

## **Creative Writing: Fiction**

English 212: Section 2, Spring 2013

M, W, F 1:30PM-2:20PM in Armstrong Hall 119

Instructor Name: Connie Pan

E-mail: cpan1@mix.wvu.edu

Office Hours: W 11:30AM-1:00PM and by appointment

Office Location: Colson 330

“We write to taste life twice.”

--Anaïs Nin

“We’re existentially alone on the planet. I can’t know what you’re thinking and feeling and you can’t know what I’m thinking and feeling. And the very best works construct a bridge across that abyss of human loneliness.”

--David Foster Wallace

### **Objective**

The goal of this course is to transform you from a daydreaming light-reader, sometimes-scribble-when-I-think-of-something-good, have-lots-of-ideas-but-I-never-see-them-through writer into a serious writer through the disciplined and dedicated practice of reading, writing, and analysis of fiction. Did I mention we’re going to have whales of fun?

### **Required Texts (in order of appearance)**

- *Blasphemy* by Sherman Alexie
- *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me* edited by Kate Bernheimer
- *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz

### **Required Materials**

- One thumb drive/flash drive
- Two notebooks (one for class notes / in-class writing and one for your Writer’s Notebook)
- Two folders (one for class handouts and one that will be submitted to me as your portfolio)
- Access to a printer, computer paper, and ink

### ***POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND OTHER THINGS***

#### **Attendance**

I hope all of you attend class 100% of the time; however, if you must miss class due to illness, winter doldrums, personal emergency, messy break-up in which you cannot get out of sweatpants and off the couch, religious observances, concert, away basketball game, etc., you are responsible for the assignments, handouts, and material that you missed. As for lateness, things--like the PRT (PRT=Partially Reliable Transportation?)--happen, but excessive lateness will affect your grade. Attendance will be graded as

follows: 0-2 absences (A); 3-4 absences (B); 5-6 absences (C); 7 absences (D); 8 or more absences (F).

### **Participation**

Everyone is expected to contribute their ideas, insights, and interpretations to class discussion. This weighs heavily on your being prepared. Being prepared means not only completing the work before the start of class but having read and digested the material thoroughly and thoughtfully. You should read everything three times. Come to class prepared to answer questions and discuss the material. Lively discussion makes for a better experience for all; let's keep the tumbleweeds and crickets on the other side of the door.

### **Grades and Major Assignments**

All work should for this class should be typed and printed from a computer. Please include a heading that states your name (I love knowing who you are), my name (I like being reminded of who I am), the class, the date (I never know what day it is, but, not to worry, I always manage to be in the right place at the right time--knock on koa wood), and a concise description of the assignment. Double-space all work with the exception of Critiques. (We will critique a lot, so save those trees. PS I love it when people print on both sides of a page.) If the assignment exceeds one page, include your last name and page number in the top right-hand corner. Collate all work before class. (Morgantown is windy.) Handwritten work will not be accepted. (My eyes apologize.)

Grades in this class will be based on the following: Attendance and Participation (10 percent); Writer's Notebook (5 percent); Discussion Questions (5 percent); Final Reading (5 percent); Workshop Critiques (10 percent); Online Discussion Board Posts / Reading Responses (15 percent); Writing Exercises (20 percent); your original creative work to be critiqued by the class, revised, and collected in a portfolio with a short introduction to your work and an explanation of your growth as a writer throughout the course (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. Note: If you miss more than seven classes, you will not pass this class. Because this is a workshop-designed course, your success depends heavily on you being an active presence in class. We love hearing your voice.

### **Late Work and Electronic Copies**

Late papers and electronic copies will not be accepted except under extraordinary circumstances. An extension must be approved and prearranged in advance with me. Your grade may still be penalized for lateness. This will be the most severe I will ever be, I swear.

### **Brief Explanations of Some of the Major Assignments:**

**Writer's Notebook** - You will keep a separate notebook in which you will write, paste, or tape anything that inspires you and your writing: images, photos, quotes, song lyrics,

excerpts from stories / poems / essays, charts, magazine articles, etc. Try to record at least one thing a day. The point of keeping this notebook is to encourage you to observe the world around you more and to revisit the things that inspire you when your Muse calls in sick. Your Writer's Notebook will be turned in twice throughout the course of the semester. Please bring it to every class and carry it with you constantly. I will ask you to share from them often.

**Discussion Questions** - You will be responsible for leading the discussion for at least one of the readings. On the day your reading is due, you will email thought and discussion-provoking questions to me, and I will make copies for the class. Please submit your numbered questions including the author and the title of the work in .doc format by noon of the day you direct discussion. When you lead discussion for a reading, you do not have to write an Online Reading Response.

**Writing Exercises** - You will write ten pieces of flash fiction this term. Each will be an exercise aimed at developing an aspect of the craft of fiction writing. You will workshop these short pieces in small groups. In these small groups, you will submit, distribute, discuss, and vote on the flash. Submission and distribution will all occur on eCampus. Discussion and voting will all occur in class. Each piece of flash and vote is worth up to ten points.

**Workshop Story** - For this class you will write one original short story. Your story should be 7-15 pages. If you choose to turn in flash fiction for workshop, please turn in three flash fiction pieces. If you use a writing exercise make sure it is reasonably revised. Your effort will be calculated in the Portfolio grade. More about the portfolio towards the end of the semester.

**Workshop Critiques** - Please print two copies, one for the writer and one for me, to be turned in on Workshop Wednesdays. Each Critique is worth up to ten points. \*More on Workshop Critiques following this section.

**Final Reading** - In lieu of a final exam, we will celebrate the culmination of your labor of love for the word with a final reading. For this event, you will prepare a short reading, approximately three minutes, of your work.

**Online Discussion Board** - In order to assure you complete the readings, there will be a Reading Response due to the Discussion Board prior to discussion. For Discussion Board Posts, see the glossary for guidance. In addition to your post, please respond to at least one of your peer's posts per reading. While this is considered informal writing, please engage with the texts, ideas, and each other professionally. Your Discussion Board posts should be approximately 500 words. Your responses to posts should be approximately 150 words. Each Reading Response is worth up to ten points. Each response to a peer's reading is worth up to five points. \*More on Reading Responses following this section.

### **Additional Help**

I am always available to help you with any questions regarding the course. However, if you would like additional support:

#### **WVU Writing Center**

Web address: <http://english.wvu.edu/centers-projects/writing-center>

Phone: (304) 293-5788

#### **University Counseling Services**

Web address: <http://well.wvu.edu/ccpps>

Phone: (304) 293-4431

### **Disabilities**

If you have a documented learning disability or any special needs that may impair your participation and / or performance in class, please make me aware of it as soon as possible, so that I may better accommodate you.

Email: access2@mail.wvu.edu

Phone: (304) 293-6700

Voice/TDD: (304) 293-7740

### **Extra credit**

You may attend and write a single-spaced one-page review of two special events connected to the English Department. Please get approval from me for your special event in advance. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. The extra credit assignment is worth up to five points counted towards Writing Exercises. In the Class Schedule are pre-approved events listed as Reading Opportunities. The English Department and I would love to see your beaming face there.

### **Social Justice Policy 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.

### **Not-So-Brief Explanations of Some of the Major Assignments:**

#### **TIPS FOR WRITING A CRITIQUE**

- Keep in mind when writing your critique that we honor the Social Justice Policy. This class is a safe haven for tough and sensitive issues. Undoubtedly through exploring these issues we will gain a better understanding of the world and of ourselves. Of course, I reserve the right to navigate the discussion if the discussion needs navigation.
- Please ensure that your criticism is *constructive* criticism. If you think the main character is a flat character, please suggest ways to develop that character.
- Please comment on the writing, not the writer.
- Try your best to avoid rewriting the writer's story and comment on the material at hand.
- It is poor writership (think sportmanship for writers) to cross out another writer's lines. If you feel the urge to cut something, mark the margin and explain why. If you feel the urge to cut a line, consider what isn't working within the line and make a suggestion.

1.) Read the story once. Let it marinate; get familiar with its aboutness. Toss it around in that subconscious.

2.) Read the story a second time and, while reading, make marginal comments.

### A Workshop Key for the Margins:

\* or <3 = Awesome

:) = Funny

X/X = Expand and Explode

? = Necessary? Unclear?

Don't limit your symbols. Not only the writer's work but

text. For example: <3 the character development here. The dialogue helps me understand the protagonist's motivation. X/X the scene. This interaction seems to hint the heart of the conflict. Extend the scene for pacing and to draw out the tension in the story. Now, that's way more informative than a simple <3, isn't it? Copious marginal comments will make typing up Critiques volcanoes easier. I promise you.

comments to AWKftM offer your reactions to also engage with the

3.) Write a Critique for the story. First, concisely summarize the story. Who are the main characters? What's the heart and soul of the story? If this story had a Twitter bio, what would its 140 characters be? Second, inform the writer of what they are doing well. Praise, praise, praise! Third, follow up your praise with suggestions and questions. What does the story need to get to a polished-story-status, one of those stories you'd love to read in the glossies (*Tin House*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*)? Your Critiques should be one page single-spaced. Please include your email address in case the writer has any questions about your Critique. In addition to our standard heading, include the writer's name and the story title.

### READING RESPONSE GLOSSARY FOR ONLINE DISCUSSION BOARD

**1. Write a Review:** Write a formal description of the identity of the story. In your description, discuss major characters and other story elements we should notice. The formal description could include but is not limited to: POV, omniscience, reliability or unreliability of the narrator, the style, voice, diction, narrative distance, literal vs. figurative language, structure, time, pacing, traditional vs. experimental story, the traditions of genre the author is writing within (realism, absurdism, magical realism, fairy tale, science fiction, satire, historical fiction, myth, allegory, parable, confession, mystery, etc.).

**2. Questions for the Author:** State a writerly question(s) you might have for the story's author in terms of the specific choices that the writer made when writing the story. Try to choose questions aimed at how the story works. Also, try to choose questions with no definitive answer. Attempt to do your best to answer your question(s) using specific details from the story.

**3. Compare and Contrast:** Compare and contrast the story to another story we've read in class. Point out what's to be learned in one story when examining the other.

**4. Prose Imitation:** In *Sacred Wood*, T. S. Eliot states, "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal." Especially in the beginning of a writing career, imitation is a big part of finding your own voice and writing style. Mimic the writer's style. In your imitation exercise, try to capture the writer's voice and the story's essence by examining the specific story elements and to illustrate the writer's techniques and how they execute the story.

**5. Writing Prompt:** After explicating the author's craft, create a writing exercise based on an aspect of the piece. There is no need to complete the assignment, but you must explain how your writing prompt highlights an element of craft within the piece. A short example of the writing prompt may not only be fun, but it may help you reach the word count requirement!

### **CLASS SCHEDULE AND DAY-TO-DAY ASSIGNMENTS**

\*I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus according to the class's progress if the changes benefit the class.\*

#### **Monday, January 14**

*Class Activities:* Icebreakers, Course Introduction

*Homework:* Sign Student Agreement, scan student ID, and bring your favorite paragraph by your favorite author

*(re)Read:* Syllabus

#### **Wednesday, January 16**

*Class Activities:* Introduction to Writer's Notebooks, Introduction to R&R (Reading & Writing) Friday, Sign-up for Discussion Questions

#### **Friday, January 18**

*Class Activities:* Introduction to Flashy Monday, Sign-up for Workshop

*Write:* Flash Exercise #1

#### **Monday, January 21**

No Class. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

#### **Wednesday, January 23**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #1

*Class Activities:* Special Edition Flash Monday on Wednesday

*Read:* Alexie “What Ever Happened to Frank Snake Church?” by Sherman Alexie

**Friday, January 25**

*Class Activities:* Introduction to Workshop Wednesday using R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #2

**Monday, January 28**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #2

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

*Reading Opportunity:* Mark Brazaitis and Amanda Cobb Reading, Gold Ballroom, 7:30-9:00PM

**Wednesday, January 30**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* “Cry Cry Cry” by Sherman Alexie

**Friday, February 1**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Monday, February 4**

No Class. Conferences.

**Wednesday, February 6**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* “War Dances” by Sherman Alexie

**Friday, February 8**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #3

**Monday, February 11**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #3

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

Tuesday, February 12

*Reading Opportunity:* Valentine's Reading to benefit the Appalachian Prison Book Project, 130 Colson Hall, 7:30-9:00PM

**Wednesday, February 13**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* “Scenes from a Life” by Sherman Alexie

**Friday, February 15**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #4

**Monday, February 18**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #4

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Wednesday, February 20**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* "Breaking and Entering" by Sherman Alexie

**Friday, February 22**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #5

**Monday, February 25**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #5

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

Tuesday, February 26

*Reading Opportunity:* Kevin Oderman and Jessie Van Eerden Reading, Robinson Reading Room, Downtown Library, 7:30-9:00PM

**Wednesday, February 27**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* "The Search Engine" by Sherman Alexie

**Friday, March 1**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #6

**Monday, March 4**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #6

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

Tuesday, March 5

*Reading Opportunity:* Valerie Boyd Reading, Robinson Reading Room, 7:30-9:00PM

**Wednesday, March 6**



*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* “The Story of the Mosquito” by Lily Hoang & “Blue-Bearded Lover” by Joyce Carol Oates

**Friday, March 8**

*Class Activities:* Online R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #7

**Monday, March 11**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #7

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Wednesday, March 13**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* pp 1-75 of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

**Friday, March 15**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Monday, March 18**

No Class. Conferences.

**Wednesday, March 20**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* pp. 77-210 of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

*Reading Opportunity:* Mary Ann Samyn Reading, 130 Colson Hall, 7:30-9:00PM

**Friday, March 22**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #8

**Monday, March 25 - Friday March 29**

No Class. Spring Break!

**Monday, April 1**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #8

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Wednesday, April 3**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* pp 211-end of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

**Friday, April 5**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #9

**Monday, April 8**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #9

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Wednesday, April 10**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* “What the Conch Shell Sings When the Body is Gone” by Katherine Vaz

**Friday, April 12**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday

*Write:* Flash Exercise #10

**Monday, April 15**

*Due:* Flash Exercise #10

*Class Activities:* Flashy Monday

*Read:* Workshops

*Write:* Critiques

**Wednesday, April 17**

*Class Activities:* Workshop Wednesday

*Read:* “Ever After” by Kim Addonizio & “The Girl, the Wolf, the Crone” by Kellie Wells

Thursday, April 18

*Reading Opportunities:* Calliope Reading, 130 Colson Hall, 7:30-9:00PM & 418

Capstone Reading, 130 Colson Hall, 11:30 a.m.-1:00PM

**Friday, April 19**

*Class Activities:* R&R Friday, Introduction to Portfolio

*Write:* Revise and Compile Portfolio

**Monday, April 22**

**ATTN: Meet in Colson G18**

*Class Activities:* Revision

*Write:* Revise and Compile Portfolio

**Wednesday, April 24**

**ATTN: Meet in Colson G18**

*Class Activities:* Revision

*Write:* Revise and Compile Portfolio

Thursday, April 25

*Reading Opportunity:* MFA Reading, Rhododendron Room, Mountainlair, 7:30-9:00PM

**Friday, April 26**

**ATTN: Meet in Colson G18**

*Class Activities:* SEIs, Revision

*Write:* Revise and Compile Portfolio

**Monday, April 29**

No Class. Conferences.

*Write:* Revise and Compile Portfolio

**Wednesday, May 1**

*Class Activities:* Final Reading

*Write:* Revise and Compile Portfolio

**Friday, May 3**

*Class Activities:* Final Reading Continued (if needed), Turn in Portfolios

\*Portfolios Returned Before Final Exam Time Slot

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Student Agreement

(Please read the following agreement and return to me.)

I have thoroughly read the syllabus and the schedule of work. I understand what is expected of me regarding the course work, policies, and procedures.

Student Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_

