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ENG 3063-001 Intermediate Fiction Writing

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ENGLISH 3063 – 001

Intermediate Fiction Writing

Fall 2023: 11:00pm to 11:50am, MWF

Classroom: Coleman Hall 3159

Instructor: Dr. Mike McClelland

Office: Coleman Hall 3365

Email: mbmcclelland@eiu.edu

Office Hours:

MWF 12:00pm to 1:00pm in office and 1:00pm to 2:00pm online (or by appointment)

Welcome to Intermediate Fiction!

“Some may say I couldn’t sing, but no one can say I didn’t sing.” -Florence Foster Jenkins

COVID

EIU is a mask-optional campus, though I would ask that you mask for this class if at all possible. If you are feeling any symptoms, please stay home and get tested. To view the latest EIU COVID-19 related information and any policy updates, please visit <https://www.eiu.edu/covid/>

Required Texts:

- VanderMeer, Jeff. *Wonderbook*.
- Salesses, Matthew. *Craft in the Real World*
- Handouts distributed by the instructor

Required materials:

- Notebook or lined paper; a pen or pencil; access to the Internet; a computer with word-processing capabilities and a printer; copies of your writing as needed.
- Your imagination!
- Bring assigned texts to each class meeting (unless otherwise instructed). Digital versions are fine.

Course Description:

“When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner’s pick, a wood-carver’s gouge, a surgeon’s probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year.”

-Annie Dillard

This course serves as an introduction to the creative aspects of fiction writing through studying the work of published authors and producing original work discussed in an open forum throughout the semester. For this course, we will read short stories intensely to determine how they “work,” covering issues of craft and technique. We will also read a variety of craft essays concerning the nuts and bolts of fiction writing. This course also focuses extensively on our own writing; students will complete exercises, workshop polished pieces, and participate regularly in entire class workshops, submitting drafts, revisions, and more polished works. Copies for distribution to all workshop members are to be prepared the week before discussion.

This is a course on the writing of literary fiction. Genre work, such as young adult, horror, romance writing, and science fiction is, of course, acceptable unless otherwise specified (but note we have specific classes and a workshop set aside to discuss these genres) but remember that the aim of this course is to build proficiency and even excellence in the core processes of fiction writing. Good literary skills can inform excellence in the writing of speculative, fabulist, horror, romantic, and young adult fiction.

Please note, that as the instructor of a creative writing class, the professor asserts the right to discuss all topics that literature covers; if you are not willing to view the world as a complex place, this might not be the class for you. **Exercises and in-class writing will also be a mandatory part of the course.**

Writing:

“Art is not about thinking something up. It is the opposite - getting something down.”

-Julia Cameron

Being a fiction writer has only one real requirement: the writing of fiction. As such, the primary endeavor so this course is for each student to write as much as possible. Each student will workshop five pieces over the course of the semester: four of these will be specifically assigned flash fiction pieces (500-1,000 words) and will be workshopped in student groups while one of these pieces will be a full-length short story (2,500 to 5,000 words) which will be workshopped by the entire class.

In addition to these writing assignments, we will perform writing exercises in every class meeting. You should keep a specific notebook or binder for these exercises so that you can keep track of them, as they will factor into your final portfolio.

The portfolio reflects your effort and participation in the course and will contain a brief introduction (1-2 double spaced pages), revised versions of each of your shorter fiction pieces from the semester, and any of your favorite pieces of in-class writing.

Your final portfolio should contain 20-40 pages of polished work as well as unpolished in-class writing. The final portfolios are due on D2L by December 13th by noon.

Reading:

“Reading is like breathing in, writing is like breathing out.”

-Pam Allyn

“If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.”

-Stephen King

Our reading for each week of classes will be divided into two areas: craft essays and short fiction. The craft essays are self-explanatory, and each week of the semester will correspond to an element of fiction writing. We will usually read two short stories each week: one “classic” short story and one “contemporary” short story. While we will be reading both of these stories to particularly support the specific technique or craft element that we are discussing for that week, we will also pay attention to commonalities within the established short fiction “canon” as well as significant attributes of the most lauded short fiction of today. Reading this way will allow us to explore class fiction while training ourselves to enter today’s fiction market.

The Workshop and Critique Process:

For our fiction workshops, we will incorporate elements adapted from Jesse Ball’s pedagogical practice “The Asking” Matthew Salesses’ *Craft in the Real World* in order to give those being workshopped more control in the workshop.

We will work in small groups during the first half of the semester while workshopping your first four pieces. Then, for your longer piece we will have full class workshops. For these workshops your work will be due to the entire class one week before.

When you receive your classmates’ longer work for class workshop, you will be required to type up a one-page critique in addition to writing comments on the manuscript.

Your critique should be laid out like this: begin with a summary of the piece, then explain what was working in the piece, and conclude with what about the piece needs improvement. Personal comments about the writer are inappropriate in critique as are insults of any kind. However, in the same vein, unfounded praise should be limited. Critique should be about the work and making the work better. I often find that asking questions in your critique can be helpful for those you are critiquing.

Grading

- Small Group Workshops 20% (5% and for each workshop submission)
- Full Class Workshop 20%
- Class Participation 20%
- Final Portfolio (Each workshop piece revised with a short introduction) 40%

Revision

- Students will be expected to revise each of the shorter workshopped pieces from the semester. Some pieces will require a lot of revision, some very little. The key to revising is listening to classmate and instructor feedback with “one ear open and one ear closed” and then revising accordingly.

Final Portfolio

- Students will turn in revised versions of all four short workshoped pieces from this semester along with a short introduction (500 to 1000 words) describing how their writing process evolved or changed over the course of the semester.

Participation

- Participation means coming to class and actively participating in building classroom culture by speaking up, by completing in-class writing assignments, and by reading a particular day's assigned material before class begins. Participation means silencing your cellular devices and shutting your laptops during class.

Plagiarism and Copyright

Just don't plagiarize! If you have any issue completing your assignments within the assigned timeframe, please contact me directly before you even consider plagiarizing an assignment. I will work with you on a timeframe for completion.

Eastern Illinois University considers plagiarism a serious offense under its student conduct code, and the penalty can be as serious as expulsion from school.

The English Department's policy on plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office."

A.I.

The use of artificial intelligence to produce work for this course is not appropriate and will result in a grade of 0 on that assignment.

Late and Make-up Work

- All work should be turned in complete and on time. As we are workshoping your work, it is key that we are getting our assignments in before the scheduled workshop. If you know you will be missing days, please let me know in advance so that we can make sure that everyone gets all their workshops in. Of course, unforeseen things happen, and if you have a documented excuse for your absence, I will work with you to make sure that you get credit for all your work. Work submitted late without an appropriate excuse may be penalized up to a letter grade per day for each day it is late.

Methods of Evaluation:

The grades for this class will be determined by points earned (1000 total points possible) and will be reported based on the standard grading scale. However, per IAI standards, a grade of C or higher is required for advancement to higher level English courses.

- 100% to 90%: A
- 89% to 80%: B
- 79 to 70%: C
- 69% to 0%: NC

Conduct and Kindness Policy:

Participants in this course **must** be course compliant with the University's Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy, which prohibits harassment of or discrimination against any person because of race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other basis of discrimination precluded by federal and state statutes is strictly prohibited.

In addition, as we will be discussing and investigating aspects of each other's cultures, it is important for members of this class to not only "tolerate" each other's unique and different qualities but to celebrate them. **It is a requirement of this class that all we treat each other with kindness, respect, and compassion.**

Electronics:

Failure to silence and put away phones, laptops, and smartwatches, and other cellular devices (if they aren't being used for class purposes) will result in points being deducted from your participation grade for the class.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

Students with Disabilities

You are welcome here and are an equal member of this classroom. Please advocate for your rights and allow me to help point you in the right direction for exercising those rights! If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by McAfee, Room 1210, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

The Student Success Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee Gym, Room 1301.

The Writing Center

“The Writing Center of Eastern Illinois University is a place where students can develop as writers and thinkers. We recognize that student writers come to the center with individual needs and individual writing processes, and we are committed to working with students from all disciplines, majors, and academic backgrounds at any stage of the writing process.” I highly recommend you visit the Writing Center in the first three weeks of class with low stakes assignment, so you are comfortable in the environment and familiar with their processes when you go in for a more challenging one. <https://www.eiu.edu/writing/index.php>.

Restrooms

There are gendered restrooms at the end of this hallway and gender neutral restrooms down on the second floor.

English Education/Teacher Certification

Students seeking Teacher Certification in English Language Arts should request each of their English Department professors to complete the "Application for English Department Approval to Student Teach" before the end of the semester. This online evaluation form is available here: <https://www.eiu.edu/english/machform/view.php?id=19831>.

Resources for Student Well-Being

Life is hard, especially when you're in college. Please check out the university's extensive options for assisting your emotional/physical/spiritual wellbeing: [https://www.eiu.edu/fdic/Student%20 Well-Being_26-July-2022.pdf](https://www.eiu.edu/fdic/Student%20Well-Being_26-July-2022.pdf)

ENG 3063 Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend class meetings as scheduled. When an absence does occur, the student is responsible for the material covered during the absence. When possible, the student should notify the instructor in advance of an anticipated absence.

After 1 unexcused absence, absences will begin to negatively influence your class participation grade.

Commitment to Diversity:

I have chosen the readings for this course in an effort to reflect writers whose races, genders, nationalities, sexual orientations, and religious backgrounds are typically underrepresented in university classrooms and in the established literary canon. This class will celebrate and investigate diverse work.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments/readings are due ON the date they are listed below.

Any reading assignment not from the textbook will be provided as a handout or electronically.

Week One - Introduction

Introductions and discussion of syllabus. In-class writing. Introduction to textbook.
Reading: We'll be reading our way through *Saleses* this week (and possibly into next)
8/25 is the last day to add a class!

Week Two – Character

In-class writing.
Reading: First 40 pages of *Wonderbook*. Online Reading.
9/1 is the last day to drop a course with no grade and/or withdraw from all classes with full tuition and fees refund

Week Three – Character, continued

In-class writing.
Reading: Chapter 5 of *Wonderbook* (pages 177-210). Online Reading.
First flash piece (character) due to small group
No class on 9/4 due to Labor Day

Week Four – Setting and Style

Group Workshop 1.
In-class writing.
Reading: Worldbuilding section of *Wonderbook* (pages 211-244). Online Reading.

Week Five - Suspense

In-class writing.
Reading: Chapter 4 of *Wonderbook* (Narrative Design)
Second flash piece (setting) due to small group

Week Six – Point of View

Group Workshop 2
In-class writing
Reading: Appendices of *Wonderbook*. Online Reading.
Third flash piece (suspense) due to small group

Week Seven - Time

Group Workshop 3
In-class writing
Reading: Silber on Time (handout). Online Reading.
No class on 10/7 (Fall Break)

Week Eight – Plot and Structure

Individual Workshops begin
In-class writing
Reading: Chapter 2 of *Wonderbook* (pages 41-72) on the “ecosystem of the story” - Online Reading.

Week Nine - Epiphany

Individual Workshops

In-class writing

Reading: Chapter 3 of *Wonderbook* (Beginnings and Endings. Online Reading.

Week Ten – Research and Revision

Individual Workshops

In-class writing.

Reading: Chapter 7 of *Wonderbook* (245-281) which is about revision. Online Reading.

Week Eleven - Voice

Individual Workshops

In-class writing

Reading: Online Reading – Handouts. Fielding, Evanovich, Brown.

11/4 is the withdrawal deadline

Week Twelve – Detail, Dialogue, and Metaphor

Individual Workshops

In-class Writing

Readings: Online Reading. Hempel, Evanhoe.

Week Thirteen – Ekphrastic and Graphic Narratives

Individual Workshops

In-class writing.

Reading: Satrapi, five pieces from the archive of the ekphrastic online literary/art journal *7x7.la*

Week Fourteen – Experimental Fiction and Digital Narratives

No class, Thanksgiving Break!

For break, I'll assign each of you an experimental online literary journal to peruse at your leisure. If you have some free time, play through a narrative-driven video game, such as *Device 6* or *80 Days*.

Week Fifteen – Fabulist and Speculative Fiction

Individual Workshops

In-class writing.

Reading: Online Reading.

Fourth flash piece (genre) due to small group

Week Sixteen – What's Next?

Group Workshop 4.

Discuss Publishing and Scholarship Opportunities

Week Seventeen

12-13: FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE BY NOON.

