

ENGLISH 212/002

Professor Mark Brazaitis

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Office Hours: Tuesday (11:30-1), Thursday (11:30-1) and by appointment

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Class Hours: TTh 10:00-11:15

Class Location: 313 Armstrong

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

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will read eighteen short stories, one novel and one writer's guide (*Bird by Bird*) and write at least one short story. In addition, you will be required to complete seven short writing exercises. Finally, you will read and comment on the work of your classmates.

Quizzes: Whenever a short story 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 stories we read. Although there will be no make-up quizzes, your worst quiz score, including a quiz you might have missed, will be eliminated.

Take-Home Exercises: Take-home exercises are given below. They should be between 3/4 of a page and three pages. You should type all take-home exercises because you will be handing them in. For full credit, please hand in the take-home exercises on time. Late assignments will be accepted (with a 10-point penalty) only during the week after they are due. After this, they will receive a zero. If you are going to miss class, have a classmate deliver your take-home exercise to me or send it to me as an email attachment before class.

Texts: *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories* (edited by Joyce Carol Oates); *Election* (Tom Perrotta); *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (Anne Lamott).

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 stories (10 percent); take-home exercises (30 percent), short story (20 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); 3-4 absences (B); 5-7 absences (C); 8 or more absences (F).

Extra credit I: You may attend and write a one-page review of two 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 a take-home assignment.

Extra credit II: You may re-write your short story for a maximum of four extra credit points. You must hand in your revised story no later than one week after you have received comments on it in class.

Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, August 25 Get acquainted

Thursday, August 27 Lecture (character) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, September 1 Read: “Rip Van Winkle” (page 18), “The Wives of the Dead” (page 63) and “Hunters in the Snow” (page 621). **Due**: Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Describe a character both physically and via an action.

Thursday, September 3 Lecture (plot) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, September 8 Read: “The Tell Tale Heart” (page 92), “Two Kinds” (page 715) and “The Persistence of Desire” (page 560). **Due**: Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Write a brief story or scene with a classic conflict (i.e. person versus machine, person versus nature, person versus himself or herself).

Thursday, September 10 Lecture (point of view) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, September 15 Read: “The Yellow Wallpaper” (page 154), “The Management of Grief” (page 698) and “Red-Headed Baby” (page 365). **Due**: Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Write a scene in the first person (i.e. the narrator uses ‘I’). Write the same scene with a different narrator (i.e. second person, third-person limited, third-person omniscient).

Thursday, September 17 Lecture (setting) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, September 22 Read: “In a Far Country” (page 191), “Sonny’s Blues” (page 409) and “A Distant Episode” (page 385). **Due**: Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Write a scene set in a specific place (a club, a coffee house, the Mountainlair) in Morgantown.

Thursday, September 24 Lecture (dialogue) and in-class exercises

Special Event: Monday, September 28, at 7:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, poet Campbell McGrath will be reading.

Tuesday, September 29 Read: “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” (page 296), “Big Bertha Stories” (page 655) and “The Man Who Was Almost a Man” (page 372). **Due:** Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Write a conversation between two people of very different backgrounds.

Thursday, October 1 Lecture (style) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, October 6 Read: “Sweat” (page 353), “Heat” (page 607) and “Are These Actual Miles?” (page 583). **Due:** Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Write a story opening or scene in the style of one of the authors we’ve read so far in class.

Thursday, October 8 Lecture (autobiographical stories) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, October 13 Read: Chapters 1 through 8 of *Election* by Tom Perrotta. **Due:** Take-home exercise. Take-home exercise: Write a fictional scene in which you (or someone like you) is a character.

Thursday, October 15 Read: Chapter 9 to the end of *Election* by Tom Perrotta.

Special Event: Monday, October 19, at 7:30 p.m. in 202 Brooks Hall, novelist and short story writer Janet Peery will be reading.

Tuesday, October 20 Read: “Getting Started,” “Short Assignments,” “Shitty First Drafts,” and “Perfectionism” “Looking Around,” “The Moral Point of View,” “Broccoli,” “Radio Station KFKD,” “Index Cards,” and “Calling Around” in *Bird by Bird*.

Thursday, October 22 Writing Day—No Class! If you haven’t started writing your story for the class, do so now!

Tuesday, October 27 Discuss writing workshop procedures and participate in a trial workshop. First stories due.

Thursday, October 29 Workshop

Special Event: Monday, November 2, at 7:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, fiction writer and poet—and your English 212 instructor!—Mark Brazaitis will be reading.

Tuesday, November 3 Workshop

Thursday, November 5 Workshop

Tuesday, November 10 Workshop

Thursday, November 12 Workshop

Tuesday, November 17 Workshop

Thursday, November 19 Workshop

Saturday, November 21—Sunday, November 29: Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, December 1 Workshop

Thursday, December 3 Workshop

Tuesday, December 8 Workshop

Thursday, December 10 Workshop

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.