



# REGINA DOMINICAN

## English Department Grade 10 Level 3: Summer Assignment - 2026

**Course:** Honors American Literature **Level:** 3 **Grade:** 10 **Instructor:** Ryan Pesole

**Course Description:** This course is designed to give students a rich understanding and deep appreciation of the diversity and heritage of American literature. Students study a cross-section of American authors and their works and selections across eras. The course will study classic and modern American texts in the genres of the novel, short story, poetry, drama, and non-fiction. Students will be encouraged to think critically, participate in meaningful discussion and to write logically. Students will continue to work on composition, research, vocabulary, reading, speaking, listening, and language usage skills in addition to preparation for standardized testing. This Level 3 class provides instruction at an accelerated pace, which allows for opportunities for enrichment and deeper exploration of the subject for students whose skills are well above grade level and who are seeking greater academic challenge.

**What to Read:** *Passing* by Nella Larsen ([Signet Classics edition](#) with foreword by Brit Bennett)

Clare Kendry is living on the edge. Light-skinned, elegant, and ambitious, she is married to a racist white man unaware of her African American heritage, and has severed all ties to her past after deciding to “pass” as a white woman. Clare’s childhood friend, Irene Redfield, just as light-skinned, has chosen to remain within the African American community, and is simultaneously allured and repelled by Clare’s risky decision to engage in racial masquerading for personal and societal gain. After frequenting African American-centric gatherings together in Harlem, Clare’s interest in Irene turns into a longing for Irene’s Black identity, which she herself abandoned and can never embrace again, and she is forced to grapple with her decision to pass for white in a way that is both tragic and telling.

**Please purchase this book and read IN PRINT. E-Books are not allowed.**

### Before reading: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

**The Great Migration:** The novel is set in the **1920s mainly in Harlem, New York**, with early scenes set in Chicago. Harlem in this era was a thriving center of Black business, arts and letters. (We will read some poetry and view some of the artwork in the fall!) This thriving community directly benefited from what is called **the Great Migration**—the movement of millions of Black Americans from rural southern areas to northern and western states, in pursuit of opportunity.

**“Passing”:** The main character, Irene, whose perspective drives the narrative, is married to a Black doctor, raising her two young sons. Irene and her husband Brian are part of a vibrant Black society where they are of a high social status. Although it is her childhood friend Clare who more officially “passes” for white, having given up her ties to Black life or society, Irene occasionally does so for convenience at a time when America was deeply segregated. One example of this is in the earliest scene of the novel, when in order to get out of the Chicago heat, Irene goes to a hotel for tea—a hotel which would not allow her as a Black woman. The following excerpt from R. R. Rikes explains the history of “passing”:

Routinely shocking and sometimes lurid in detail, reports abound over three centuries of mixed-race persons lacking discernible African heritage masquerading as white: a Vassar student who proceeded toward graduation as informed school officials looked the other way; the man who abandoned his family in Atlanta and became a leading voice for fascism in the United States; a syndicated cartoonist who took his secret to the grave; an attorney who also changed his name and did not return home until retiring from a prosperous career on Wall Street; the Vaudeville actor-singer whose success vaporized when he was discovered to be “a Negro”; an assumed to be white *New York Times* editor and literary critic who also rose to captain in the segregated white Army of World War II; and the guilt-ridden New England doctor and his wife who journeyed to the extreme in withholding the fact of being “Colored” from even their four children... Unlike Brazil, a nation that had a larger 18th and 19th century black slave population than the United States, there was not a “mulatto escape hatch,” as historian Carl Degler termed it, that permitted those with the taint of slavery in their background to be more easily accepted across the spectrum of society. A cause for anxiety for white Americans fearing racial contamination and degradation, but seen by many African Americans as a way of outwitting the system of oppression and making laughable fools of those who countenanced notions of white racial purity and supremacy, the extent of passing has never been reliably quantified by social scientists, hence estimates up to 1950 ranged from hundreds of thousands to several million blacks vanishing into the ranks of unsuspecting whites.<sup>1</sup>

NOTE: Brian, Irene’s husband, longs to move to Brazil from Harlem, due to the above.

### **Colorism:**

While not explicitly addressed in *Passing*, the novel does touch on colorism. In her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, Alice Walker defined colorism as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color.” Or put another way, colorism is a bias that positions lighter skin color as superior. Like racism, colorism can be experienced on an interpersonal and systemic level. Readers can see colorism when Irene’s childhood friend, Gertrude, speaks about marrying a white man in order to have light-skinned children, or through Irene’s attitude towards the darker skinned “mahogany” Black women who work for her.

### **Warning:**

The n-word is used several times in *Passing*. While Larsen, as a Black author, might be using the word in her novel to make a specific point as a writer, under no circumstances should the n-word be spoken aloud in class. One character, John Bellew, Claren’s husband, expresses deeply white supremacist and racist points of view. His character first appears in Chapter 3 of Part 1 when he comes home and finds Clare, Irene, and Gertrude gathered. It is here that readers learn of his nickname for Clare, which is a shortened version of the n-word. ***Similar to the n-word, under no circumstances should this nickname be stated or read aloud, and students should be directed not to do so either.***

In addition, the word “Negro” is found throughout the book. This is a word that we no longer use to refer to African Americans or Black people. Explain to students that while the word is found in the book, it is because it was the word that was in common use at the time. Teachers might say something like, “Although that word was used historically, when we refer to African American or Black people in class discussion, we will use these contemporary terms instead.”

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<sup>1</sup> Fikes, R. (2014, December 30). *The Passing of Passing: A Peculiarly American Racial Tradition Approaches Irrelevance*. BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/passing-passing-peculiarly-american-racial-tradition-approaches-irrelevance/>

**Assignments:** The purpose of this assessment is to prepare you for further work with this book at the start of the semester, as well as to provide your teacher with a sense of your comprehension and interaction with the text as a reader. Enjoy the reading, but read closely: demonstrate close reading by actively engaging (pencil/pen/highlighter in hand) with the text, perhaps even re-reading intriguing sections. This assignment is not simply for “completion.” Please use this opportunity to develop a nuanced understanding of the book as a whole.

**1. READ, HIGHLIGHT, AND ANNOTATE THE BOOK ( \_\_50\_ pts for quality of work).**

On the first day of school, your annotated book WILL BE COLLECTED. An annotation is simply a note or comment.

Annotate by:

- highlighting or underlining
- making notes in margins for the majority of the above
- adding sticky notes (optional if you find this helps you be organized)

The act of annotating a text is making comments in the margins or within the text of your reading.

*See rubric for more instructions.*

**2. OPEN-NOTE QUIZ ON THE BOOK ( \_35\_ pts for understanding expressed):** This will occur within the first week of school, and you will be given more information on the content of the quiz on day one.

**Due Date:** The completed assignment is due in class on the first day of school. Your books will be checked for complete and quality annotations. You will be given an assessment during the first week of school.

Annotations Rubric: 50 pts

Point Value	Quality of annotations	Further details:
A-/A/A+: 45-50 pts	The text is <b>extensively</b> annotated with <b>copious</b> margin notations. The annotations demonstrate a <b>comprehensive and thoughtful reading</b> . The margin notes show that the reader has proficiently <b>analyzed</b> the text, made <b>insightful connections</b> and drawn <b>valid conclusions</b> . Notations are balanced and <b>show deep reading and thinking</b> . <u>All</u> of the text is addressed.	Student annotations should reflect comprehension, inference and depth/breadth of interaction with text.  Based on text type, the following types of responses should be evidenced in annotations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Questions, reactions, opinions</li> <li>● Predictions and Inferences</li> <li>● Locating important passages / key evidence or ideas</li> <li>● Connections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ other sources/accounts</li> <li>○ our current world</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
B-/B/B+: 40-44	The text is <b>adequately</b> annotated with margin notations. The annotations demonstrate that the <b>reader understands the text beyond the literal level</b> . The margin notes show that the reader has <b>analyzed</b> the text, made <b>some connections</b> and drawn <b>some</b>	

	<b>conclusions.</b> Notations are balanced and <b>show some deep reading and thinking.</b> <u>Most to all</u> of the text is addressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ other texts, films, etc.</li> <li>● Key words or phrases including figurative, connotative and specific word choices of the writer</li> <li>● Challenges of author's bias/assumptions</li> <li>● Identification of author's strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Development of events or characters OR</li> <li>○ Structure and development of argument</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Writer's Style: Tone, POV, Facts v. Opinions, Rhetorical/ Persuasive Devices, (diction, point of view, tone, repetition, etc.)</li> <li>● Literary elements such as characterization, setting, narrative (point-of-view), allusions, imagery, setting, mood, etc.)</li> <li>● A comment on something that intrigues, inspires, confuses, aggravates, etc.</li> <li>● Definitions of any unfamiliar words or allusions</li> <li>● Particular difficult lines (it's okay to be confused)</li> </ul>
C-/C/C+: 35-39	The text is annotated with <b>some</b> margin notations. The annotations are <b>basic</b> and consist mainly of plot driven questions or <b>literal ideas</b> . Annotations indicate a <b>basic understanding</b> of the text. The reader has been able to make <b>one or two connections</b> , but has been <b>unable to use the text to draw valid conclusions</b> . Notations are unbalanced and <u>only half</u> of the text is addressed.	
D-/D/D+30-34	The text is underlined in appropriate places, but there are <b>very few margin notes</b> making it difficult to evaluate how well the reader understood the reading. <b>Notes are illogical</b> and not balanced. <u>Only one quarter</u> of text has been glossed. Insufficient length and depth in comments.	
F: 25-29	Significant parts of the text are completely unmarked. There are no margin notes, only underlined text; OR the text is completely unmarked.	<p>RL.9-10.1,RL.9-10.2,RL.9-10.3,RL.9-10.4,RL.9-10.5, RL.9-10.6,RL.9-10.8,RL.9.10.9,RL.9-10.10,</p> <p>RL.11-12.1,RL.11-12.2,RL.11-12.3,RL.11-12.4,RL.11-12.5, RL.11-12.6,RL.11-12.8,RL.11-12.9,RL.11-12.10,W 11-12.4,</p>

### Academic Integrity and Honor Code of Regina Dominican

Regina Dominican is an academic community defined by its commitment to scholarship and to developing students to become independent thinkers. We expect all students to be honest and committed to the principles of academic and intellectual integrity in their preparation and submission of course work. Academic dishonesty is defined as unjust or unethical manipulation of material to achieve an academic advantage. It is the intention to circumvent learning and to present work as one's own when it isn't. Examples include but are not limited to - handing in any work that is not one's own; - distributing and/or receiving answers on any graded assignment, test, quiz, paper, or homework; - distributing and/or receiving a copy of any test, quiz, paper, or homework assignment; - altering answers after an assessment is returned to gain credit; - using study materials or accessing technology without a teacher's permission during an assessment; - communicating during an assessment without permission; - manipulating grades in any manner; - the uncredited use, whether intentional or unintentional, of another person's words or ideas; - passing off work generated from an AI website or generator as one's own If a student suspects or has knowledge of an act of academic dishonesty, the student is obligated to inform the teacher, the Assistant Principal, a Counselor, or the Principal.