What does it mean to “reframe”? What is modernism? How did black artists generate modernism? How did modernism arise out of community?
- C. **Listen:** N/A
View: PowerPoint Presentation about Jacob Lawrence paintings
Read: NA
Respond: In-Class discussion
Act: In your small group, make a decision about your group project, and begin planning who will do what.

VI. Week 6—Online—How do artists reframe social and political realities on the ground? How do Madhubuti’s poems reframe black life in Chicago? How do stories help reframe social/political/historical events?

- A. **Online:** Watch videos, read poems, meet virtually in small group, develop and submit 250-500 word description of group project, including each group member’s responsibilities
- B. **Key themes:** What does it mean to “reframe”? How can artists and activists reframe events?
- C. **Listen:** NA
View: “The Migration Series,” “How Jacob Lawrence Reframed American History with Struggle.” Videos
Read: Haki Madhubuti Poems
Respond: TCR #3

Act: Have as many small group zoom or discord meetings or discussion threads as you need to create and submit a description of your group project.
Convener convenes, reporter reports.

VII. Week 7—F2F—How do music and poetry reframe black suffering? How do artforms “talk to” each other? How do poets influence each other? How can creative communities respond to suffering? What stories does Leadbelly tell? What stories do Jess and Plumpp tell about Leadbelly?

A. **In Class:** Introduction to connections between Haki Madhubuti, Tyhimba Jess & Sterling Plumpp

B. **Key themes:** What does it mean to “reframe”? How can artists and activists reframe events?

C. **Listen:** Listen to Leadbelly songs, Reader’s Theater-style reading of Tyhimba Jess & Sterling Plumpp

View: NA

Read: Tyhimba Jess & Sterling Plumpp poems

Respond: In-Class discussion

Act: In your small group, consult with your instructor about project plans and continue planning process.

VIII. Week 8—Online—How did role modeling work for Gwendolyn Brooks, Haki Madhubuti, and Tyhimba Jess? How does role modeling work in creative communities?

A. **Online:** Listen to podcast, watch videos, read poems, meet virtually in small group

B. **Key themes:** How do role models work in creative communities? Who are your role models? How can creative communities protect artists in hostile cultures?

C. **Listen:** Confronting the Warpland podcast

View: Tyhimba Jess & Sterling Plumpp videos

Read: Tyhimba Jess & Sterling Plumpp poems

Respond: TCR #4

Act: Have as many small-group zoom or discord meetings or discussion threads as you need to make significant progress on your projects;
Convener convenes, reporter reports.

IX. Week 9—F2F—What is creativity? What is creativity outside the realm of art? What is political and social creativity? What is creativity in everyday life, in homemaking, business, in parenting, in what we could call “life-craft”?

A. **In Class:** Introduction to Ida B. Wells, Augusta Savage & Margaret Walker

B. **Key themes:** What stories did Ida B. Wells and Margaret Walker tell? What stories did Augusta Savage tell with her sculptures? What stories do you tell about your own life and work? Do you need to change your story? Does anything need reframing?

C. **Listen:** NA

View: Ida B. Wells/Margaret Walker presentation

Read: NA

Respond: In-person Discussion

Act: In your small group, continue your planning process.

X. Week 10—Online—How did art and politics overlap during the Chicago Black Renaissance? Where do you see art and politics overlapping in your communities?

- A. **Online:** Listen to podcast, watch videos, read poem, meet virtually in small group
- B. **Key themes:** In development
- C. **Listen:** Poetry Foundation “Bronzeville” podcast episode
View: Ida B. Wells video
Read: Margaret Walker introduction and poem
Respond: TCR #5
Act: Have as many small-group zoom or discord meetings or discussion threads as you need to make significant progress on your projects.
Convener convenes, reporter reports.

XI. Week 11—F2F—Project Management

- A. **In Class:** Groups use entire time for project planning, with instructor support.
- B. **Key themes:** In development
- C. **Listen:** In development
View: In development
Read: In development
Respond: In-person development
Act: In development

XII. Week 12—Online—Reflecting on Creativity and Community

- A. **Online:** Listen to podcast, meet virtually in small group, prepare to launch projects
- B. **Key themes:** What have you learned about making? What are you learning about creative communities? What are you learning about communities in Chicago?
- C. **Listen:** Shareefa J, Mental Health, Self-Kindness, and Learning from Failure, Couragemakers Podcast
View: CCCX Video about Community
Read: NA
Respond: Add to Canvas Discussion about making, creativity, community
Act: Groups 3 & 4 finish preparing their projects for sharing

XIII. Week 13—F2F—Groups Share Projects

- A. **In Class:** Groups 3 & 4 Provide the Class
- B. **Key themes:** TBA by Groups 3 & 4
- C. **Listen:** TBA by Groups 3 & 4
View: TBA by Groups 3 & 4
Read: TBA by Groups 3 & 4
Respond: TBA by Groups 3 & 4
Act: TBA by Groups 3 & 4

XIV. Week 14—Online—Reflecting on Creative Communities

- A. **Online:**
- B. **Key themes:** How do creative communities operate? How do communities support/complicate individual creativity?
- C. **Listen:** Creativity Matters Podcast
 - View:** CCCX Video about Community
 - Read:** Other people's discussion posts about their creative communities
 - Respond:** 250-500 word comment about your experience of community in this course, and/or in another community to which you belong.
 - Act:** Groups 1 & 2 finish preparing their projects for sharing

XV. Week 15—F2F—Groups Share Projects

- A. **In Class:** Groups 1 & 2 Provide the Class
- B. **Key themes:** TBA by Groups 1 & 2
- C. **Listen:** TBA by Groups 1 & 2
 - View:** TBA by Groups 1 & 2
 - Read:** TBA by Groups 1 & 2
 - Respond:** In-Class Engagement with Projects
 - Act:** Groups 1 and 2 share their projects