

English 121-06: Critical Reading and Writing – Fiction

Fall 2014, TTh 9:30–10:45 in Stein 423

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Goals:

Why do writers tell stories? Why do we read them? Starting from these fundamental questions, this course will teach you how to get more kinds of pleasure out of reading fiction. We'll begin with short stories, classic and contemporary, to explore how fiction produces emotional and intellectual effects through narrative structure, technique, and style. By becoming acquainted with a writer's tools, you can deepen your response to fiction, just as learning the techniques of music or a sport helps you to enjoy listening to or watching it and allows you to appreciate a player's skill. As you learn to read more attentively, you'll hone your interpretive skills on more complex works of fiction, building to the novel *Frankenstein* and the short story collection *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please*. Throughout the semester you will be learning how to use the writing process to develop and refine your analyses, and ultimately to express them in the form of persuasive critical arguments.

Texts:

Please plan to use the listed editions, in hard copy, so we can refer to passages quickly and easily in class.

- Ann Charters, *The Story and Its Writer*, Compact 8th Edition (Bedford)
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle (Penguin)
- Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please* (Vintage)
- Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 6th Edition (Bedford).
- A number of shorter texts available on our Moodle course site

Expectations:

Class participation and study questions (15%): This course is designed to help you develop your thinking about fiction both independently and collaboratively. To take full advantage of the opportunities it offers, the most important thing you can do is to read all

material closely, more than once, and always in hard copy, filling your margins with questions and observations. This will prepare you to advance your thinking even further by engaging in thoughtful class discussion. You will typically need to spend around two hours preparing for each regular class session, more when papers are due. If you aren't yet comfortable participating in class discussion, please stop by to see me so that we can work on strategies for developing this skill. You need not be adept at it at first, only willing to improve through preparation, practice, and patience with yourself.

Since regular attendance is essential in a discussion-centered course, more than three absences will lower your final grade. That's a full week and a half of class – an ample allowance for most illnesses, although not if you've allowed yourself to be flaky about attendance earlier in the semester. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to borrow the notes from another student, acquire any materials that were handed out, and learn if changes have been made to the syllabus. I do not need to know why you have been absent unless you need my help with a crisis.

To help you think critically about our readings and practice the steps leading up to paper-length analyses, for most sessions I will provide study questions on our Moodle course site. Your responses to these questions need not be typed, as you will not normally be submitting them to me, but they should be thorough and thoughtful. From time to time I will spot-check your responses. Since the writing in these exercises is informal and exploratory, collected responses will receive general marks (✓, ✓-, or ✓+).

Please bring your book and a binder of all Moodle texts to class. We'll often be looking back at texts discussed earlier in the semester, so you'll need to have them with you.

Papers (75%): one 4–5pp paper (15%), two 4–6pp papers (the first 15%, the second 20%), and one 5–7pp paper (25%). As you grow as a writer over the course of the semester, your work is weighted more heavily to reward your progress. We will discuss paper topics in advance. For papers we workshop in class, grades will be based on completion of first drafts, thoughtfulness of peer reviews, and quality of revision work as well as final drafts.

I am delighted to meet with you to discuss your papers as you develop them. For me, email is not an effective medium for substantive discussion, so I ask that you come to talk with me in person, either in office hours or by appointment. To ensure that I can be helpful to you, please come in well before a paper is due. I will gladly sit down with you anytime up until two days before a final due date.

Late papers lose 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from A to A-) for each class period or part of a class period they are overdue. Last-minute extensions will not be granted; if you foresee any problem with the due date for a final draft, please speak to me well in advance. We can usually work out a solution.

I do my best to return papers no more than two weeks after they come in, and always before the final drafts of the next paper are due so that my feedback on an earlier paper can inform revisions of a later one. If you have any questions about my comments (or my handwriting!), never hesitate to stop by office hours or make an appointment.

Papers should be printed in a conventional twelve-point text font (like Times), and double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. In the upper left corner of the first page, list your name, my name, the course number, and the date on separate lines. At the center of the next line, please provide a title designed to prepare your reader for your argument. Remember to proofread carefully for spelling and mechanical errors before you print. To preserve your instructor's sanity and good humor, always number and staple your pages.

Presentation of a short story (10%): Near the end of the semester you and two partners will select a story from Raymond Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please* and lead the class through an analysis of it using all of the tools you've amassed from the course.

Academic Honesty: Your work must be your own and must be prepared exclusively for this class. Since you are developing your own close reading skills in this course, **please do not consult any secondary sources except reference texts like dictionaries or encyclopedias.**

Whenever you do make use of language **or ideas** from outside sources (**including web sites**, books, high school classes, roommates, etc.), you must acknowledge the sources in formal citations, formatted according to MLA guidelines. You'll find an overview of MLA format in *A Pocket Style Manual*. For issues the overview doesn't address, consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (call number LB2369.M53) in Dinand's main reading room.

Failure to acknowledge sources constitutes plagiarism, a serious violation of academic honesty. Other violations include cheating and collusion. Just as you need to be able to trust that I will evaluate your work fairly, I must be able to trust that the work you present as your own is, in fact, your own. Therefore any violation of academic honesty will incur a zero on the assignment and academic probation, suspension, or dismissal from the College, as determined by the college-wide academic honesty policy described on pages 17–19 of the College Catalog (<http://www.holycross.edu/catalog/>).

The process of learning which sources need to be cited and how takes time. I am always happy to field questions about acknowledging sources before you submit an assignment. Afterwards is too late. Always err on the side of giving credit where credit may be due.

Schedule:

This schedule offers a tentative outline of the course; it may change as the course progresses.

Thurs. 9/4: Introductions
Storifying

I. ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON: THE STORY AND ITS READER

Tues. 9/9: Jamaica Kincaid, “Girl” (507–8)
Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour” (203–4)
Margaret Atwood, “Reading Blind” (903–6)
Language; showing and telling
Writing for a reader: style choices in email
Due: 1. Read Charters 1077–81 on “Reading Short Stories” and 1094–96 on “Style”
2. Study Questions 1

Thurs. 9/11: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown (357–66)
Edgar Allan Poe, “[The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale]” (978–981)
Narrative structure
Due: 1. Read Charters 1082–86 and 1096–97 on “Plot” and “Theme”
2. Study Questions 2

Tues. 9/16: Stephen King, “The Man in the Black Suit” (Moodle)
Herman Melville, “[Blackness in Hawthorne’s ‘Young Goodman Brown]”
Characterization
Due: 1. Read Charters 1086–89 on “Character” and “Setting”
2. Study Questions 3

Thurs. 9/18: William Faulkner, “A Rose For Emily” (314–20) and “[The Meaning of ‘A Rose for Emily’]” (937–39)
Using the OED
Discussion of Paper 1 and the Writer’s Workshop
Due: 1. Study Questions 4
2. Read Charters 1108–09 and 1113–16 on “Writing About Short Stories” and “Types of Literary Papers: Explication”
3. Print out assignment for Paper 1 from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.

Tues. 9/23: Ernest Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants” (368–71)
Due: 1. Read Charters 1090–94 on “Point of View”
2. Study Questions 5

Thurs. 9/25: James Joyce, "Araby" (430–34)
David Lodge, "Epiphany" (Moodle, 3pp)
Quotation and citation
Due: Study Questions 6

II. HARMONY AND DISSONANCE: FINDING MEANING IN FORM

Tues. 9/30: James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (36–58)
Wondering
Moving from explication to interpretation – developing a thesis
Discussion of Paper 2
Due: 1. Paper 1 (4–5 pp)
2. Study Questions 7
3. Print out assignment for Paper 2 from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.

Thurs. 10/2: "Sonny's Blues" cont'd
Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (623–35)
David Lodge, "The Stream of Consciousness" (Moodle, 5pp)
Free indirect style
Focusing, Collecting
Due: Study Questions 8

Tues. 10/7: "Sonny's Blues," cont'd
Herman Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener," pp. 561–87
Constructing a claim
Due: Study Questions 9

Thurs. 10/9: Theses & topic sentences
Supporting a claim
Due: 1. Read Charters 1109–13 and 1116–18 on "Writing About Short Stories"
2. Study Questions 10

Tues. 10/13 &
Thurs. 10/15: Fall break. Enjoy!

Tues. 10/21: Thesis workshop
Due: working thesis for Paper 2

Thurs. 10/23: Writing workshop – peer reviews
Due: full draft of Paper 2

III. THE NOVEL:

“MOCK[ING] THE STUPENDOUS MECHANISM OF THE CREATOR OF THE WORLD”

Tues. 10/28: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Introduction, Author’s Introduction, Preface, and Letters 1–4, pp. xi–xlvii and 5–32
Due: Study Questions 11

Thurs. 10/30: *Frankenstein* Volume I, pp. 33–90
Discussion of Paper 3
Due: 1. **Paper 2 (4–6 pp), with draft and peer reviews**
2. Study Questions 12
3. Print out assignment for Paper 3 from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.

Tues. 11/4: *Frankenstein* Volume II, pp. 93–151
Due: Study Questions 13

Thurs. 11/6 *Frankenstein* Volume III, pp. 153–225
Due: Study Questions 14

Tues. 11/11: *Frankenstein*, cont’d
Discussion of oral presentation
Argument & persuasion
Due: 1. Study Questions 15
2. Print out assignment for oral presentation from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.
3. Start reading Raymond Carver’s *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* collection of short stories. Plan to complete one read-through by next Tuesday.

Thurs. 11/13: Writing Workshop – peer reviews
Due: full draft of Paper 3

IV. WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FICTION:

ORAL PRESENTATIONS AND THE SHORT STORY COLLECTION

Tues. 11/18: Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*: “Fat,” pp. 3–7
Discussion of Paper 4
Due: 1. Study Questions 16
2. List the six oral presentation stories in order of preference to prepare for signing up for one in class.
3. Print out assignment for Paper 4 from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.

Thurs. 11/20: Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*: “Neighbors” and “The Idea,” pp. 9–21

Due: 1. Paper 3 (5–7pp), with draft and peer reviews

Tues. 11/25: Presentation Workshop

Due: Study Questions 17

Thurs. 11/27: Happy Thanksgiving!

Tues. 12/2: *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* presentations: “Nobody Said Anything,” “What’s in Alaska?” and “Collectors,” pp. 43–61, 77–93, and 102–110

Thurs. 12/4: *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* presentations: “Why, Honey?” “Bicycles, Muscles, Cigaretts,” and “What Is It?” pp. 170–76 and 195–218

Tues. 12/9: *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*: “Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?” pp. 227–51.

Raymond Carver, “On Writing” and “Creative Writing 101,” pp. 1010–16 in *The Story and Its Writer*.

Thurs. 12/11: Writing Workshop – peer reviews

Due: full draft of Paper 4

Due at the start of the course’s final exam period: Paper 4 (4–6pp), with draft and peer review