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Office Hours: THH 433, M 4-5, W 1-2 and by appt.

English 303
Section 32645
Fall 2016, W 2-4:20 PM
THH 107

Introduction to Fiction Writing

This class introduces the craft and practice of fiction writing. We study the formal aspects of fiction—such as dramatization, point-of-view, and characterization—that are integral to short stories and novels. We do this through the close examination of published work and the creation of student work. To that end, we examine various aspects of the creative process, from inspiration to revision.

The heart of the class is the workshop, where students submit original work for peer review. Weekly reading assignments and responses, writing exercises, and lectures on narrative craft are meant to help students become more conscious of technique and defter with its practice. At the end of the semester, students will turn in a portfolio of revised work and a self-assessment examining their personal aesthetic, interests, and progress. Our goal is for students to better clarify their understanding of their own narrative and lyric pleasure, and to strengthen their insight and ability to create such pleasure. We aim to do this as a community of writers who enjoy and grow from sharing their work.

Required Texts

Please note that computers are not allowed in class, so you will need physical copies of these texts. Some material will be available on Blackboard, and students should print out these texts.

Ann Charters, editor, *The Story and Its Writer*, 9th edition. ISBN: 9781457664618

This is a comprehensive anthology of short fiction. Note that you will need the ninth edition, as the other editions have different page numbers and stories.

Kelly Link, *Get in Trouble*

ISBN: 9780812986495

This is a contemporary, well-received book of short stories that was published last year.

The occasional handout.

Recommended Texts

Some students may find a craft handbook useful, and I have ordered the following from the bookstore: Burroway and Stuckey-French, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*.

ISBN: 9780321923165

Course Requirements

Original Writing

- Short Stories

Students will be required to write at least two complete short stories: approximately 30 pages. Any additional writing necessary to make up the 30 pages will be turned in as a portfolio at the end of the semester.

Short stories may be revisions of exercises.

All work submitted must be written for this class. Any work that has been previously written for or recycled from another class will be considered a failure.

- Workshop

Each student will have a story workshopped at least twice during the semester. You must have two workshops, or you will not pass the class.

You will bring 13 copies (or as many copies as there are students in class, plus myself) of your story to class the week before it is due. This is more efficient than posting the story and having the other students download and print it. For our purposes, a physical printout is necessary.

Work that is not submitted the week before it is due will not be workshopped. If you are absent the week before you post, you will need to make arrangements to get your story to class on the due date.

All absent students are responsible for getting copies of the story to be read next week. You will have a contact list for the students in class, and you also may reach students through Blackboard. The onus is always on the missing student, and not the author.

We will make up a workshop schedule on the second or third week of class.

- Exercises

Students will write brief exercises in fiction. Some will be written in class, and some will be written at home. Those written at home will either be brought to the next class or posted on Blackboard. For Blackboard, I prefer a pdf if at all possible.

Exercises will be constructed to allow students creative freedom while enabling them to focus on particular aspects of technique. Exercises are strictly limited in length to two pages. You will find that this hard limit will spur your ingenuity; I advise you to view it as a helpful challenge rather than a burden.

- Format

Both stories and exercises must be typed and double-spaced. They should include your name and the due date; I need this information for grading. Please do not forget the page numbers, which help us reference your work in class.

I would appreciate your reading that bit about format again.

- Competence

Our purposes require competence in English grammar and spelling. Any mistakes should be intentional.

Critique

Students will prepare two kinds of critique: reading responses to published work and student critiques to student work. Both should be about a page long, and both should be formatted as specified above. For critiques of student work, you should make or print two copies of critiques: one for the author, and one for me. You must print out both copies to get credit.

Especially at the start of the semester, do not worry if you are somewhat at sea while writing critiques. Part of our goal is to enable you to critique creative work from the perspective of a writer. You are expected to develop as this kind of critic, and not to know how to critique before the class begins.

Both kinds of critique should a) be specific (what exactly did you like/dislike? And, specifically, why?) and b) address the formal characteristics of creative work that we have covered in class. You will find that specificity will help you organize your thoughts.

At the same time that students should recognize and honor their own taste and reactions to writing, they should also make an attempt to distinguish between what is being portrayed in the writing at hand and how it is portrayed. In other words, students are not helpful when they tell another student that they did not like her story about the prom because they hate proms. How does that help her? By contrast, comments about *how* the student conveyed the prom are very much to the point.

With student work, please keep in mind that this course is meant to foster a community of writers offering each other constructive criticism. The goal is to help each writer improve, and not just to vote up or down on the manuscript. Judgments of “Good” or “Bad” are not your primary goal; instead, think about how writers might move forward in their development.

Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester, each student will submit a final portfolio with these contents:

- 30 pages of fiction. These should be drawn from your workshop stories and exercises: You should choose your best work. You do not need to print out new copies if the old ones will suit.
- Your 30 pages should include a revision of at least one workshop story. The revision should be clearly marked as such and attached to the original.
- An introduction that details the merits and demerits of your work, your improvement as a writer, and what you’ve learned (or confirmed) about your personal aesthetic. You also may include notes about revisions. The introduction should be at least four pages long.
- A table of contents. If I have not turned back work to you, please note that in the table of contents. Note that you will need to give page numbers to your portfolio for the table of contents to work.

Note

Do not throw away any work that you do for this class, or your grade may be affected.

Policies and Procedures

Attendance

A workshop cannot function if its members do not attend and participate. Students are expected to attend all classes on time, and absences and tardiness will be factored into semester grades. As we only meet once a week, missing one class is equivalent to missing a full week of classes. If you suspect that you may need to miss more than one class during the semester, I suggest that you take this class at another time.

Students who join the class late will not be penalized for missing the first class. Enrolled students who miss the first class may be dropped. If they do not, they may be dropped from the class. Absences due to religious holidays or illness are excused only if I am notified in advance. Please notify me by e-mail, so that I have a record of your request.

More than one unexcused absence may be cause for failing the class, as may more than two excused absences. This is also true for students who are taking the class pass/fail. (Please note that auditing is not appropriate for a workshop.) Excessive lateness is equivalent to absence, as is consistently not bringing required books and texts to class. What is excessive? Two classes without the textbook or the appropriate student work, or arriving late to class twice by ten minutes or more, are excessive.

In all cases, students are responsible for all missed work. I require a physical copy of all work that was due one week after the absence.

Electronic Devices

Computers, phones, and other electronic devices may not be used in class. Student stories and other readings may not be read off of laptops or phones. This rule will be strictly enforced. Those who require their computers are advised to take another section of this class.

Extra Credit

There is none.

Grades

Student grades will be based on your growth and productivity as a writer and critic, and your participation in the class and the workshop. There are 1000 possible points that may be earned in this class, distributed as follows:

Fiction: 500 points

 Workshop Stories: 200 points

 Final Portfolio: 200 points

 Exercises: 100 points

Critiques: 300 points

 This will be broken down by the number of student critiques and reading responses.

Participation: 200 points

Office Hours

My office hours are posted on the first page of the course outline. I hope that you will come by with any general or particular questions about the class. Please feel free.

For informal questions, students are welcome to come when they like. We will also have formal meetings where students discuss their work in class to date. For these meetings, students are asked to make an appointment.

If your schedule conflicts with my office hours, we will make other arrangements.

Participation

Class participation is a full fifth of your grade, and students should not expect to do well in class if they do not speak, regardless of the grade they receive on other assignments. Students should expect to share at least one specific observation from the stories assigned for any particular day; on occasion, they will be asked to write the page number of their observation on the board before class. I will keep track both of informal participation and of students' presentation of these quotes.

If class participation fills you with horror, please come see me, and we will make arrangements. I hated to speak in class myself at one time, and I sympathize. Nonetheless, class participation is an essential skill, and I do require it.

Policies and Procedures for the University at Large

Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Student Behavior

Deportment that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Students with Disabilities

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible.

Syllabus

Assignments and readings are due by the day listed. Students are required to bring the class text to class every day, as well as any relevant handouts.

Please note as well that all assignments and dates are subject to change, and some will. Keep alert for these changes, and if you miss class, make sure to ask a classmate both what you have missed and if there have been any changes in the syllabus.

8.24 Introduction

Course Outline and Syllabus

Class Texts

In-Class exercise: Dramatization and Sensory Detail

Elizabeth Tallent, “No One’s A Mystery”

8.31 Dramatization and Exposition

Kate Chopin, “The Story of a Hour”

Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery”

Tim O’Brien, “The Things We Carried”

Burroway, Chapter 1 (recommended). On the creative process.

Burroway, Chapter 2 (recommended). On dramatization and exposition.

Dramatization and Sensory Detail exercise due 24 hours—Tuesday, 9.6, at 2PM—before class on Blackboard. That means Tuesday at 2PM.

Discussion of Dramatization exercise

Reading response on one of the stories due. Be prepared to discuss a specific quote from the story and how it relates to this week’s topic. You will be asked to put the page number on the board.

Workshop schedule assigned.

9.7 Point of View Workshop Begins

Edgar Allen Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Edwige Danticat, “Night Women”

Junot Diaz, “How To Date a Brown girl, Black girl, White girl, or Halfie”

Burroway, Chapter 8: Point of View (recommended)

Reading response due.

Discussion of Dramatization exercise

Point of View exercise assigned.

9.14 More Points of View Workshop

Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"
William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily"

Critiques for student stories due today and every day of the workshop.

Point of View exercise due 24 hours before class on Blackboard.
Discussion of Point of View exercise

No reading response due from hereon out unless specified.

9.21 Characterization Workshop

Mary Gaitskill, "The Other Place"
Kurt Vonnegut, "Harrison Bergeron"

Discussion of Point of View exercise
Cliché exercise assigned

Burroway, Chapters 3 and 4: On Character

9.28 Dialogue Workshop

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"
Denis Johnson, "Work"

Cliché exercise due 24 hours before class on Blackboard.
Discussion of Cliché exercise

Characterization and Dialogue exercise assigned.

10.5 Style: Detail and Voice Workshop

Franz Kafka, trans. Ann Charters, "A Hunger Artist"
Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl"
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Characterization and Dialogue exercise due
Discussion of Characterization and Dialogue exercise

Style exercise assigned.

10.12 Plot Workshop

Guy de Maupassant, "The Necklace"
Jack London, "To Build a Fire"

Burroway: Story Form (hand-out)
Burroway, Chapter 7: On Story Form, Plot, and Structure (recommended)

Style exercise due 24 hours before class on Blackboard.
Discussion of Style exercise

Plot Exercise assigned.

10.19 The Plot Thickens Workshop

Raymond Carver, "A Small Good Thing"
Dagoberto Gilb, "Love in LA"

Plot Exercise due 24 hours before class on Blackboard.
Discussion of Plot exercise

Burroway, Chapter 7: Story Form, Plot, and Structure (recommended)

10.26 Plot and Structure Workshop

Ray Bradbury, "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains"
John Cheever, "The Swimmer"
Margaret Atwood, "Happy Endings"

Discussion of Plot exercise

Burroway, Chapter 7: On Story Form, Plot, and Structure (recommended)

11.2 Metafiction Workshop

Grace Paley, "A Conversation with My Father"
Angela Carter, "The Kiss"

Discussion of exercises (catch-up)

11.9 Get In Trouble Workshop

"The Summer People"
"I Can See Right Through You"

Reading response on one or both of these stories due 24 hours before class on Blackboard. You may pick one technical aspect of the story as your focus, or you may discuss the story more broadly.
Discussion of reading response

11.16 Get In Trouble Workshop

"Secret Identity"
"Valley of the Girls"

Revised exercise due 24 hours before class on Blackboard.

Burroway, Chapter 9: On Revision (recommended)

Discussion of final portfolio and revision

11.23 Thanksgiving Vacation

11.30 Get In Trouble

It would be best for you to finish the book, but if you cannot, please read the following:

“The New Boyfriend”

“Light”

Discussion of Revised Exercises

PORTFOLIO DUE WITH OVERALL INTRODUCTION

Final Exam Time: Friday, December 9, 2-4PM

There is no final in this class, but we may find a use for this time.