

English 204: Studies in Fiction
Course Policies, Procedures, & Schedule
Fall 2003

Instructor: Dr. Sharon James McGee

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Classroom Location: Peck 3315

Class Time: MW 12:00-1:15

To begin, a quote:

Fiction is nothing less than the subtlest instrument for self-examination and self-display that mankind has invented yet. Psychology and x-rays bring up the portentous shadows, and demographics and stroboscopic photography do some fine breakdowns, but for the full *parfum* and effluvia of being human, for feathery ambiguity and rank facticity, for the air and iron, fire and spit of our daily mortal adventure there is nothing like fiction: it makes sociology look priggish, history problematical, the film media two-dimensional, and the *National Enquirer* as silly as last week's cereal box.

---John Updike from "The Importance of Fiction" in *Esquire*

Course Objectives: The objectives of this course are

- to expose you to some major and minor writers of fiction,
- to lay the groundwork for you to study fiction in other courses,
- to hone your critical reading of literature, and
- to enable you to appreciate more deeply the works of fiction that you read on your own.

To reach these objectives, I have prepared a syllabus that is challenging and (I hope) exciting. I will strive to provide productive and intellectually engaging class sessions. (This does not necessarily mean that I will lecture all the time, either.) I will provide you with feedback on your work for the course. I will meet with you outside of class as needed to help you. **HOWEVER, you** must do **your** part to meet these objectives. I expect you to keep up with the syllabus; read assignments carefully and thoughtfully; prepare thoroughly for class discussions, quizzes, and exams; bring enthusiasm and energy to class each day; and participate willingly in classroom activities.

Required Texts: *Introduction to the Short Novel*, ed. Beaty, 2nd edition
 The Story and Its Writer. ed. Charters, 6th ed.

Both of these texts are available through textbook rental. However, studying literature with a rental book is difficult (perhaps impossible). I encourage you to buy the rental texts. Not only are they excellent additions to (or foundations for) your personal library, owning texts will allow you to take notes in the margins, which is the best way to read because it increases your engagement with and understanding and retention of the material. If you do not wish to purchase the texts, then I strongly encourage you to make a photocopy of each assigned reading so that you can take notes, etc. on your copy.

Attendance: It's required! I do not reward you with points for coming to class: that is part of your responsibility as a student. Missing more than four class periods puts your grade in extreme jeopardy (read: possible failure). I am empathetic with reasons for why one must miss class; nevertheless, I still count absences, and I still uphold my attendance policy.

You should be in your seat when class begins and you should remain in class for the entire class period (unless of course, nature calls, in which case leave quietly and return quickly). If you arrive after I have taken attendance, it is your responsibility to notify me. Otherwise, you may well be counted absent for the day.

Grading: 500 total points possible

Exam 1 = 100 points

Exam 2 = 100 points

Each exam will consist of three sections, including an essay portion. We will review for each exam.

Quizzes = 5 points each for 110 points total

There will be a quiz almost every day with the exception of exam days and other announced days. This means we will have 24 quizzes, and I will drop the two lowest quiz grades. Missed quizzes cannot be made up. If you arrive late to class and the daily quiz has been given, you will not be allowed to take it—unless prior arrangements were made with me. Having daily quizzes encourages students to keep up with the reading.

Response Paper = 50 points

I will provide further details on this paper. I will deduct five points (the equivalent to a letter grade) for each day late.

Literary Analysis Paper = 100 points

I will provide further details on this paper. I will deduct ten points (the equivalent to a letter grade) for each day late. I will deduct ten points if you do not bring a draft of the paper to class for peer review on the date stated in the syllabus.

Discussion Questions = 40 points

*Each student will sign up to bring two or three discussion questions to class on two different days. These questions should be more than text based questions; rather they should be questions about issues or ideas that you find puzzling, engaging, interesting, etc. **Each time you are responsible for questions, you should write your questions on the board before class begins.** You must also provide me with a written copy of those questions at the beginning of class. My goals with this assignment are to (1) allow you, the students, to have some say-so in the direction that the class takes, (2) foster your critical reading and thinking skills, and (3) address issues that you feel are important.*

Scale: 450-500 points = A

400-449 points = B

350-399 points = C

300-349 points = D

<299 points = F

Plagiarism: Do not attempt to represent someone else's words or ideas (whether famous critic or parent) as your own. When in doubt, provide full documentation of your source(s), or simply ask me for assistance. If you plagiarize, you should expect to fail the course, and the appropriate university officials will be notified of the reason for the failure.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability for which you need academic assistance, you must consult the Disability Support Office (located in Peck Hall 1311) **immediately** before any accommodations can be made.

Other Items You Should Know:

- I routinely call upon students at random during the class period. You should be able to answer my questions, or at least be able to articulate coherent thoughts about them. It is **not** enough to say, "I don't know." If you try to present that statement as your answer, I will not let you off the hook.
- Fiction is about life, and life is messy. I have selected a wide variety of stories this semester that deal with many complex ideas and themes. It is possible that you may not agree with all of the political, religious, or societal views presented in these stories—I don't necessarily agree with all of them either. Nevertheless, it is important to read and critically think about a myriad of issues as a college student. We can disagree with one another (both students and teacher); however, let's do so respectfully. If you cannot abide having your ideas and beliefs challenged, then you should consider taking another section of this course.
- Always bring your book or a copy of the assigned readings to class.
- Always bring paper and pen to class.
- It's fine to eat or drink in class, but clean up your own mess.
- As is the case in any course, it is wise to keep all of your returned work until you receive your official course grade.
- I do not return the last exam; however, you may drop by my office to see it if you desire.
- Cell phones and pagers are a distraction in class. If you must have them with you, then set them to vibrate rather than ring (or buzz). Answer the phone quickly and leave the room to conduct your call. Cell phone calls may not be answered during an exam unless you have a good reason and notify me before you receive the exam.

"Fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners." ---Virginia Woolf

Schedule

Note: All readings come from *The Story and Its Writer*, unless otherwise noted. Read all introductions, headnotes, afterwords, etc.

Read all assigned texts before coming to class. During class, we may not discuss every text listed below; however, you are nonetheless responsible for all of the items listed on this syllabus. Therefore, be prepared to answer questions about them on quizzes or exams.

Weeks 1-2: Beginning Literary Analysis

- M 8/25 Course introduction; basic first-day things; discuss how to take notes and study for the exams; discuss basic elements of fiction
- W 8/27 “A Brief History of the Short Story” (1731), “The Elements of Fiction” (1739), Hawthorne “Young Goodman Brown” (633), Melville “Blackness in Hawthorne’s ‘Young Goodman Brown’”
- M 9/1 Labor Day—University Holiday—No classes
- W 9/3 Jackson “The Lottery” (693); “The Morning of...” (1506)

Week 3: Tone, Style and Irony

- M 9/8 Garcia Marquez “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” (570), Carver “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” (252), Salzman (1622)
- W 9/10 Olsen “I Stand Here Ironing” (1165) Coles “Tillie Olsen...” (1478), film

Week 4: Setting

- M 9/15 Melville “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (977), Miller “A Deconstructive Reading...”
- W 9/17 Hurston “Sweat” (664), “Spunk” (660), “What White Publishers Won’t Print” (1652), “How It Feels...” (1648), Walker “Zora Neale Hurston...” (1661)

Week 5: Characterization (Baggage Week)

- M 9/22 O’Brien “The Things They Carried” (1102), “Alpha Company” (1551), Mason “On Tim O’Brien’s...” (1531), Welty “A Worn Path” (1377); “Is Phoenix Jackson’s Grandson Really Dead?” (1591)
- W 9/24 Mason “Shiloh” (954), Chopin “The Story of an Hour” (333)

Week 6: Gothic Week

M 9/29 Poe “The Cask of Amontillado” (1188), “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1206), “The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale” (1692), Gargano “The Question of Poe’s Narrators...”(1701)

W 10/1 Faulkner “A Rose for Emily” (484); “The Meaning of ...” (1490);
Response Paper due

Week 7: Flannery O’Connor Week

M 10/6 O’Connor “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (1142), related material on pp. 1663-1688

W 10/8 O’Connor “Good Country People” (1128); **review for Exam 1**

Week 8: Modern Native American Experience and Exam

M 10/13 Erdrich “The Red Convertible” (475), Alexie “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” (14)

W 10/15 Exam 1

Week 9: A Novel of Assimilation

M 10/20 Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus* (read pp. 578-612 top, through end of section 5 in *Norton*)

W 10/22 Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus* (read pp. 612-644 in *Norton*)

Week 10: Transforming a Novel into Film

M 10/27 film

W 10/29 film

Week 11: Class Issues

M 11/3 Bambara “The Lesson” (108), Ellison “Battle Royal” (464); “The Influence of Folklore ...” (1486)

W 11/5 Updike “A & P” (1343); **peer review of Literary Analysis Paper in class**

Week 12: Female Writers/Female Protagonists Week

M 11/10 Freeman “The Revolt of ‘Mother’” (547), Gilman “The Yellow Wallpaper” (576), “Why I Wrote..” (1498)

W 11/12 Walker “Everyday Use” (1360); **Literary Analysis Paper due**

Week 13: Male Writers/Male Protagonists Week

M 11/17 Wolff “The Rich Brother” (1407), “On...” (1595)

W 11/19 Wright “The Man Who Was Almost a Man” (1427), Lee “Scene from the Screenplay...” (1521)

M 11/24 Thanksgiving Break—No Classes

W 11/26 Thanksgiving Break—No Classes

Week 14: *Ethan Frome*

M 12/1 *Ethan Frome* (read pp. 179-234 in *Norton*)

W 12/3 Continue discussion on *Ethan Frome*

Week 15: The End

M 12/8 Carver “The Bath” (230), “A Small, Good Thing” (235), Shute (1617)

W 12/10 Exam review, course evaluations, wrap-up

Week 16: Finals Week

Thursday, Dec. 18 10:00-11:40 Exam 2 (same classroom)

- W 5/28 Course introduction; basic first-day things; discuss how to take notes and study for the exams; discuss basic elements of fiction; read and discuss Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (333)
- F 5/30 Hawthorne "Young Goodman Brown" (633), "The Elements of Fiction" (1739), Melville "Blackness in Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown'" (1535); Jackson "The Lottery" (693); "The Morning of..." (1506)
- M 6/2 "A Brief History of the Short Story" (1731), Poe "The Cask of Amontillado" (1188), "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1206), "The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale" (1692), Gargano "The Question of Poe's Narrators..." (1701); Faulkner "A Rose for Emily" (484); "The Meaning of..." (1490)
- W 6/4 O'Brien "The Things They Carried" (1102), "Alpha Company" (1551), Mason "On Tim O'Brien's..." (1531), Mason "Shiloh" (954), Welty "A Worn Path" (1377); "Is Phoenix Jackson's Grandson Really Dead?" (1591)
- F 6/6 Garcia Marquez "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" (570), Olsen "I Stand Here Ironing" (1165) Coles "Tillie Olsen..." (1478), Melville "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (977), Miller "A Deconstructive Reading..." (1537), **Essay due**
- M 6/9 Bambara "The Lesson" (108), Hurston "Sweat" (664), "What White Publishers Won't Print" (1652), "How It Feels..." (1648), Walker "Zora Neale Hurston..." (1661), **review for Exam 1**
- W 6/11 **Exam 1** (1 ½ hours) Kinkaid "Girl" (839) **to be read in class**
- F 6/13 O'Conner "Good Country People" (1128), "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1142), "Everything that Rises Must Converge" (1117), related material on pp. 1663-1688
- M 6/16 Roth "Goodbye, Columbus" (*Norton*, p. 579), "Afterword" (641)
- W 6/18 Freeman "The Revolt of 'Mother'" (547), Gilman "The Yellow Wallpaper" (576), "Why I Wrote..." (1498), Walker "Everyday Use" (1360)
- F 6/20 Updike "A & P" (1343), Wolff "The Rich Brother" (1407), "On..." (1595), Wright "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (1427)
- M 6/23 Silko "Yellow Woman" (1241), "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective" (1575), Allen "Whirlwind Man Steals..." (1452),

Erdrich “The Red Convertible” (475), Alexie “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven” (14), **Essay DUE**

W 6/25 Carver “The Bath” (230), “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” (252), “A Small, Good Thing” (235), Shute (1617), Salzman (1622), review for Exam 2

F 6/27 **Exam 2** & course evaluations