Syllabus
English 140: The Short Story

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G 489
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Office Hours: MW 10:30-11:30; T 2:30-3:30

Course Description:
Our course introduces you to a broad swath of classic and contemporary short stories, arranged chronologically. The course method is what I call a modified seminar-style; that is, students will be responsible to engage vocally and critically with the instructor and with each other. Along the way, you will form your own informed concept of the genre in question, and you will practice the discipline of literary interpretation based on both primary and secondary readings. Thus, you will become a much better critical reader and writer, even beyond short fiction.

Course Objectives:
1) to acquaint you with a broad selection of traditional and contemporary examples of the short story genre;
2) to read, write, and think critically about the texts through discussion, analysis, and argumentation of issues in the readings;
3) to acquaint you with methods of literary criticism
4) to interpret these texts within their generic, historic, and cultural contexts. You will
5) to analyze a given issue in one or more texts, distill a critical thesis, and present that thesis in a cogent, well-supported critical essay
6) to respond critically to classmates’ writing. Thus, you should come away from the course with a) sharpened critical thinking and writing skills; b) a solid introduction to the genre, and, as much as possible; c) a sense of how these texts have been and may be read to suggest deeper cultural issues implicit in the genre and in its post-modern reception.

Required Texts:
2) *E-Reserve readings (see syllabus)*

Policies:

1. Students are responsible to back up all formal assignments, and to keep all
informal writing (prewriting, drafts, etc.) until term’s end.

2. Only hard copies of assignments will be accepted; no e-mail attachments, please.

3. Students are responsible to notify me in case of emergency absence.

4. Students must attend regularly and promptly; any more than two absences will substantially lower your course grade.

5. By the second week of class, you must formally designate one of your classmates as your contact person—i.e. the person who will be responsible to supply you with any notes, announcements, assignments, or handouts missed due to emergency absence.

6. Students with documented learning and/or physical disabilities should speak with me early in the semester to discuss special arrangements for test taking and paper writing.

7. Students must be scrupulous in ascribing proper credit to sources; see below:

**Academic Honesty:** Because your student handbook and several other readily available sources discuss plagiarism and its consequences, I will assume your understanding of the law, unless you indicate otherwise. Essentially, you must give credit when you use the ideas or even the words of a source. In our course, use MLA style for documentation. If you ever have questions about whether to cite a source, you should err on the side of caution. Also, you should consult me, the Writing Center, and/or the library Reference Desk.

**Evaluation Guidelines:**

Each student will write two presentation papers of one single-spaced page on given issues in the readings (roughly 40%), a dialogic response journal (roughly 20%), informal theses, terms quiz, and other in class-writing (*roughly 10%), and a final examination (30%).

*Includes adjustment based on apparent conscientious engagement with the course, as evident in prompt attendance, preparation, contributions, conferences, critical questioning, characterizations, etc.

**Presentation Papers:**

Each of you will be assigned to a presentation “group” (A, B, C, or D), meaning only that the members of each group independently prepare formal papers for the same class date. Each of you will present twice during the term, on a rotating schedule. These very short papers (one page, single-spaced) are to be written, presented, and then submitted for a grade, on the dates designated. Each student will write two, each addressing an audience of fellow scholars who are familiar with the readings. The
brevity of the assignment dictates a bare-bones argument. In most cases, you will begin by setting forth a sharp critical position on the given issue, along with its larger implications, and follow with selected textual evidence in support of your position, and a brief conclusion. The thesis should be as pointed and controversial as your conviction allows. I will evaluate these papers for the incisiveness of the analysis, the clarity and substance of the evidence, and for your observance of formal criteria for essays. I strongly urge you to avail yourself of The Writing Center (G 332; X-2636) well before the due date.

**Dialogic Journal:**
Each of you will partner with another student in a dialogic journal, each of you writing a new entry of about 300 words or so on alternate weeks. (Some students may be assigned to triads, likewise alternating each week.) Journal entries are due on the first class meeting of each week, unless you are notified otherwise. Beginning with week #2, Partner A must respond critically and thoughtfully to the journal prompt for the week OR to an issue stemming from our class reading and discussion. These entries will not be graded for their formal correctness, but rather for evidence of intellectual engagement with the prompt and with the readings. Entries should be approximately 300 handwritten or typed words in which you engage with the given prompt critically and substantively. Be sure to bring journal responses to class; you will be asked to share them. Toward the end of term, I will assign grades, based on your apparent level of critical engagement and conscientiousness in responding to prompts.

**Reading Notes:**
For each reading assigned, you are to read critically; that is, you must not only understand plot and characters, but you must come ready to articulate your analysis of the elements of the story and its larger resonances. Always be sure to read the editor’s biographical notes on each author (515-533) along with the story. Come with questions, comments, parallels. Always be prepared to offer your critical comments in class, and, likewise, to respond to classmates’ interpretations. Toward these ends, be sure to jot down your critical reactions as formally or informally as you need to. These ungraded reading notes are independent of the dialogic journal, though there will likely be a lot of crossover.

**Characterizations:**
While I generally ask for volunteers to characterize specific readings, all of you should make it a point to prepare at least two or three readings. A “characterization” has three parts: 1) a terse distillation of the reading’s thesis, chief concern, or most salient features; 2) your critical response to that thesis; and 3) your assessment of how that thesis or concern relates to our class content.

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**Reading / Writing Schedule**
M 8/27: Introduction
W 8/29: Course Syllabus; Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” (1835),
F 8/31: Glossary of Literary Terms, 535-542; guidelines for presentations

**Last day to drop without a W**

2 W 9/5: De Maupassant, “The Necklace”; 1; Wain, “Remarks on the Short Story”*
F 9/7: Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener” (1853), 21

M 9/10: Ferguson, “Defining the Short Story”*
W 9/12: Presentation A: Psychological Approaches to the Short Story
F 9/14: Presentation A (continued)

3 M 9/17: Presentation B: Setting as Character in the Short Story
W 9/19: Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), 82; Presentation B (continued)

4 M 9/24: Cather, “Paul’s Case” (1905), 121
W 9/26: Presentation C: Symbol and Short Story

5 M 10/1: Culler, “Narrative”*
W 10/3: Kafka, “The Metamorphosis” (1915), 146

M 10/8: Presentation D: The Misfit as Mirror
W 10/10: Welty, “A Worn Path” (1941), 269; Presentation D (continued)
F 10/12: Cortázar, “Some Aspects of the Short Story”

6 M 10/15: Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (1957), 304
W 10/17: No class: Conferences
F 10/19: No class: Conferences

7 M 10/22: Munro, “How I Met My Husband” (1974); Wright. “On Defining the Short
Story: The Genre Question.”
W 10/24: Presentation A: Significance of Narrative voice
F 10/26: Presentation A (continued)

**Last day to withdraw without an F**

8 M 10/29: Presentation B:
W 10/31: Ellison, “Battle Royal” (1952); Presentation B (continued)
F 11/2:
M 11/5: Walker, “Everyday Use” (1973),

9 W 11/7: TBA
F 11/9: Quiz on literary terms

W 11/14: Presentation C: Gender issues in the short story

F 11/16: TBA

**Thanksgiving Week: November 19-23 (No Classes)**

M 11/26: Cisneros, “The House on Mango Street” (1983); Presentation C (continued)

W 11/28: TBA


M 12/3: Presentation D: culture clash in the short story

W 12/5: Alexie, “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” (1993),

F 12/7: Last class

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**Journal Prompts:**

(Use these topics as starting points for your dialogic journal ONLY when you find yourself in need of a prompt; you are otherwise free to pursue issues relevant to our primary and secondary readings or to class discussion):

1. Can we read short stories as representations of human psychology—whether through the characters, the setting, or the plot? Can we read “Young Goodman Brown,” “Bartleby the Scrivener,” or “The Necklace” as allegories?

2. Why are short stories so often concerned with misfits or otherwise marginal characters? Is there something about the short story that favors the oddball?

3. How can short stories reveal cultural tensions of their historical moment? Notice the dates of the stories we’ve read. How important is that date to our interpretation of any given story?

4. Can the setting of a story be seen as a character—that is, as an agent or cause of the action? Is it possible to imagine a story with no specific place, time, or culture? If so, what might that story look like?

5. How should we think about the relationship between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist of a given short story? Are the distinctions important? Why or why not? Cite examples.

6. Is the short story a natural, organic form, or is it a form imposed deliberately by writers? What is your definition of the genre?


Dialogic Partners / Contact Sheet

Natalie DiCaro / Ellie Newton
Alyssa Mulheron / Emily Cutting
Kiri Trotto / Christine Biondo
Ryan Smith / Kathryn Boughton
Katie Valerio / Hannah Farwell
Katie Sweet / Mary Bradford
Cat Fisher / Jeff Dick
Beth Gates / Sara George
Ashlee Ussia / Tracy Checchi
Hannah Farwell / Tiffany Eng
Jessica Stevens / Evan Meccarello
Dan Simmons / Phil Stolze
Christie Leszczinsky / Kelly Noble
Rose Marchitello / Katie Fraser
Amanda Sherman / Sara Heron
Charlene Czadzek / Julia Baird
Tricia Coleman / Abe Gerson
Kathryn Boughton / Ryan Smith