

# FINAL EXAM PREP

## COURSE THEMES

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### Notes

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#### **theme: family**

Typically, a theme most commonly present in southern literature is family. Family is presented in texts in a way where the youngest of the family gives respect to the older generations; family's must be close and it is important that there is a distinct man of the family. There are often many gender roles that are also associated with this theme. Some negative interpretations of this theme can be perceived as more incestual in some cases.

Examples: Po' Sandy (1899), The Planter's Northern Bride (1854), Everyday Use (1973), Iola Leroy (1892)

#### **counternarratives:**

- Here, list texts that provide some kind of counternarrative of the theme's typical appearance in southern literature and explain why:
  - Desiree's Baby- she had no true family, and yet was still taken in only to be cast aside when the truth comes out about her. Typically in southern literature, family is held highly and now the lack of family is shown and how that impacts women specifically.
  - Everything that Rises Must Converge(1962)- This story is a counternarrative of the typical family trope in southern literature due to the son's adversity against the mother. Throughout the story, the son is annoyed and hoping for his mother to get what he believes she deserves due to her outdated beliefs. This is a clear contrast to the typical southern ideal of respecting your parents, and having a close family.
  - Story of an Hour - usually a wife should be doting on her husband but she literally died from joy that he died and then the shock of him coming back

- Why I Live at the P.O - a girl got so sick of her family and living at home that she went to live by herself

### **changes over time:**

- Here, list how you believe that southern literature's interactions with the theme have changed over time
  - Southern writers have allowed more room for rebellion
  - The protagonists are starting to be the people that go against family values rather than those that uphold them

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### **theme: race**

When Southern writing first began, it contained many Confederate ideals. Many works preached on white superiority, the romanticization of plantation life, the degradation of Black culture through dialect and characterization, and the erasing of Black history.

Good Examples: The Planter's Northern Bride (1854), Desiree's Baby (1893), Iola Leroy (1892)

### **counternarratives:**

- Here, list texts that provide some kind of counternarrative of the theme's typical appearance in southern literature and explain why:
  - A Lesson Before Dying- Race is a defining factor in the treatment of Jefferson, as well as the other members of society. They are often seen as inferior because of their race and live in a segregated community on a plantation, dehumanizing them by making them live where their ancestors were enslaved.
  - "History Lessons" in *Magic City* - rather than preaching about the goodness of slavery or the superiority of white people, it focuses on how tragic it is to be a young black man in the South
  - Ethnogenesis(1861)- Speaks about and glorifies the confederacy and claims that god is on the side of the confederacy in the war- it also demonizes the north and compares them to hell. Although this is not a directly racist poem, it is very against the north and northern ideals which were opposing slavery at this time.

### **changes over time:**

- Here, list how you believe that southern literature's interactions with the theme have changed over time
  - The beginning of southern literature had a strong emphasis on how race impacted everything about a person including dialect, behavior, and relationships. This was highlighted in plantation narratives, but a shift towards African American education and writing showed that culture was shifting and developing.
  - Less degradation, especially with the increase in African American writers and their focus on their experience and view of the south

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### **theme: religion**

Here, explain the most common uses of the theme in southern literature. This may include how the theme is typically presented, cultural reactions, or importance. List texts that *in your opinion* represent the theme well

- common use of religion/cultural belief either to form stories that play on what is seen in present day and also make connections to what is important to a particular group of individuals (i.e. Cherokee creation myth)
- in some ways to challenge/criticize society's view on religion and what it means to be a religious and virtuous person (i.e. A Good Man is Hard to Find)
- used to uphold social values on others (i.e. A Rose for Emily)
- contemplate the meaning of religion among poor Black communities especially in the face of injustice and oppression. Especially important to console suffering among the poor and socially oppressed (i.e. A Lesson Before Dying)
- used to connect identity to an individual and the way the religious aspect of a person can be attacked, as well as justice for the suffering (i.e. Sweat)
- used to show nationalism and also southern pride and honor in fighting their beliefs in the war. (Ethnogenesis 1961)

### **counternarratives:**

- Here, list texts that provide some kind of counternarrative of the theme's typical appearance in southern literature and explain why:
  - Cherokee creation myth → although not a religious text it does contrast against Christian religions/creation myths that were common for white and Black southern folk.
  - *A Good Man is Hard to Find* → the Misfit exposes individuals with wavering faith (such as the grandma) despite her suggestions that the Misfit strive harder to be individual of faith and good-doings and find the courage to pray
  - *A Rose for Emily*- Emily completely rejects all religious judgment when being seen hanging out with Homer, despite judgment from the town and efforts from a pastor to bring attention to her “promiscuous” behavior

### **changes over time:**

- Here, list how you believe that southern literature's interactions with the theme have changed over time
  - Religion in culture has transformed from an integral part of society to something that is part of an individual's identity. With the progression of time, more texts suggest a criticism of religious hypocrisy and the arguments that believing in God or in another religious does not make an individual inherently good

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### **theme: land**

The holiness of land is typically portrayed in Southern Lit. It's typically pictured as being having a strong sense of connection to the land or that it is better.

### **counternarratives:**

- Here, list texts that provide some kind of counter narrative of the theme's typical appearance in southern literature and explain why:
  - *A Lesson Before Dying*- Grant wanted to leave the South and escape everything about it. The land was not special to him.
  - “A Good Man Is Hard To Find”- The grandmother is a hypocrite throughout this story but she specifically tells Bailey that he should appreciate Georgia more and

he doesn't even though she does not appreciate where they are going on vacation (Florida).

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### **changes over time:**

- Here, list how you believe that southern literature's interactions with the theme have changed over time
  - Poems from *The People Who Stayed* from American Indians show how they appreciated the land and loved the land- how it was sacred and holy to them and also stories of how everything came to be.
  - Jefferson's Notes On Virginia also display a liking to the land in a way.
  - But over time, I feel like they started to appreciate the land less, like in *A Lesson Before Dying* because of the hatred for the South and also how the South was seen a place of slavery and a lot of racism throughout history.
  - In *Magic City*, the land itself is appreciated but what happens in this land is terrible racism and murders which Komunyakaa writes about throughout this book.
  - I think that in the beginning the land was much more appreciated and even worshiped in a way.

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### **theme: gender**

Overall, the role of gender is used to determine power dynamics. This is seen in many of the texts throughout the semester. Women and men have very different roles within a majority of the texts.

### **counternarratives:**

- Here, list texts that provide some kind of counternarrative of the theme's typical appearance in southern literature and explain why:
  - "A Rose for Emily" She does not marry and remains independent, however, this is because she comes from a wealthy family.
  - "Mary Chestnut's Diary" This text is different as all of the men in the south are off at war. This allows Chestnut's writing to provide political analysis that otherwise would not have occurred during this time period.

**changes over time:**

- Here, list how you believe that southern literature's interactions with the theme have changed over time
  - “A Good Man is Hard to Find” In this text, the female characters are ultimately making the decision of where the family will vacation and play a more prominent role in the text. While the mother’s role is to take care of the children, these female characters are more complex than those we previously read. The grandmother acts as if she is better than everyone for being a lady but she ultimately is as rude as the children are.
  - “An Odor of Verbena” Drusilla breaks gender norms and fights along with the men in the Civil War. Bayard knows that when he returns he is expected to enter a duel in order to show respect for his dead father, however, he is unable to do this. He struggles with this as he is a man and wants to prove this. Ringo, his brother who is African-American proves that he is a man and enters the duel following Colonel Sartorios’ death.