

ENGLISH 312/001

Professor Mark Brazaitis

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Office Hours: Tuesday (2-4) and by appointment

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Class Hours: Tuesday, 4-6:50

Class Location: Armstrong 123

Objective: In this class, you will learn how to become a better fiction writer. To become a better fiction writer, you must dedicate yourself to both writing and reading fiction, and this class will allow you to do both.

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will read more than a dozen short stories and two novels and write at least two short stories of between five and twenty pages. In addition, you will be required to complete ten short writing exercises. Finally, you will be evaluated on the written feedback you give to your classmates.

Quizzes: Whenever a published short story or novel is assigned, 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 are unable to attend a class and you would like credit for the quiz, you may email me (as an attachment) a 250-word summary of the reading before class.

Take-Home Exercises: Take-home exercises are given below. They should be at least a page but no more than three pages. You should type all take-home exercises because you will be handing them in. Please hand in the take-home exercises on time, as late exercises will be penalized. (If you are going to miss a class, have a classmate deliver your take-home exercise to me or send it to me as an email attachment before class. No take-home exercise will be accepted more than a week after it is due.)

Texts: *Indignation* (Philip Roth); *What the Thunder Said* (Janet Peery); *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead* (Randall Kenan); and *Mule* (Tony D'Souza).

Grades: Grades in this class will be based on the following: attendance/class participation (10 percent); quizzes (20 percent), take-home exercises (30 percent); feedback given to fellow students (10 percent); short stories (30 percent). Note on absences: Two absences are a problem. Three put you at risk of failing.

Extra credit: You may attend and write a one-page review of any three of the “special events” listed below. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. (Please type your review.) Each of the extra credit assignments counts for

four extra points on one of your take-home assignments. You are encouraged to attend all the events.

Note on your writing: You are expected to produce quality *literary* writing. Please, no genre writing (science fiction, romance, horror, fantasy). The world you create in your fiction doesn't necessarily have to be realistic but your characters must be human (or anthropomorphic) and complex.

Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, January 15 Get acquainted.

Tuesday, January 22 Read: Pages 1 through 123 in *Indignation*.

Special Event: January 28: A reading by fiction writer Mark Brazaitis and poet Amanda Cobb, Gold Ballroom (Mountainlair), 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, January 29 Read: Pages 124 to the end of *Indignation*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which your protagonist has an awkward encounter with a potential romantic interest. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, February 5 Read: "Prologue: Set Me as a Seal Upon Thine Heart" (page 1) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which your protagonist runs afoul of an authority figure or entity. Workshop of stories

Tuesday, February 12 Read: "Fits and Starts" (page 27) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which your protagonist reunites with a sibling he/she hasn't seen in years. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: February 12: A Valentine's reading by poet James Harms, nonfiction writer Katie Fallon, fiction writer Tony Christini, and others to benefit the Appalachian Prison Book Project, Colson Hall room 130, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 19 Read: "Signs and Wonders" (page 111) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene set in the past. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, February 26 "No Liquor Sold to Indians Past Dark" (page 179) and "Garden of the Gods" (page 205) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene set in a workplace. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: February 26: A reading by fiction writers Kevin Oderman and Jessie Van Eerden, Robinson Reading Room (downtown library), 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 5 Read: “Great Men and Famous Deeds” (page 217) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which an outcast from society (or a group) appears. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: March 5: A reading by nonfiction writer Valerie Boyd, Robinson Reading Room (downtown library), 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 12 Read: “How Okies Look to Natives” (page 237) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which your protagonist suffers from an irrational (or a rational) fear. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, March 19 Read: “All of the House That Stood” (page 265) and “Worldly Goods” (page 281) in *What the Thunder Said*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which food figures prominently.

Special Event: March 20: A reading by poet Mary Ann Samyn, Colson Hall room 130, 7:30 p.m.

March 23 to April 1 Spring Recess – Enjoy!

Tuesday, April 2 Read: Pages 1-145 of *Mule*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Revise one of your take-home assignments (if it received less than a 90). Hand in both the first draft and your revision. If all of your take-home assignments received a 90 or better, write a scene in which your protagonist does something illegal. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, April 9 Read: Pages 146 to the end of *Mule*. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, April 16 Read: “Clarence and the Dead” (page 1) and “Things of This World” (page 24) in *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: April 18: A reading by students published in WVU’s literary magazine, *Calliope*, Colson Hall room 130, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 23 Read: “The Foundation of the Earth” (page 49), “The Origin of Whales” (page 73), and “Cornsilk” (page 88) in *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: April 25: A reading by graduates of WVU’s MFA in Creative Writing Program, Rhododendron Room (Mountainlair), 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 30 Workshop of stories.

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Core Values/Social Justice at West Virginia University

The following core values establish the foundation for Social Justice at West Virginia University.

Every person has intrinsic worth and dignity;

Respect for the law is fundamental;

Freedom from fear is universal;

A climate of opportunity, mutual respect, and understanding engenders a feeling that the future should be shared by all community members;

There is an absence of discrimination and harassment based on age, color, disability, ethnic origin, marital status, pregnancy, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status; and

The rich diversity of people, their cultures, and the bonds that tie people together are appreciated and celebrated.