

Jennifer L. Hayes Ph.D. autobiography

Jennifer L. Hayes Ph.D. is a Nashville, TN native and graduated from Martin Luther King Jr. Academic Magnet High School. She earned her B.A. from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville where she studied English and Africana Studies. She earned her M.A. at Tennessee State University and her doctorate at Middle Tennessee State University. Her doctoral thesis “‘Will the Circle Be Unbroken?’: Lynn Nottage’s Multicultural Community Plays,” explored Lynn Nottage’s commitment to multiculturalism. This work was the first full-length dissertation examining the oeuvre of the two-time Pulitzer Prize dramatist.

She has taught at Middle Tennessee State University, Judson College and Tennessee State University. She is guided by Black feminist scholar Audre Lorde in her approach to teaching literature courses. In her literature classes, she applies an intersectional praxis to literature considering the historical matrix of race, gender and class on the lives of characters. She challenges students to consider voices that stress varied perspectives. Her strategy encourages students to appreciate complex alternative views to critically contemplate their position within their communities at all levels. Further, her approach empowers students to embrace the influence their writing can have in their academic and private lives.

At Tennessee State University, she teaches sophomore level Black literature classes, upper division courses, and Women’s Studies. She created English 3660 African American Drama as a space for students to evaluate the breath and depth of scholarship within the African American dramatic literature tradition. Additionally, she has conducted study abroad courses to Paris and Copenhagen which connect to her pedagogical research regarding Black expatriate writers.

Dr. Hayes applies a Black feminist theoretical framework in her scholarship. Her research has focused on 20th and 21st century African American Literature. The foundation of her research agenda is contemporary African American drama. From encyclopedic articles on Alice Childress, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange to her book chapter in *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage* “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner: Choral Performance in Mud River Stone” (Routledge), Dr. Hayes has evaluated the contributions of Black women playwrights to the literary tradition.

Additionally, she has published pedagogical articles in the *The South Atlantic Review* and the *South Journal*. Recently, she has published book chapters in MLA’s *Teaching Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Temple University Press’s *Changing Faith: Religious Practices and Ideologies in the Work of Octavia Butler*. Her first full length book project *Teaching African American Literature Through Experiential Praxis: African American Writers in Europe* (Palgrave MacMillan) represents a synthesis of her scholarship. She proposes innovative strategies for teaching African American literature abroad and domestically. By incorporating aspects of experiential praxis via study abroad courses, she broadens the already robust pedagogical conversations regarding the teaching of African American literature. By critically examining the trope of travel within African American literature, Dr. Hayes exposes an undercurrent of resistance work that emphasizes the empowering impulse of African American literature.