

# ENGLISH 418

Professor Mark Brazaitis

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Office Hours: Tuesday (11:30 to 12:45) and by appointment

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Class Hours: TTh 1-2:15 p.m.

Class Location: Armstrong 121

Objective: This is the capstone class in creative writing. In this class, you will complete a single, long writing project under the supervision of a graduate-student mentor as well as the professor. You will read an excerpt from your final project in December, at a venue open to the public. Your final project should be the best work you have ever done. In addition, you will read works of poetry, fiction, and memoir regarded as classics. They are works every writer should be familiar with.

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will complete a long writing project (40-50 pages of fiction or creative nonfiction or 20 pages of poetry or a combination). You will take daily quizzes on the class readings.

Quizzes: Whenever a published work is assigned to read, you will be quizzed on it. This brief, objective quiz is designed to give credit to students who do the reading and to encourage everyone to participate in class discussion about the works we read. Although there will be no make-up quizzes, your worst quiz score, including a quiz you might have missed, will be eliminated. If you will be absent on the day a quiz is given and you would like credit for having done the reading, you may submit to me (via an email attachment) a one-page summary of the work(s) before our class meets. **Note:** Additional reading may be assigned.

Texts: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin; *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories* (edited by Joyce Carol Oates); *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity* by James M. Cain; *Tell Me* by Kim Addonizio

Grades: Grades in this class will be based on the following: attendance/class participation (20 percent), quizzes (20 percent), written feedback given to fellow students on their writing (10 percent); project drafts (20 percent); final writing project (30 percent).

Grading Key: 100=A+; 94-99=A; 90-93=A-; 85-89=B+; 83-84=B; 80-82=B-; 75-79=C+; 73-74=C; 70-72=C-; 65-69=D+; 63-64=D; 60-62=D-; 59 and below=F.

Attendance: Attendance will be graded as follows: 0-2 absences (A); 3 absences (B); 4 absences (C); 5 or more absences (F). **Note:** You will flunk the course if you have five or more absences.

Extra credit: You may attend and write a one-page review of any two of the “special events” listed below. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. It should be at least 250-words (one, double-spaced page) long. (Please type your review.) Each extra credit assignment counts for four extra quiz points or four extra writing draft points. You are encouraged to attend all of the events.

## Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, August 19 Get acquainted

Thursday, August 21 Read: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. Lecture and in-class writing.

Tuesday, August 26 Read: Part 1 of *Tell Me*. Lecture and in-class writing.

Thursday, August 28 Read: Part 2 of *Tell Me*. Lecture and in-class writing.

Tuesday, September 2 Read: Part 3 of *Tell Me*. Lecture and in-class writing. **Due to mentors:** At least 10 pages of prose or 5 pages of poetry.

Thursday, September 4 Read: Part 4 of *Tell Me*. Lecture and in-class writing.

Tuesday, September 9 Meet with mentors. No class meeting.

**Special Event:** Tuesday, September 9, at 7:30 p.m. in room 130 of Colson Hall, fiction writer George Singleton will be reading.

Thursday, September 11 Read: “Battle Royal” and “Red-Headed Baby” in the *Oxford Book of American Short Stories*. Lecture and in-class writing.

**Special Event:** Monday, September 15, at 11 a.m. in room 130 of Colson Hall, poet Kelly Moffett will be reading.

Tuesday, September 16 Read: “The Lottery” and “Heat” in the *Oxford Book of American Short Stories*. Lecture and in-class writing.

Thursday, September 18 Read: “The Reach” and “The Drowned Life” in the *Oxford Book of American Short Stories*. Lecture and in-class writing.

**Special Event:** Thursday, September 18, at 7:30 p.m. in the Robinson Reading Room (downtown library), fiction writer and poet Michael Blumenthal will be reading.

Tuesday, September 23 Read: “Hunters in the Snow” and “How to Become a Writer” in the *Oxford Book of American Short Stories*. Lecture and in-class writing.

Thursday, September 25 **Due to the workshop:** a revision (and expansion) of what you’ve written so far: 20 pages of prose/10 pages of poetry (or a combination thereof). Bring in sufficient copies for your classmates and your professor. Make sure to give a copy to your mentor.

Tuesday, September 30 Workshop

Thursday, October 2 Workshop

Tuesday, October 7 Workshop

Thursday, October 9 Workshop

Tuesday, October 14 Fall break

Thursday, October 16 Read: “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin; reread: *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin.

**Special Event:** Thursday, September 16, at 7:30 p.m. in the Robinson Reading Room of the downtown library, Marianne Boruch will be reading.

Tuesday, October 21 Read: “Hell-Heaven” and “Edison, New Jersey” in the *Oxford Book of American Short Stories*

Thursday, October 23 No class – writing day.

Tuesday, October 28 Read: Pages 1 to 73 of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Thursday, October 30 Read: Pages 74 to the end of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Tuesday, November 4 No Class – Election Day – Please Vote Responsibly

Thursday, November 6 Due: Rough draft of your final project. Bring in enough copies for your professor and everyone in the class. Give a copy to your mentor.

Tuesday, November 11 Workshop

Thursday, November 13 Workshop

Tuesday, November 18 Workshop

Thursday, November 20 Workshop

## **Thanksgiving Break --- Enjoy**

Tuesday, December 2 Read: *Double Indemnity* by James M. Cain

Thursday, December 4 Rehearse final reading. **Due: Final project.**

Tuesday, December 9. Final reading— 130 Colson Hall. Invite your family and friends.

## **Social Justice at West Virginia University**

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

## **English Major Program Goals**

Upon completing a B.A. in English, a student should be able to:

1. Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts.

2. Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language.
3. Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

Four aspects of Goal 1 are especially important. A student should be able to:

- Identify genre conventions and analyze their effects
- Identify and analyze effects of complexity or ambiguity
- Locate texts in social, economic, political, and literary history
- Connect a text to other literary or cultural texts

Not all English courses will address all three goals; some will focus particularly on one goal. However, the English major curriculum as a whole will provide multiple opportunities to address all of the goals.