

FICTION CRAFT SEMINAR

Darin Strauss

Tuesday/Thursday, 3:30pm-6:00pm

This class will teach you to read as a writer. (It may dampen the naive joy of reading for pleasure a bit).

We'll use outside texts to answer the elemental questions of story telling. And we'll look at things that lit classes don't: how to begin a story, say; how to introduce a character. And we'll take up such questions as, "What is the relationship of plot to sub-plot? How does one hold the reader's attention?" Of course, in Art, rules must be flexible—but I ask my students to think of writing in strategic terms; each story-telling decision needs to make tactical sense. With that in mind, we'll examine—with so much esprit de corps as to arouse envy—the tenets of the Art of Fiction.

Grades are in large part based on class participation and attendance. If you show up and talk about the books you've read, you'll likely do well. If you don't do either, then you'll do poorly. (Each class missed will take your grade down a notch.) Also, we have a strict no-plagiarism policy. One strike and you fail.

Book List:

•the packet

Cormac McCarthy, "No Country for Old Men"

Kazuo Ishiguro, "Remains of the Day"

Reading Schedule:

Class 1) Barthleme's "The School," Saunders essay on "The School." (This will be read in class.)

Class 2) Zadie Smith: "Miss Adele Among the Corsets"; Lydia Davis selection; Grace Paley selection

Class 3) Elmore Leonard 3:10 to Yuma; film of the same story

Class 4) Raymond Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love."

Class 5) VS Pritchett "The Saint."; Lorrie Moore: "People Like That Are The Only People Here"; Lorrie Moore "And You're Ugly, Too"

Class 6) VS Pritchett: "The Diver"; Isaac Babel stories; Alice Munro stories

Class 7) Except of David Foster Wallace; of George Sanders; rules of comedy; McCarthy

Class 8) Kazuo Ishiguro "Remains of the Day"; Colson Whitehead "Underground Railraod

Course Assignments:

1) Students will be designated "discussion leaders" for the fiction that's on the reading schedule. Each student, therefore, will have to work with a partner (or partners) to guide the discussion for a single class session.

2) A final paper, examining -- on a craft level -- two or more of the works discussed in class. This will differ from a standard lit class final paper in that the students will address a nuts-and-bolts storytelling technique ("How Lorrie Moore and VS Pritchett differ in their approach to building character," for example.)

3) For the stories and/or novels that aren't read in class, each student will be required to submit a very brief response: no more than a paragraph, summarizing what you thought was effective (or ineffective) about each.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- } Describe and analyze what works (and what doesn't) in published works of fiction.
- } Critically examine their own writing.
- } In writing and discussion, reflect on the various aspects of the craft of fiction—character and plot development, prose effectiveness, and theme—in the work of their peers.
- } Develop new ways of looking and thinking about texts and their own work.
- } Formulate an informed level of analysis based on a comprehensive understanding of the writing of fiction.
- } Critically examine and compare the similarities in composition between novels and student work.
- } Demonstrate the ability to transform a rough first draft into an effective work of fiction

TEACHING & LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

This is a discussion class.

I will lead discussions—if not lecture—about the assigned readings. The analysis of student work will be more democratic, with my voice being only one (the final one, usually) among those of the entire class.

Grades are based on oral participation, the completion of written assignments, written critiques, revision, and attendance. If you show up and talk about the books you've read—and if you hand in your work on time, and thoughtfully—you'll do well. If you don't, then you'll certainly do poorly.

GRADING MATRIX

Completion of Short-story assignments

Our discussion of student work is the backbone of this course. If you fail to hand-in work on the day when your writing is slated to be discussed, you will fail the class automatically.

Attendance

Showing up for class is a third of your grade. If you miss class, you will not do well, no matter what you do when you are present.

Oral Participation

This course will float on student discussion. A sixth of your grade will be dependent upon your talking in class.

Written Critiques

Students will be expected to offer written criticism to their classmates. This will also make up a sixth of the grade.

Revisions and Final Paper

Students will be expected to revise their work, based on the class discussion, and to write a final paper. Together, these will make up the final thirty-three percent of the grade.

This class has a strict no-plagiarism policy. One strike and you fail. The nature of plagiarism in fiction writing is similar to the nature of plagiarism in expository writing; stealing somebody else's work will not be tolerated. All the same, there is room, in creative work, for the student to be influenced. We will discuss in class. Suffice it to say, any verbatim use of other work will be considered plagiaristic.

DAILY AND WEEKLY COURSE OUTLINE

The topics covered will vary based on issues that come up in the assigned work. But, a basic framework: We will begin with beginnings, move on to plot and character, and then finish up with the power of influence and revision.

Office Hours

TBD, both scheduled or by appointment