

Professor: Marshall Boswell
Office Phone/Voice Mail: 843-3581
E-Mail: boswell@rhodes.edu

Office: Palmer 316
Office Hours: MWF 11:00-12:30
and by appointment

Introduction to Fiction Writing ENG 201
ThTh 2:00-3:15 Clough 304
Writing Fiction, Janet Burroway
The Story and Its Writer, ed. Ann Charters

| | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Jan | 10 | Introduction. |
| | | Showing and Telling |
| | 15 | Burroway, pp. 21-70; |
| | 17 | "A Small Good Thing," p. 133; "Battle Royal," 294; Ex. 1: Description Due |
| | | Conflict and Plot |
| | 22 | Burroway, 247-298 |
| | 24 | "An Act of Vengeance," p. 20; "Happy Endings," 32; An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," p. 103. Story #1 Due |
| | | Criticism and Evaluation |
| | 29 | Workshop |
| | 31 | Workshop |
| | | Character |
| Feb | 5 | Workshop |
| | 7 | Burroway, pp. 116-161 |
| | | Point of View |
| | 12 | Paul's Case," 161; "The Darling," 189; Ex. 2: Character Sketch Due |
| | 14 | Burroway, pp. 300-332; "How to Date a Brown girl, Black girl, White girl, or Halfie," 290 |
| | 19 | "Bad Neighbors," 413; "Good Country People," 662; "Good People," 859. Ex. 3: Point of View Due |
| | 21 | Burroway, pp. 73-112 |
| | | Dialogue |
| | 26 | "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," 150; "Hills Like White Elephants," 368; Brownies," 701 |

Ex. 4: Dialogue Exercise Due

28 “The Interpreter of Maladies,” 510; “The Management of Grief,” 600

Signs and Symbols

March 5 “Cathedral,” 123 ; “Shiloh,” 542
7 “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,” 14; “The Rocking Horse Winner” 525.

12-14 SPRING BREAK

19 “Sonny’s Blues,” 36; “Black Man and White Woman in Dark Green,” 67
21 “The Circular Ruins,” 112; “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,” 334
Story #2 Due

26 Workshop

28 Workshop

April 2 Workshop

4 Workshop

9 “The Red Convertible,” 305, “Two Kinds,” 784

11 “The Dead,” 434

Story #3 Due

16 Workshop

18 Workshop

23 Workshop

25 Workshop

Policies for English 201

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this class we will read, discuss, write, and revise **literary short fiction**. Literary fiction discloses truths about human experience in a moving and artful way. It strives for seamless mimesis while simultaneously making resourceful and aesthetically sound use of all the various aspects story telling, including language, point of view, plot, character, setting, metaphor, symbolism and tone. In short, you will endeavor to write *literature*. For the purposes of the class, you cannot write genre fiction—that is, fantasy, science fiction, mystery, children’s fiction, young adult fiction, and so on.

WRITING LOAD: Everyone will write and revise three (3) complete short stories over the course of this semester. Each story *submitted for discussion* should be “complete,” with a worked-out ending—even a bad one. (Fixing bad endings is one of the things workshop is for.) Each story submitted **must exceed 6 pages, double-spaced, in length at time of submission.**

You are free to write about whatever you wish, so long as you fulfill, at semester's end, the following requirements:

- One story must be in the first person
- One story must be in the third person
- One story must be told from the point of view of someone *not* your (i.e. the author's) gender

You will gather together both the original as well as the revised versions of all three stories into a final portfolio, which you will submit to me at the end of the semester for final evaluation. This portfolio should consist of polished, well-crafted fiction. In assessing the merit of the completed portfolio, I will pay special attention to the *revisions* you have made to stories that originally appeared in workshop. The portfolio should run anywhere from 5000 to 7500 words (between 16-22 pages), but can certainly be longer.

You will also write four (4) exercises, which I will grade. The average grade of these four exercises will constitute your “exercise average.”

STORY SUBMISSIONS: During workshop weeks, we will workshop roughly four or five stories per class period. You will submit your stories electronically, and I will then compile all the stories into three packets of four stories each, and email them to you as an attachment. Each of you is then responsible for printing out that day's packet. Moreover, you will write *at least* a half-page of single-spaced comments for each story up for discussion. You can either write these comments on the packet printout itself or type them out on your own: the former method is easier, the latter option is more conscientious. These comments—both those you compose and those you verbalize in class during workshop—will factor into my evaluation of your final fiction portfolio, so take this process seriously.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| GRADING: Fiction Portfolio | 60% |
| Exercise Average | 40% |

ABSENCES: You may miss two classes, excused or otherwise, totally free of charge. An F on a pop quiz will count as an absence, as will failure to bring your book and/or story packet to class. Absences after those initial two will cost your *final course* average two tenths of a point. I make no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. So if you can attend, you should. **If you miss more than eight (6) classes, you will fail the course.**

LATE PAPERS: Each assignment is due on the day stipulated on the syllabus. Any late assignment will be docked a tier reduction for each day that it is delayed. Any assignment turned in 5 class sessions *after* the original due date will receive a grade of F and can result in failure of the course itself. (See departmental policies at the end of the this syllabus.)

PROBLEMS? Anytime you have a problem with an assignment or class attendance, PLEASE get in touch with me. My office phone number and e-mail address are listed on the front of this syllabus.

Department of English Expectations and Policies

A college course is more than simply a set of assignments; it is an intellectual process, one which requires active engagement from beginning to end in order to achieve its intended results. With this in mind, the Department of English has formulated a number of expectations and the policies that support them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to the syllabus for a particular course, you should address them to the instructor.

Attendance: The success of a course depends to a significant extent upon the presence of students alert and prepared to address the subject under discussion. Unavoidable absences should be discussed with the instructor, ideally before they occur. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of grade, in some cases to an F.

Deadlines: Writing assignments, tests, etc., are carefully scheduled as stages toward the fulfillment of the course's goals and cannot be indefinitely deferred without frustrating those goals. Brief extensions for good reasons may be permissible with the instructor's prior approval; otherwise, late assignments will be penalized and may result in their not being accepted for credit.

Submission of all work: All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

Intellectual honesty: All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Clear evidence of plagiarism (failure to use quotation marks around verbatim or copied language, failure to adequately paraphrase, and failure to cite the source of quoted, paraphrased, or borrowed text and ideas), regardless of the Council hearing outcome, may likewise result in failure of the course. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.

Description Exercise

1. Make a list of the streets, parks, stores, creeks, backyard swimming pools, and nooks and crannies that intimately and memorably invoke your home town for you.
2. From this list, construct a two page description of this town as if you were writing the opening pages of a novel that will be set there. Use concrete details and active verbs, and make sure you strive to make the description not only vivid but interesting to a reader. Your job is to draw in the reader, and you'll do that if you make the setting concrete and vivid but also human and compelling: it must be a place the reader will want to visit.
3. By the second page return the reader's attention to some spot in the preceding description where something happened to the story's protagonist—you, of course, but cast here as a fictional character. Provide an account of the event that builds directly on the concrete physical details of the setting.

Use only active verbs. Avoid all passive voice.

NOTE: The one sure way to mess this one up is to employ linking or passive verbs. I will automatically lower your grade on this assignment on grade tier for every linking or passive verb I see. I mean business!

Due Tuesday, Jan. 17

Character Sketch Exercise

1. First, come up with three entirely disparate characters. These characters can be from anywhere on planet earth (rather than from some other planet) and from any class or part of the world you choose: they simply must all be alive at the same historical moment. For *each* character, fill out a Character Checklist, three copies of which are attached to the end of this syllabus. In other words, you will complete this checklist three times.
2. Write 2-3 page scene set in a public space in which you introduce, one-by-one, each of your three characters. For full credit, the scene MUST obey the following restrictions:
 - The setting must be a space that all three characters might plausibly share—i.e., a doctor's waiting room, an airport gate, a restaurant, a principal's office, a sports arena, a public street, etc.
 - The point of view must be *objective third person*. This means you will cast the scene from the perspective of some hovering "camera eye" which sees all that transpires within this setting but which has no access to any single character's mind.
 - Each character must *enter* the setting one after the other, preferably in discrete paragraphs.
 - After all three characters have entered the setting, they must all interact in some way.

The trick here is to present each of your three characters *directly*, imparting to your reader as much of the information from the checklist as you can without resorting to indirect (authorial) characterization or interiority. Each assignment will be evaluated according to how vividly and memorably it presents the three characters while still adhering to the restrictions listed above. NOTE: You will submit BOTH the three Character Checklists AND the 2-3 page scene.

DUE: Tuesday, February 12

Point of View Exercise

This one builds on your Character Sketch Exercise. There you introduced three characters into a public space and had them interact. Your perspective was that of an objective narrator. Here, you will rewrite the central scene in that episode **three** different times, each version from the perspective of one of the three characters. What's more, each version will represent a different point of view. For instance:

- One character's version will be cast in the first person
- One character's version will be cast in the second person
- One character's version will be cast in the third-person directed

The three versions should be consistent as regards events, so that each character should be wearing the same thing, and saying the same things, in all three versions. The key is to alter the perspective. Although you can condense or even shorten the overall episode so that the individual scene are not necessarily as long as the original, you must still remain consistent in the overall presentation of events and so on.

Due Tuesday, February 19

Dialogue Exercise

Select a conflict from the left-hand column below and write a two-to-three-page dialogue in which two characters disagree about which choice to make. At the same time, select an activity from the right-hand column below that will serve as the setting/frame for this dialogue. The characters should not only know each other well—brother/sister, husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend—but should also be easily distinguished from one another—fat/skinny, aggressive/passive, smug/sincere. What's more, the two characters should be evenly matched participants in the conflict at hand. Note: the activity you choose does not necessarily have to reflect the conflict; in fact, it can be at total odds with it! All dialogue and activity must be presented directly. Punctuation counts.

Conflict

1. Should we really start seeing one another, particularly since we're both seeing other people?
2. Why do you (the parents) insist that I (the child) go to college when I want to work?
3. When are we going to tell the children about the divorce?
4. Which of us is going to tell mom and dad about the dent in the car?
5. When are you going to stop drinking? And when are you going to lay off?
6. Should we really tap into the professor's computer and download tomorrow's test?
7. Should we spend any more money on fertility treatments, or should we simply adopt?

Activity

1. Repairing the sink
2. Playing poker
3. Pumping iron in a gym
4. Painting a room
5. Giving someone a haircut
6. Cleaning out a church
7. Assembling a child's bicycle on

Due Tuesday, February 2

Character Checklist

1. Character's name and possible nickname
2. Age and Gender
3. Race and Class
4. Color/Style of Hair
5. Most prominent facial feature
6. Most prominent bodily feature
7. Style of dress
8. Family situation
9. Occupation
10. Type of home (apartment? house? trailer?)
11. Kind and name of pet (if any)
12. Hobbies
13. Favorite movies
14. Favorite books
15. Favorite CDs
16. Favorite food(s)
17. Secret fear
18. Secret desire
19. Best and Worst character trait
20. Life's ambition

Character Checklist

1. Character's name and possible nickname
2. Age and Gender
3. Race and Class
4. Color/Style of Hair
5. Most prominent facial feature
6. Most prominent bodily feature
7. Style of dress
8. Family situation
9. Occupation
10. Type of home (apartment? house? trailer?)
11. Kind and name of pet (if any)
12. Hobbies
13. Favorite movies
14. Favorite books
15. Favorite CDs
16. Favorite food(s)
17. Secret fear
18. Secret desire
19. Best and Worst character trait
20. Life's ambition

Character Checklist

1. Character's name and possible nickname
 2. Age and Gender
 3. Race and Class
 4. Color/Style of Hair
 5. Most prominent facial feature
 6. Most prominent bodily feature
 7. Style of dress
 8. Family situation
 9. Occupation
 10. Type of home (apartment? house? trailer?)
 11. Kind and name of pet (if any)
 12. Hobbies
 13. Favorite movies
 14. Favorite books
 15. Favorite CDs
 16. Favorite food(s)
 17. Secret fear
 18. Secret desire
 19. Best and Worst character trait
 20. Life's ambition
-