

WRITERS IN NEW YORK: FICTION (CRAFT SEMINAR)

Darin Strauss

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

We'll use outside texts to answer the elemental questions of storytelling. 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 to 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: Craft packet for Purchase.

Remains of the Day, Kazuo Ishiguro

Reading Schedule:

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

Class 2) Raymond Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love."

Class 3) VS Pritchett "The Saint."

Class 4) Lorrie Moore: "People Like That Are The Only People Here"; Lorrie Moore "And You're Ugly, Too"

Class 5) Zadie Smith: "Miss Adele Among the Corsets"

Class 6) James Baldwin: "Sonny's Blues"

Class 7) Jhumpa Lahiri: "Interpreter of Maladies"; "Sexy"

Class 8) Ishiguro, "Remains of the Day"

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 published novels and stories and their own work.

TEACHING & LEARNING METHODOLOGIES

This is a lecture class, with a discussion component.

That is to say, I will do much of the talking, but not all of it. I will lead discussions about assigned readings, and will expect students to participate. There will be the occasional in-class writing assignment, which will be discussed by the entire class.

Grades are based on oral participation, the completion of written assignments, 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

Outside Reading/ Oral Participation

The student must read, and be able to discuss, all of the outside assignments. This course will float on student discussion. A sixth of your grade will be dependent upon your talking in class.

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.

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.

Written evaluations

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.

This will make up a sixth of the grade.

Final Paper

Students will be expected to write an essay evaluating not only the outside work, based on the class discussion, but also of their own work. This 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.

ASSIGNMENT DATES

Based on a schedule determined by our reading list, students will be slated to submit written evaluations of the assigned work.

On the last day of class, students will hand in a final paper, examining -- on a craft level -- two or more of the published 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 Jhumpa Lahiri differ in their approach to building character," for example.) This paper will be from 5 to 10 pages long.

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