

Prof. Erin Stiles

Office: Mendocino Hall 2026 Office hours: Tues. 4:00-5:00 and Wed. 1:00-3:00

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HRS 148: African Arts and Cultures

Tuesday and Thursday, 10:30-11:45 (GE C1)

Alpine 147

Catalog Description

Survey of African cultural and artistic forms which explores the intersection of culture and the humanities in different African contexts—past and present. Emphasizes the cultural diversity of the African continent, and surveys how different cultural, ethical, aesthetic and religious values are expressed in literature, visual art, ritual, music, and architecture. Focuses primarily on sub-Saharan Africa.

This is an upper-division undergraduate course, intended for all students. There are no prerequisites for this course. In this course, we will learn about several African cultures through studying the expressive traditions particular to those cultures. The course is divided into thematic areas, which are identified on the class schedule below. The course will consist of lectures and discussion of reading materials and audio-visual materials.

Required Texts

- Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God* in Hornet Bookstore
- Kelly Askew, *Performing the Nation* in Hornet Bookstore
- Mariama Ba, *So Long a Letter* in Hornet Bookstore
- Teplit ole Saitoti, *Worlds of a Maasai Warrior* in Hornet Bookstore
- Fa-Digi Sisoko and J. Johnson, *The Epic of Son-jara* in Hornet Bookstore
- Reader: collection of articles available at [University Copy & Print, 446 Howe Ave.](#) (behind Tokyo Fros on Fair Oaks Blvd.)
- Some readings will also be on reserve in the CSUS library. These are marked as on “reserve” on the syllabus

Recommended Texts

- Perani and Smith, *Visual Arts of Africa* in Hornet Bookstore

Learning Goals

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Explain the variations in/varieties of humanistic traditions in Africa and understand the expressive traditions of several African cultures
- Identify the stylistic expression of values and ideals in art, literature, music, and ritual practice
- Understand the impact of historical events on changing styles/concepts in African humanities
- Demonstrate skills in critical thinking and writing

Course Requirements and Grading

15% Class Attendance, Participation, Discussion

15% Short Essays

30% In Class Midterm Exam

40% Take-Home Final exam

- In addition to lectures, readings, films, and audio materials, discussion is essential to the learning process. Participation in class is thus strongly encouraged, and is part of your grade.

- Students will occasionally be asked to present brief sections of the readings to class: this is a great way to make sure you are getting full participation points, so you are encouraged to volunteer.
- During other class periods we may do small group work—you need to have all reading assignments completed so you don't frustrate others in the group.
- Throughout the course, you need to learn the locations of the various cultures we will be discussing. At the midterm and the final, you will have a brief map quiz.
- **Essays:** You will hand in three short essays, 3-4 pages, on assigned topics. Each is worth 5 points.
- **Midterm:** The midterm will be an in-class, short essay exam and a map quiz.
- **Final Exam:** The final exam will be two take home essays, which should be your very best writing. We will also have a brief map quiz on the day of the scheduled final.

Class Policies

- I am happy to make accommodations for students with recognized disabilities; please see me early in the semester to discuss your needs.
- Cell phones must be turned off or silenced during class.
- Late essays will not be accepted, nor will essays submitted via email only.
- Makeup exams are not permitted.
- Plagiarism on essays and cheating on exams will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic F for the course. Please see the following: <http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353>

Week	Topic	Readings
Jan. 29	Introduction to Course	None
Jan. 31	The African Continent--overview	Reserve: Martin and O'Meara, Ch 2 (optional)
	Religion, Worldview and the Arts in Northeastern Africa	
Feb.5	Cultural Diversity in Africa through the Humanities	Reader: "Introduction"
Feb. 7	Nile and Ethiopian Civilizations: Nubia, Kush, Axum	Reader: "Northeastern Africa" Reserve: Connah, ch 3 (optional)
Feb. 12	Ethiopian Highlands Ethiopian Christianity and Sacred Art	Reader: "Fre Seyon" Reserve: Connah, ch. 4
Feb 14	Film: "Mountains of Faith"	Reserve: Connah, ch. 4
	Social Organization and Epic Traditions in West Africa	
Feb 19	Epic Literature in Africa; Old Mali Kingdom	<i>The Epic of Son-Jara</i> : Preface and Intro Optional: Perani and Smith, Ch 1-2
Feb 21	The Epic of Son-Jara	<i>The Epic of Son-Jara</i> : p 20-65
Feb 26	The Epic of Son-Jara, cont	<i>The Epic of Son-Jara</i> : 65-101
Feb 28	Film: "Keita: Heritage of the Griot"	Review Son-Jara

March 4	Finish Film: “Keita: Heritage of the Griot” Discussion of film and article <u>Essay #1 due</u>	Reader: “Mask Makers”
	The Colonial Encounter and Expressive Culture	
March 6	Literature and the Colonial Encounter	Reader: “Colonial Era” and “African Literature”
March 11	Language Diversity in Africa: Past and Present: Guest Lecture	Achebe, chs 1-7
March 13	Chinua Achebe’s <i>Arrow of God</i>	Achebe, chs 8-13
March 18	Chinua Achebe’s <i>Arrow of God</i>	Achebe, chs 14-end
March 20	Visual Arts and the Colonial Encounter	Reader: “Art and Authenticity”
March 25	MIDTERM AND MAP QUIZ	Prepare for exam
March 27	Mariama Ba’s <i>So Long a Letter</i>	
	Gender Experience, East and West	
April 1-3	SPRING BREAK	Ba, pp 1-45
April 8	Mariama Ba’s <i>So Long a Letter</i>	Ba, pp 45-89
April 10	East African Autobiography: <i>The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior</i>	Saitoti: Intro and 3-35
April 15	Film: “Maasai Women”	Saitoti, 36-87
April 17	Saitoti, continued. <u>Essay #2 Due</u>	Saitoti, 88-end
	Performance and Politics in Southern and Eastern Africa	
April 22	The Swahili Coast and Great Zimbabwe Film: “Africa: A History Denied”	TBA (on reserve) Optional: Perani and Smith, ch 11
April 24	Performance in Postcolonial Tanzania Students lead discussion	Askew, ch 1-2
April 29	Continued. Students lead discussion	Askew, ch 3-4
May 1	Continued. Students lead discussion	Askew, ch 5-6
May 6	Continued. <u>Essay #3 Due</u>	Askew, ch 7-8
	Transnational Influences in Urban Popular Culture	
May 8	Hip Hop in Tanzania	Reader: “Hooligans and Heroes”
May 13	Music Videos in Mali	Reader: “Music Videos”
May 15	Continue discussion of pop culture	
May 22	FINAL EXAM DUE AND MAP QUIZ	