

English 241: Techniques of Fiction Writing

Tues/Thurs 8:30-10:00, Richardson 303

Professor: John Woods

Office Hours: Tues. and Thurs., 11:40 a.m. - 12:40 p.m. (or by appointment)

Office: 7 University 106

Course Description

Reading is a leap a faith. Readers give their minds and ideas over to writers' words. As writers, it is our job to *convince* our readers to take this leap of faith, to *ask* them to stay in our fictional worlds for a while, and to make them *care* about what happens once they are there.

For this class to be successful, we must be willing to take this leap of faith, both as readers and writers. We must have faith both in our own abilities and in the work of our peers. The purpose of this course is to practice our skills and to stay curious so that we can become strong writers of fiction. Together, we will explore our own voices and styles; we will create and participate in a workshop that promotes constructive criticism; we will learn to become sensitive and demanding readers of texts and one another's work. Most importantly, we will write.

Course Format

For roughly the first half of the semester, we will spend our class time discussing texts and issues of craft, writing (based on assignments and prompts), and sharing our work informally in small and large groups. Each week you will be expected to read, carefully and thoughtfully, assigned short stories from our course packet, to engage with the material by preparing questions and written responses to the reading, and to WRITE FICTION using guidelines from me as well as your own instincts.

For roughly the second half of the semester, we will spend our class time workshopping one another's writing. Each student will have three chances to workshop his or her short stories. You must bring a copy for everyone in the class. (I will explain specific workshop protocol in the months to come.) Your goal is to refine the body of writing that you generated during the first half of the semester into presentable pieces, and to then use the input that you garner from your peers during workshop to strengthen your work further and ready it for your final portfolio. You will learn as much, if not more, from your peers as you will from me. You are expected to give your classmates written feedback and to be prepared to offer verbal feedback during workshop. Week to week, you will still be expected to read and to write often.

What I Expect

Commitment to your work and the work of your peers, willingness to share your work and to take risks, respect for ways of thinking and writing that are different from your own. Rather than critiquing your fellow students' work for its content, consider the quality of the work that is presented.

Required Texts:

Barry, Lynda. *What It Is*.

Marcus, Ben, Ed. *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*. New York: Anchor, 2004.

A good college dictionary

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

Visiting Writers Series

You will be invited to attend the evening readings that are part of SLU's Visiting Writers Series this semester. All readings are at 8:00 p.m. in the Sykes Common Room.

Reading Presentations

During the first half of the semester, on one occasion, you will each be asked to pair up with another student to introduce one of the day's readings and to conduct our discussion of the text. Your presentation should introduce the author to the class, offer an analysis of the story, identify themes and motifs within the work, connect the work to the writing techniques we've discussed in class, and offer insight into the work's role in a broader context. Consider other works of fiction, film, music, art, historical events, etc. And, most importantly, bring questions that will help us look at the text with new eyes. You may use audio/visual aids, although this is not required.

Portfolio

This is your culminating project. At the end of the semester, you will hand in a portfolio containing 15-20 pages of polished work. This work should be revised carefully. I'll grade on skill level as well as responsiveness to feedback and overall progress.

Class Participation

This class is an active workshop. With your complete readiness and eagerness to question, share, exclaim, to put your voices and your words out there, this workshop will work quite well. You will be evaluated not only on your efforts as reflected in your writing, but also, and equally importantly, on your commitment to our in-class discussions and undertakings.

Getting Help

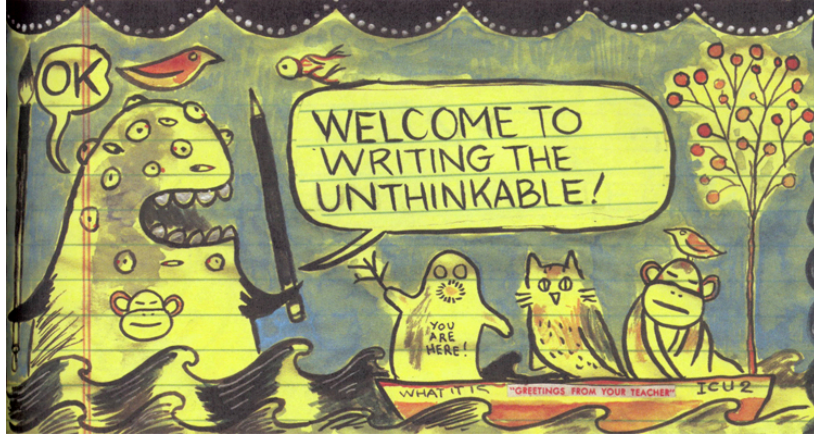
If you have any questions or just want to talk about your work, please feel free to come to my office hours or arrange an appointment. If you have any special concerns or questions, please talk to me so I can help. I highly recommend visiting my office hours several days before an assignment is due, as I will be able to spend more time working with you, and you will need more than one night to work on your assignment.

Disability and Accessibility Services

If you require accommodation for a disability to complete the required coursework, please contact Disability and Accessibility Services (315-229-5537). The counselors will be able to review your concerns and provide reasonable accommodations.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Present your own original work. If you want to use the work of others, then give them credit for it. If you plagiarize you will fail the assignment and the incident will be referred to the Academic Honor Council.



COURSE SCHEDULE

1/15 (Th) Introduction

1/20 (T) “The Girl in the Flammable Skirt” by Aimee Bender, “Down the Road” by Stephen Dixon

1/22 (Th) **Image and Time:** *What It Is*, Notebook prompts: pp. 4-30 / Activity 1, pp. 137-149

1/27 (T) “Up the Old Goat Road” by Dawn Raffel, “Two Brothers” by Brian Evenson

1/29 (Th) **Memory and Playing:** *What It Is*, Notebook prompts: pp. 31-54 / Activity 2, pp. 150-158

2/3 (T) “Sea Oak” by George Saunders, “Tiny, Smiling Daddy” by Mary Gaitskill

2/5 (Th) **Mood and Monsters:** *What It Is*, Notebook prompts: pp. 55-81 / Activity 3, pp. 159-169

(SLU Writers Series: John Dermot Woods, 8 p.m., Sykes Common Room)

2/10 (T) “The Old Dictionary” by Lydia Davis, “Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned” by Wells Tower

MIDSEMESTER BREAK

2/17 (T) **Time and Place:** *What It Is*, Notebook prompts: pp. 82-105 / Activity 4, pp. 170-173

2/19 (Th) “You Drive” by Christine Schutt, “Letters to Wendy’s” by Joe Wenderoth

2/24 (T) **Meaning:** *What It Is*, Notebook prompts: pp. 106-136 / Appendix Activity, p. 185

2/26 (Th) Workshop: Group A

3/3 (T) Workshop: Group B

3/5 (Th) Workshop: Group C

(SLU Writers Series: Charlotte Boulay, 8 p.m., Sykes Common Room)

3/10 (T) Workshop: Group D

3/12 (Th) Workshop: Group E

SPRING BREAK

3/24 (T) Workshop: Group A

3/26 (Th) Workshop: Group B

3/31 (T) Workshop: Group C

4/2 (Th) Workshop: Group D

4/7 (T) Workshop: Group E

4/9 (Th) Open

4/14 (T) Workshop: Group A

4/16 (Th) Workshop: Group B

4/21 (T) Workshop: Group C

4/23 (Th) Workshop: Group D

(SLU Writers Series: Lorrie Moore, 8 p.m., Eben Holden)

4/28 (T) Workshop: Group E

4/30 (Th) Final Class Meeting: **FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE**