Casper College Course Syllabus

ENGL 2050 – Creative Writing: Fiction

Semester/Year: Spring 2016
Lecture Hours: 3    Lab Hours: 0    Credit Hours: 3
Class Time and Days: Mondays, 2-4:40 p.m., PS 107
Instructor: Terry Rasmussen    Office: PS 336    Phone: 268-2480
Email: trasmuss@caspercollege.edu

Office Hours: T&TH 7-9:30 a.m. (in PS 336), W 11 a.m.–5 p.m. (in Writing Ctr., SH 215) or by appointment.

Course Description: “Analysis of the forms of fiction and practice of writing fiction at the introductory and intermediate level.” Prerequisite: ENGL 1010; 1020 recommended.

Overview: This course involves intensive reading and writing of fiction with an emphasis on the art of the literary short story for adult readers. Throughout the semester, we will work to answer one all important question: What makes for an effective and memorable short story? To assist in this inquiry, we will immerse ourselves in the stories of others. As John Gilgun states, “we learn to write through imitation of writers we love.” Many of the stories that appear on this syllabus are stories that I love. I hope that you, too, will enjoy these texts and that they will inspire and instruct as you develop quality stories of your own.

Outcomes:
• Demonstrate effective oral and written communication
• Appreciate aesthetic and creative activities

Objectives:
• to identify and use appropriate terms applicable to the short story
• to produce short stories that demonstrate/s an understanding of the traditional elements of the genre
• to constructively evaluate your own and others' work.
• to meaningfully revise and closely edit your work
• to demonstrate originality and critical thinking in your writing
• to demonstrate close attention to expression (diction and syntax)
• to develop and submit on time a writing portfolio containing the required materials
• to write persuasive, unified, and structured interpretive explications of others’ work
• to demonstrate active participation in class discussions and writing exercises
• to carefully document any borrowed material, using MLA style

Class Format/Methodology: This is a student-centered discussion and workshop-oriented writing class in which every student takes on the role of teacher. My role is to offer guidance both in and outside of class and to evaluate your contributions to the objectives of the class, including your own progress as a writer. If this approach makes you uneasy and you would prefer the more traditional teacher-centered lecture format, please see me after our first class. CC offers several literature courses that may better meet your interests and/or needs.

Disciplined Study Habits Needed for Course Schedule: Due to the schedule for this class (meeting only once weekly), homework may seem heavy. Since this is a three credit course, however, we must devote the same amount of energy and time as we would if we were preparing for a class meeting three times a week. Therefore, you should schedule, on average, six hours
**a week of preparatory time.** To procrastinate on homework until the day before class will prove highly unproductive. Instead, **develop the habit of reading one of the assigned texts and working on a few pages of your own writing daily**, rather than completing all of the homework in one sitting. If you do not have “a room of your own” for your writing, you should locate or create one. As for the long class sessions, by coming to class prepared to fully participate, we will find that our time together goes by much too quickly.

**Course Requirements and Points Possible:**
- 15 pts. – two polished short shorts (typewritten, 250-600 words each)
- 50 pts. -- two polished and workshopped longer stories (typewritten, min. of 1000 words each)
- 20 pts. -- weekly reader/writer responses to assigned readings (typewritten, min. of one page)
- 10 pts. – final oral assessment (typed formal outline and class presentation)
- 5 pts. – *Expression* submission

**Too Valuable to Tally – Workshop Participation and Journal**

100 TOTAL

Grading Scale – 100-90=A; 89-80=B; 79-70=C; 69-60=D; 59-50=F

**Evaluation of Short Stories:** You are asked to write four stories (two short-shorts and two longer stories.) The short-shorts will be evaluated for how well they demonstrate your understanding of a specific element of fiction, as well as for a professional presentation. The two longer stories should be ones that have been workshopped by the class. These will be evaluated for the quality of the material (including a traditional approach towards the elements of fiction, such as character and conflict development); a consistent point of view; the thought put into thematic development; and the quality of presentation (proper handling of dialogue, time transitions, editing, etc.)

**Weekly Reader/Writer Responses:** Each week select a published story (from those assigned) and write a **one-page minimum typed response which discusses the story’s impact on you as a READER and as a WRITER.** In other words, part one of your response is a gut level, emotional one that identifies and comments on at least one theme and its impact on you as a reader; part two of your response should be more critical, analyzing the author’s skill with fictional elements and discussing what lessons can be learned from the story that could be useful for you as a writer. **These will be collected weekly. No late work accepted.**

**Final Oral Assessment:** Your final is a self-assessment of your writing and of what you have gained from this course. You are asked to submit a formal, typed outline of your findings to me before you begin a 7-10 minute oral presentation for your classmates. Please use the following headings in your outline and as subjects for reflection:

I. Introduction (summarize your initial expectations vs. what you gained from the course)
II. Assigned Readings
   A. What you most appreciated and why, as a both reader and a writer. (Provide specific examples.)
   B. What you least appreciated and why, as both a reader and as a writer. (Again, provide specific examples.)
   C. What you learned. (Try to share a few unique insights not covered in class.)
III. Stories by Classmates
   A. What you learned from others’ stories or comments. (Be specific.)
IV. Your Stories
   A. Why you write.
   B. How you write.
C. Who you envision as a reader and why.
D. What you want your stories to accomplish.
   1. Successes
   2. Difficulties
E. Objectives for future stories.

V. Class Discussion and Activities
   A. What seemed most helpful and why.
   B. What seemed least helpful and why.

VI. Your writing plans for the future as an outgrowth of this course.

This final assessment will be evaluated for the quality of the reflection, material, and support, including concrete, detailed examples. No late work accepted.

Expression Literary and Arts Magazine: Students who submit their final portfolios in the required format to Expression for possible publication receive five points.

Workshop Format: Each student will be assigned two workshop dates for two of the longer stories. During class the week before each assigned workshop date, the student should distribute copies of the same story to every member of the class. Prior to that next class, the rest of the class should 1) carefully read classmates’ stories, 2) prepare thoughtful written evaluations of each story using the form provided below, and 3) come to class prepared to actively participate in the workshopping of those stories. Students who fail to provide this written critique lose two points for each week of ill-preparedness.

   Save the following template on your computer. Print two copies of your responses each week: one for the author and one for the instructor.

   Short Story Critique

   1. What do you appreciate most about this story?
   2. When do you get pulled into the story? And when, if at all, do you begin to care about the protagonist?
   3. What does the protagonist want?
   4. What conflicts does s/he face?
   5. Stylistically, does the story read smoothly? For example, do insistencies in point of view, tense, or conventional grammar usage interrupt the processing of the text? (Occasional slips can simply be noted on the text and not here or during workshop.)
   6. Do any passages, including dialogue, or scenes slow the story’s pace or significantly confuse the story’s content? (Again, a single weak sentence can be noted in the text and not here or during the workshop.)
   7. If this were your story, aside from what has previously been addressed in this critique, what would you develop or focus on during revision and why?
   8. Identify the most prominent theme revealed in your reading of the story.

Journal: If you are not already in the habit, keep a journal to record images and impressions from your waking hours and your dream worlds. Keep it on your person or under your pillow at all times. Learn to eavesdrop, on others and your own thoughts, and record everything that could serve as an opening or closing line, anything that triggers the possibility for developing a character, a scene, or an entire story. I will not ask to see your journals.

Weekly Writing Prompts: You will be given a weekly writing prompt to foster an appreciation for one or more of the elements of fiction. Some of these drafts may be started in class; others may need to be written outside of class. You will be expected to share your writing with the
Any of the assigned writing exercises may be developed into short-shorts or into longer stories to workshop and submit in your portfolio.

**Required Materials:** a good dictionary and thesaurus; a journal; a lightweight three ring binder for exercises, reading responses, and stories; a word processor (or daily access to one)

**Policies:**

**Participation and Attendance:** Missed classes cannot be made up by simply borrowing others’ notes. Your presence and participation are critical to the value of this course. Each unexcused absence drops your final grade one level. If it is your assigned date to have one of your stories workshopped or to submit a story for the following week’s workshop, you also forfeit the workshop opportunity. In the event of an emergency or an illness, you must contact me in advance of class to request that an absence be excused (and, if applicable, a new workshop date be assigned), but only one such absence will be excused.

**Student Rights and Responsibilities:** Students are expected to treat others in the class and their opinions with civility and respect, to avoid language or behavior that disrupts or dampens individual or classroom spirit. Please refer to the Casper College Student Conduct and Judicial Code (in the *CC Catalogue* and *Student Handbook*) for information concerning your rights and responsibilities as a student. Cell phones and habitually late students are both disruptive. Unless okayed by the instructor, all electronic devices must be turned off and out of sight before you enter the classroom. Students engaging in disruptive behavior are subject to a faculty-initiated withdrawal.

**If Help is Needed:** If my office hours are not convenient, I am more than happy to meet with you at another mutually agreeable time to discuss any course work or concerns. If you desire immediate help with a writing project and I am not available, visit the Writing Center in SH.

**Chain of Command:** If you have a concern with this class and are not satisfied with my response, please take your concern through the appropriate chain of command starting with the department head, then the division chair, and lastly the vice president for academic affairs.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Casper College demands intellectual honesty. Proven plagiarism or any form of dishonesty associated with the academic process can result in the offender failing the course in which the offense was committed or expulsion from school. See the Casper College Student Code of Conduct. *Plagiarism is defined as failure to credit the source of borrowed information and/or ideas; failure to place another’s exact words within quotation marks; copying or buying someone else’s text and presenting it as your own; distorting or misrepresenting someone’s material or thoughts through a sloppy paraphrase or an incomplete context; inaccurately presenting a source’s name or bibliographic information. If you have doubts as to what constitutes plagiarism, see me before you submit questionable material.*

**ADA Accommodations Policy:** To request academic accommodations, students must first consult with the college’s Disability Services Counselor located in the Gateway Bldg., Rm. 344, (307) 268-2557, bheur@caspercollege.edu. This individual is responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students requesting accommodations, determining eligibility for accommodations, and helping students request and use appropriate accommodations. If you
need academic accommodations because of a disability, please inform me as soon as possible. See me privately after class or during my office hours.

**Workshop Groups**

**Group I --**

**Group II --**

**Group III --**

**SYLLABUS**

The following calendar is subject to revision based upon an assessment of the needs, progress, and interests of the class. Additional stories may be distributed. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain and read missed materials before our next class. Stories next to each date should be read before that class meets.


Feb. 1 -- Discuss **Point of Attack**
“Death in the Woods” by Sherwood Anderson; Chapter from Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*; “Pie Dance” by Molly Giles
Writing Exercise __________________________________________

Feb. 8 -- Discuss **Character Development**
“Hands” by Sherwood Anderson; “Chablis” by Donald Barthelme; “Over the River and Through the Wood” by John O’Hara; “Honeymoon” by Katherine Mansfield
Writing Exercise __________________________________________

Feb. 15 – No Class; President’s Day

Feb. 22 -- Discuss **Point of View and Dialogue**
“How to Talk to a Hunter” by Pam Houston; “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway; “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” by Amy Hempel
Writing Exercise __________________________________________

Feb. 29 -- Discuss **Theme**
“Grief” by Anton Chekhov; “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson; “The Hitchhiking Game” by Milan Kundera; “Sixpence” and “Garden Party” by Katherine Mansfield
Writing Exercise __________________________________________

(Group I distributes stories for March 7th workshop)

March 7 -- Discuss **Plot**
“Say Yes” by Tobias Wolff; “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin; “The Turkey” by Flannery O’Connor; “A Cup of Tea” by Katherine Mansfield
Writing Exercise __________________________________________

**WORKSHOP GROUP I**

(Group II distributes stories for March 21st workshop)
March 14-18 – SPRING BREAK

March 21 -- Discuss Setting
“There Will Come Soft Rains,” by Ray Bradbury; “In the Gloaming” by Alice Dark;
“A&P” by John Updike

WORKSHOP GROUP II
(Group III distributes stories for March 28th workshop)
Writing Exercise ____________________________

March 28 -- Discuss Style and Voice
“Thanksgiving” by Bill Roorbach; “He” by Katherine Anne Porter; “Heat” by Joyce
Carol Oates
Writing Exercise ____________________________

WORKSHOP GROUP III
(Group I distributes stories for April 4th workshop)

April 4 -- Discuss Figurative and Descriptive Language
“We Didn’t” by Stuart Dybek; “The Second Tree from the Corner” by E.B. White;
“Taking the Veil” by Katherine Mansfield
Writing Exercise ____________________________

WORKSHOP GROUP I
(Group II distributes stories for April 11th workshop)

April 11 -- Discuss Symbol
“A Story for Children” by Svaka Jakobstdottir; “The Chrysanthemums” by Steinbeck;
“The Canary” by Katherine Mansfield
Writing Exercise ____________________________

WORKSHOP GROUP II
(Group III distributes stories for April 18th workshop)

April 14 – Withdrawal Deadline

April 18 -- “Silver Water” by Amy Bloom; “Vanka” by Chekhov; “The War Prayer” by Samuel
Clemons; “The Open Window” by Ambrose Bierce
Writing Exercise ____________________________

WORKSHOP GROUP III

April 25 – In-Class Revision Work

May 2 – PORTFOLIO, EXPRESSION SUBMISSION, AND ORAL ASSESSMENT DUE

May 9-12 – FINALS, t.b.a.