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ENG 4763-001: Fiction Writing

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In this course, students will deepen their understanding of fiction writing in general and the short story in particular. This course is a workshop and will include writing, attendance at local creative writing events and discussion of published short stories, essays on craft, and fellow students' short stories. As an advanced course, students are expected to be familiar with the fundamental elements of fiction as explained in books like Mike Kardos' *The Art and Craft of Fiction: A Writer's Guide*, or Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**
At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to
a. Provide craft analyses of contemporary short fiction.
b. Produce and revise original creative work in the fiction genre.
c. Discuss their creative work and process in the context of a tradition in fiction writing.
d. Critique new works of fiction in a creative writing workshop.
f. Attend and meaningfully participate in public readings of fiction.

**Required Texts:**
One current issue of a literary magazine (TBA)

**Suggested Texts:** (will be on reserve at Booth Library)
Burroway, Janet. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*

**Grades:**
- Reading Responses 400
- Workshop Submission I 100
- Workshop Submission II 100
- Workshop Responses 200
- Lit Mag Presentation 100
- Final Portfolio 100
- Total 1000 points

**Be Prepared for Class**
To prepare for each class, please do the following:
1. Be ready to participate in activities
2. Bring your textbooks and a notebook with you to class
3. Read the assigned material before class
4. Respond via Dropbox on Desire2Learn to the assigned reading before class
**Reading Responses**
Responses are due via Dropbox on Desire2Learn by 9am on the day they are to be discussed. Each response is worth around 30 points. For readings on craft and the writer’s life, respond by writing either 1) a List of Ten, which means ten of anything about the reading, such as words you needed to look up, items you found interesting or confusing, or phrases you had questions about. ANYTHING GOES. Write page and paragraph numbers (not included in word count), 450–500 words per list, OR 2) Notes, in paragraph form, 450–500 words (with page and paragraph numbers, not included in word count). For short story selections, you are free to write a List of Ten or Notes (see above), or, if you need a prompt to get you going, you may answer questions from “checklist: read like a writer” on pp. 5–6 in Mike Kardos’ *The Art and Craft of Fiction.*

**Note to Graduate Students:** Your responses should be 950–1,000 words.

**Attendance**
I keep attendance. You may miss up to four classes. If you miss a fifth class, you’ll fail the course. Two late arrivals = one absence. Exceptions will be made only for documented emergencies and documented school activities.

**Workshop Submissions**
For each workshop, submit one complete short story. Each submission should be 10–15 pages (2,500–3,750 words) in length. Please do not go below or beyond the word count. You are free to write about any topic, but the material must be new and created for this class. Submissions will be graded for originality and risk. Does your story say something interesting? Is the writing elegant? Does it pull the reader in? Workshop sign up will take place early in the semester. Your stories will be due before workshop and will be sent to classmates and the instructor via Desire2Learn.

**Workshop Responses**
For each workshop submission, type a one-page single-spaced letter (450–500 words). Submit your letter(s) on D2L by 9am on the day of workshop, and print one copy to bring to class (for the writer). Your letter should address what you see happening on the page (describe the content and form), as well as questions for the writer. The most important task of this letter is to reflect back to the writer what he/she has written and to pose questions and predictions so the writer can begin to see if you, the reader, have understood what he/she has attempted.

**Literary Magazine Presentation**
Pick a literary magazine from the list in the back of *Best American Short Stories* and give a presentation to the class to describe what the magazine is about. Topics to cover include format/layout (print if available and online), descriptions of content, analysis of editorial choices, and what is appealing (or not) about this magazine as a reader and as a writer. Presentations should be 8–10 minutes and include A/V and/or handouts.

**Creative Writing Events**
Attend three creative writing events during the semester. After attending an event, please submit a 450-500-word response along with your Reading Responses due before the class period immediately following the event. Additional events will be shared during the semester.
Jan 30-31: Lions in Winter at the Doudna Fine Arts Center [REQUIRED]
Feb 26, 4:30pm: Andre Dubus III at Authors Corner, Illini Union Bookstore (UIUC)
April 29 (or so): Class public reading [REQUIRED]

Final Portfolio
The Final Portfolio consists of two elements:
  1) a significant revision of one of your stories, and
  2) a reflection essay. For this essay, write an 8–10-page (2,000–2,500) [Graduate Students: 14–15 pages, 3,500–3,750] reflection on the course readings, the activities in class, the stories you wrote, your revision, and any other material relevant to your development as a writer. This essay should connect the course materials and activities with your understanding of writing, and it should also demonstrate your lively engagement with the class and the process of writing over the span of the semester.

Students with Documented Disabilities
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodation, you must make arrangements through the Office of Disability Services; you should contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Tentative Schedule

Week One
Tuesday, 1/13: Intro and overview; Workshop sign up; lit mag sign up
Thursday, 1/15: Discuss Bird by Bird (BbB) “Introduction”

Week Two
Tuesday, 1/20: Discuss “Getting Started,” “Short Assignments” and “Shitty First Drafts” in BbB
Thursday, 1/22: Discuss “Medium Tough” in Best American Short Stories (BASS) and “Thought Verbs” by Chuck Pahlanuk (link)

Week Three
Thursday, 1/27: Discuss Edward Kelsey Moore and Stephen Graham Jones selections
Thursday 1/29: Discuss Stephen Graham Jones selections and “Perfectionism” and “School Lunches” in BbB
Friday 1/30-31: Lions in Winter Literary Festival at the Doudna Fine Arts Center

Week Four
Tuesday, 2/3: Discuss “Mastiff” in BASS
Thursday, 2/5: Discuss “Polaroids,” “Character,” “Plot,” and “Dialogue” in BbB

Week Five
Tuesday, 2/10: Discuss “The Breeze” in BASS
Thursday, 2/12: Discuss “Set Design,” “False Starts,” “Plot Treatment,” and “How Do You Know When You’re Done?” in BbB
Week Six
Tuesday, 2/17: Discuss “At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners” in BASS
Thursday, 2/19: Discuss “Broccoli,” “Radio Station KFKD,” and “Jealousy” in BbB

Week Seven
Tuesday, 2/24: Discuss “Writing Groups” and “Someone to Read Your Drafts” in BbB
Thursday, 2/26: Workshop; Andre Dubus III reading at UIUC

Week Eight
Tuesday, 3/3: Workshop
Thursday, 3/5: Workshop

Week Nine
Tuesday, 3/10: Workshop
Thursday, 3/12: Workshop

Week Ten: SPRING BREAK

Week Eleven
Tuesday, 3/24: Lit mag presentations
Thursday, 3/27: Lit mag presentations

Week Twelve
Tuesday, 3/31: Lit mag presentations
Thursday, 4/2: Workshop; lit mag presentations

Week Thirteen
Tuesday, 4/7: Workshop
Thursday, 4/9: NO CLASS

Week Fourteen
Tuesday, 4/14: Workshop
Thursday, 4/16: NO CLASS

Week Fifteen
Tuesday, 4/21: Workshop
Thursday, 4/23: Workshop

Week Sixteen
Tuesday, 4/28: Discuss reading (TBA); afternoon/evening class public reading
Thursday, 4/30: Discuss Neil Gaiman’s 2012 commencement address and “The Last Class” BbB

Monday, 5/4: DUE at 3pm: Final Portfolio