

## INTRODUCTION to SECOND LIFE

### **PRIMARY GOAL of Final Project:**

Second Life allows visitors to interact with objects and physically negotiate a space so that they can get a better understanding of an environment. How could you present some of the material from the novel you've chosen in the virtual space of Second Life in order to give readers/SL-visitors a better sense of the environment depicted by the author?

Think about "environment" not only as the physical space (a yard, a house, a sidewalk, a pond), but also:

*--the cultural environment*

Note that "culture" does not refer to the narrow definition of superior pieces of Art, but rather to the beliefs, values, norms and standards, and practices of a particular group of people (religious, ethnic, age, social, or lifestyle group)

*--the historical moment in which the novel is set*

During the months and years depicted in the writing, what other events are going on in that town? the country? the world? How might these affect the occurrences in the novel, and the dynamics between the protagonist and others?

*--the emotional feelings and/or thoughts/psychological space of the individual*

As you conceptualize your Second Life space, consider how you might translate Morrison's words and themes into visual terms that profit from Second Life technology.

Keeping the following question in mind might facilitate this task:

**How can you teach other readers/visitors the crucial lessons of the novel in a more creative way than through the conventional analytical essay?**

## DAY ONE—

1. Create an account on Second Life (if you have not already done so).
  - a) Pick an avatar from the given choices (you'll just select a general form [human, robot, or animal; if human, then male or female, etc.], which you'll be able to customize later).
  - b) Provide a username (e.g. "jsmith" or "JaneDoe42")
  - c) Fill out your email address, date of birth, and password, etc.

2. Create an avatar (15 min).

Try to cover just the basics: name, gender, general appearance. You can fine-tune the details later. The SL program will remain on these computers for the whole semester, or you can download it on your personal computer (it's free).

3. Figure out how to negotiate your space. Practice walking and flying.

Over the course of the semester, I would like you to explore the virtual world of Second Life to get a sense of what it is possible for your avatar to do/experience.

**ASSIGNMENT:** *Visit at least 5 SL spaces on your own* (not including those listed below), and keep a record of the specific locations that you visit (names and URLs). Include these in your Final Project Portfolio, along with the answers to the following questions (for each site):

- a) What were the most interesting things that you saw on this island, or at particular sites on the island?
- b) How and why did they capture your attention?
- c) Did you interact with the environment, or just look/observe/wander around?
- d) What did you see and do that you might apply to your creation of a Morrison space?

4. Teleport to the following locations:

- a) Macbeth – Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters [literature]
- b) Teleport to Exploratorium site [science]  
Must wear mask & helmet to enter.  
Can ask questions of Patio Plasma.
- c) Eduisland, Arctic Live Wild Sanctuary [science]
- d) Sedig–Virtual Hallucinations site created by UC Davis [health/medicine]  
Experience what it feels like to have schizophrenia.
- e) Teleport to Kalepa–DaVinci Gardens [art/science]  
Take a ride on the magic bat.

5. Teleport to Johnson County Community College – patio  
Class meeting: 6:40 pm

English 334: Major Authors – Toni Morrison  
Professor Giselle Anatol  
Fall 2011  
Second Life Final Project

## **DAY TWO—EVALUATION PROCESS**

The process of thought, reflection, drafting, and revision is key to the Second Life project—it is a technique that should remain useful as you craft conventional essays in other classes, and/or pieces of writing outside of the academic environment. Teams/Individuals will therefore be rewarded for process and not just product (and hopefully this will also relieve some of the performance anxiety over not feeling competent with the technology!).

The following exercise is designed to further familiarize you with the virtual worlds of Second Life, but also to serve as a "norming session" for identifying and evaluating effective "educational" sites. You will visit 3 SL sites, interact with the environments, and assess them. I would like you to apply the knowledge gained from this assessment to your own final project (i.e. find ways to use the most effective tools when designing your own site).

### Assignment

1. Visit the following Second Life sites:

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE – Imagination Island, Rachelville

GOTHIC LITERATURE – Village of Nyght, Dunwich

SHAKESPEARE – Globe Theatre, East Tower

2. Rank the sites: which one is best? Why do the other 2 sites not work as well for teaching a visitor about the ideas at hand?

3. Write up your findings and submit at the end of the session. Please write legibly! Make sure your name is on your paper.

Note: Although that while it might not be evident at first, you are engaged in "textual analysis." Each site—although not the traditional short story, poem, novel, or scholarly article—serves as a "text," written/created by an artist.

English 334 – Toni Morrison  
Professor Giselle Anatol

## FINAL PROJECT – Morrison in Second Life – GRADING RUBRIC

With the help of your responses from the Second Life activity last week, I have come up with a grading rubric for the Final Project. Projects will be graded on the following:

### CREATIVITY

Choice of scene to represent – Does the site give unique, added depth to an otherwise ordinary-seeming space (such as a living room, or a garden)? Does the site give readers a clear way to understand an out-of-the-ordinary or confusing scene from one of Morrison's narratives?

Use of visual details (color, shapes, space, texture, animation, etc.) to create a stimulating environment

Use of aural details (music, voices, dialogue, sounds, etc.) to create a stimulating environment

Does the site give the visitor something to *do* (find, explore, solve, watch, listen to, think about, etc.), or just things to *look at*?

### ACCURACY and TEXTUAL SUPPORT

Evidence of close reading / use of specific details from the novel – Does the student team throw in details that have little to do with the novel or just get mentioned once or twice, or does each aspect of the site have greater significance for understanding the scene or concept at hand?

Incorporation of specific passages from Morrison's novels -- How are examples of Morrison's prose utilized for this site? Are they incorporated as "window-dressing," just to give the visitor a superficial sense of the author's writing style, or are the chosen passages emblematic of a larger theme or idea in the novel?

### EVIDENCE of RESEARCH

What details add extra depth to the setting of the scene? How does the student-team establish a particular time period? A specific culture or ethnicity? A particular state, region, town, or country? The socio-economic circumstances?

What compelling elements from other SL sites did the student-team adapt for the Morrison site?

### WRITE-UP and PORTFOLIO

*All choices should be explained in a "Creator's Statement," and included in your portfolio.*

How clearly are the project aims and goals articulated?

How clear is the reasoning for including various details?

How effectively does the writer use Morrison's own words, either from the novel at hand, or from other writing (works of fiction or scholarly essays)? Are the quotations cited in the correct (MLA or Chicago-style) format?

How effectively does the writer use supplementary materials to support interpretations, assertions, etc.? Again, are the ideas or directly quoted passages cited in the correct format?

Is a bibliography included? Is it in the correct format?

*Articulating criteria for the a project with an aesthetic/artistic component can also help students comprehend that "art is work"—simply because the piece is creative does not mean that it has no intellectual value, which is an idea they sometimes have trouble with. My hope is that if students are actively involved in generating the rubrics instead of just being handed one, they will have more ownership over their projects and the evaluation of them.*

### **Second Life Portfolio Contents / Final Project Checklist**

- \_\_\_ Evaluation of Second Life sites visited and evaluated together (Globe Theatre, Rachelville)
- \_\_\_ List and Evaluations of Second Life sites explored on your own (*at least five*). For more details, review the handout that says "Day One" on the back side.
- \_\_\_ Original In-Class Writing Assignments / Short Essays related to Second Life
  - The Bluest Eye* [Pecola in SL]
  - Sula* ["free choice"]
  - Song of Solomon* ["free choice"]
  - A Mercy* [the gate or the mansion]
- \_\_\_ Typed revisions of each short essay (or a typed first draft if you missed any in class)
- \_\_\_ Detailed description of the scene you would build in Second Life to teach an SL visitor more about the major themes and/or difficult concepts in the novel at hand
- \_\_\_ Additional materials that might give depth to your description (sketches, newspaper articles, magazine advertisements, song lyrics, etc.) --*recommended, but not required*
- \_\_\_ Analysis of your work / "Creator's Statement"
- \_\_\_ Bibliography or Works Cited page

## WRITING PROMPTS

III. Instead of requiring 2 longer, discrete essays, I will assign one conventional 5-page paper and a set of scaffolded microthemes and activities to help students think through the possibilities for the project in increasingly complex ways as the semester progresses. According to pedagogical theory scholar John C. Bean, exploratory writing not only "records the actual process of critical thinking" but works at "simultaneously driving it forward" (6).<sup>1</sup>

### (A) Individual Journal – Exercise 1

Keep a record of the specific Second Life locations that you visit (names and URLs), and answer the following questions for each site:

What were the most interesting things that you saw on this island, or at particular sites on the island?

How and why did they capture your attention?

Did you \*interact\* with the environment, or just look/observe/wander around?

What did you see and do that you might apply to your creation of a Morrison space?

[Another invaluable suggestion that came out of BPI discussions: distribute a form to each team that serves as a contract between individual students as well as between the group and the instructor. The students must fill out who is doing which tasks, and by what date, and all must sign the form. At the end of the semester, students fill out peer evaluations, making comments on how each member performed and participated, which the instructor can use to provide feedback (e.g. "I see signs of excellent leadership skills, but you need to be careful of overriding the ideas of others in order to ensure that all members of your group feel like they are significant contributors to the project").]

### (B) In-Class Reflection – Exercise 2

By now, you should have finished *The Bluest Eye*. To integrate your explorations of the Second Life world and your thinking about how a specific work of fiction can be adapted, I'd like you to write a short essay considering the following issue: Imagine that the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove, is transported 70 years into the future and exposed to Second Life technology. When it came time for her to create an avatar, what would it look like? Explain if you think this would be a beneficial experience for her or a negative experience, and why."

### (C) Microthemes – Exercise 3

After reading each of the assigned Morrison novels, students were asked to write a short essay on the most compelling aspects of the work: "After listening to lectures, participating in class discussion, and thinking through the possibilities for your own SL space, what ideas from this novel do you believe are most important to convey in the virtual world? Why? How did you pick up on these concepts in Morrison's writing? (i.e. Quote from the text to reveal the details you gathered to support your visual interpretation.). How might you illustrate one or two of these themes in Second Life? Which (one) setting from the novel would you choose for situating your ideas? (Select only one space, even if you imagine developing several ideas within that space.)"

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<sup>1</sup> Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education (1996).

(D) Group Presentation – Exercise 4

During the last week of class in the Fall 2011 semester, I anticipated meeting in the computer lab and each group giving the class a virtual tour of its SL space (but only if the builders could get the environments constructed in time—if not, teams were to present their work via sketches, storyboards, Power Point, etc.). Before presenting their project, students were instructed to gather their writing from throughout the semester to compile portfolios, which were to be submitted at the time of the presentation. Throughout the term, students were directed to turn to the various writing assignments with a critical eye, and interrogate and apply their initial thoughts, my comments and suggestions, later reflection, and research results to the final product.