

ENGLISH 212

Professor Mark Brazaitis

Office: 219 Colson Hall

Office telephone: 293-9707

Office Hours: Tuesday (2:30-4), Thursday (2:30-3:45) and by appointment

Email: Mark.Brazaitis@mail.wvu.edu

Class Hours: TTh 1-2:15

Class Location: Woodburn G21

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). (If you are absent eight or more times, for whatever reason, you cannot pass the course.)

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 two weeks after you have received comments on it in class.

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 and complex. No superheroes, trolls, elves, etc.

Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, January 11 Get acquainted

Thursday, January 13 Lecture (character) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, January 18 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, January 20 Lecture (plot) and in-class exercises.

Tuesday, January 25 Lecture (point of view) and in-class exercises. 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, January 27 No class. Use the time to write!

Tuesday, February 1 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, February 3 Lecture (setting) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, February 8 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.

Special Event: February 10: A reading by creative nonfiction writers Kevin Oderman and Erin Tocknell, Robinson Reading Room, WVU Library, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 10 Lecture (dialogue) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, February 15 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, February 17 Lecture (style) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, February 22 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, February 24 Lecture (autobiographical stories) and in-class exercises

Tuesday, March 1 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, March 3 Read: Chapter 9 to the end of *Election* by Tom Perrotta.=

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Special Event: March 7: A reading by creative nonfiction writer Randall Kenan in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 8 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, March 10 To be announced

Tuesday, March 15 Discuss writing workshop procedures and participate in a trial workshop. First stories due.

Thursday, March 17 Workshop

March 19 to March 27 Spring Recess – Enjoy!

Tuesday, March 29 Workshop

Thursday, March 31 Workshop

Tuesday, April 5 Workshop

Thursday, April 7 Workshop

Tuesday, April 12 Workshop

Thursday, April 14 Workshop

Tuesday, April 19 Workshop

Special Event: April 21: Reading by students published in *Calliope*, WVU's undergraduate literary magazine, 130 Colson Hall, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 21 Workshop

Tuesday, April 26 Workshop

Special Event: April 28: A reading by graduating MFA in Creative Writing students, Rhododendron Room, Mountainlair, 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 28 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.