

Short Story & Novel – English 132

Fall 2012

“The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps, then someday in the future, you will gradually, without ever noticing, live your way into the answer.” – Rainer Maria Rilke

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Course Description:

“What do you believe?” It’s

a question all of us have been asked, sometime or other, often in the context of religion or morality. We respond with something that, if we’re honest with ourselves, is less than satisfying and seems too short, too simple, too uncomplicated. The truth is, it’s impossible to contain our beliefs in words, but we constantly come

back to them because their implications are far-reaching. Our beliefs determine how we act toward others, what we value, how we spend our time, how we treat the earth and living creatures, what standards we set for ourselves and what we hold others to, how we reflect on our days, how we measure good and evil, justice and injustice, right and wrong. And beliefs are messy. They change as life moves forward and as we learn about the world, they’re challenged as life gives us difficulty and opportunity, and very often they conflict with our own day-to-day actions. What we *say* we believe and what we *do* can be two different things.



In many ways, then, literature dives into the messiness of beliefs and often provides us with more questions than answers. The great Russian short story writer Anton Chekhov said that an artist should work consciously to “correctly formulate a problem,” not resolve the problems cleanly. That task, Chekhov said, should be left to the audience who will sort out the message “each according to his own taste.” In other words, the short stories and novels we read this semester will depict characters who struggle with how to act, what to believe, what path to follow, who to trust and love, how to think of themselves, how to deal with pain and injustice, and how to know what (if anything) is true. Ultimately good literature asks the complex question: how can we really believe anything for certain, and yet how can we survive this life without something to believe in?

The short stories and novels I’ve chosen for this semester are some of the best ever composed—I really believe that. And I’ve chosen fairly contemporary works, since these are the pieces you will seldom be exposed to in the survey courses. They are arranged thematically, but not necessarily chronologically, so we’ll need to keep in mind when the works were written, what the cultural climate was like, what was going on in history and so on—things which we’ll dive into through supplemental readings or information I’ll provide in class. Remember that context is just as important as the words on the page. After all, could you write the same story right now that you’d write fifty years from now, or in a different country, or as a different person with different experiences?

One more thing to consider: while we’ll be concerned this semester with belief, unbelief, and action, I want to be sure we’re not simply looking for a “moral to the story” in our discussions. The stories we’ll read are far more complex than that, and they work against any neat, easy, black-and-white understanding of how to live. In fact, we’ll probably talk more about the *challenges* to belief than we will formulate any real solutions; but that’s our reality anyway—we constantly live the questions and hope that doing so will lead us to a complete answer.

Required Texts: (available at University bookstore or online)

- Baush, Richard and R.V. Cassill. Ed. *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction, Shorter Seventh Edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006. ISBN: 978-0-393-92612-4
- Chin, Frank. *Donald Duk*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1991. ISBN: 978-0-918-27383-3
- Kahf, Mohja. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. Carroll & Graf: New York, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-786-71519-0
- Potok, Chaim. *The Book of Lights*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1997. ISBN: 978-0-449-00114-1

Attendance:

Your regular attendance is required, and your grade may be lowered for poor attendance, down to and including "F." There are no "excused" or "unexcused" absences; rather, you are permitted **three** absences total for the semester. A fourth absence will result in a full letter grade reduction for the final course grade (A to a B, B to a C, etc.). With a sixth absence, you will fail the course. These numbers include all absences for whatever reason.

If you miss a class, YOU must take responsibility to get the class notes and information from a classmate, or contact me directly. All handouts are available on eCampus, and in-class reading quizzes **cannot** be made up. Remember that if you're absent on a day that a Reading Response is due, you must bring it to the next class. No exceptions.

Lateness and Class Etiquette

You need to come to class on time, so we can get started with the material and so you don't miss handouts or instructions. **If you come in after class starts, do so without disruption and be sure to check in with me after class to be sure I mark you as present.** If you are more than 10 minutes late on two occasions, this will result in an absence; habitual lateness, even a few minutes, may be reflected in your participation/etiquette grade.

Please silence your cell phones and electronics before class begins (as opposed to setting phones to vibrate, which everyone can still hear). Students who text, check messages, listen to iPods or do work for other classes will be asked to leave and take an absence. This is one of the quickest ways to frustrate an instructor and indicate a lack of interest in the course. Further, distracting behavior will be reflected in your participation grade. Never, ever text message in my class. Ever.

Class Participation/ Daily Discussion:

Class discussion will be vital component of this course. You'll find that even the most difficult reading assignments will take on new meaning after you discuss them with your classmates and have more insight into each text's importance. This is why class time is so valuable. I expect each of you not only to offer comments or to help summarize the reading but to also pose questions for the class, connect the day's readings to previous readings, and discuss the reading's themes and issues. Yes, I really mean everyone.

Your participation grades will be loosely measured by the following descriptions:

Participation (10% of course grade):

- **"A" Participation:** You are prepared for every class period and contribute to class discussion every (or almost every) day. You have insightful and relevant contributions and go "above and beyond" an average engagement with the day's readings. You respond to your peers comments and questions and help facilitate dialogue in the classroom.
- **"B" Participation:** You are prepared for most class periods and contribute to most class discussions. Comments are relevant and insightful and demonstrate a careful reading of the texts assigned. You respond to other's comments on a regular basis.
- **"C" Participation:** You are typically prepared for class and contribute to class discussion approximately half of the time. "C" participation reflects a "quiet" role in group work, but the student is not distracting or "off task."
- **"D" Participation:** You are often unprepared for class which is reflected both by a lack of participation and low quiz scores. This student rarely comments or adds insight to class discussion, shows little interest in the material, and is "off task" during class (reading non-relevant material, sending text messages, sleeping, etc...).

- **“F” Participation:** This student shares the same qualities as the “D” participation student. Additionally, this person distracts others, intentionally offends others, is disrespectful, or has missed 6 or more classes.

Reading Quizzes:

Reading quizzes will occur at least once a week, will be unannounced, and may occur any of our three class days. For this reason you’ll want to stay up to date with the reading assignments and be sure that, as you read, you’re understanding the main idea of the text. As for **READING STRATEGIES**, I suggest that you keep notes as you read (either in the margins or in an informal “reading journal”). If you dedicate a small notebook to this kind of note-keeping, you’ll have a great review tool for the mid-term and the final. Just write down each author’s name, the text’s title, and any other important information (publication date, author’s background, historical events that put the reading in context); then keep a list of key points the author makes, as well as some of the examples or ideas that he/she presents, or if it’s fiction or poetry, write a bullet point summary of what happens in the text, as well as main characters’ names. Even a few important or moving quotations can provide a good memory of the author and work, later on. These are just basic suggestions, but if you’d like more tips for note-taking or reading comprehension, just ask me or talk to one of the tutors at the Writing Center. There will be a lot of readings to keep track of this semester.

Response Papers (Due: Aug 31, Sept 21, Oct 12, Nov 2, and Dec 3)

Five times this semester you’ll be asked to submit a response paper (the weeks are marked on the schedule). In these papers you’ll analyze some aspect of the previous weeks’ readings (anything from the last time that a response was due) and seek to **synthesize two of the reading selections**. The one exception is during the weeks we’re reading the novels; then your response can look at the novel and a short story, two parts of the novel, or just two of the short stories. It’s up to you. You may compare a specific aspect of the readings, contrast their purpose or message, or explain how they address an issue with a certain kind of language or story-telling style. The topic of your response is up to you, but feel free to have it address the theme of belief, which we will constantly consider this semester. You simply want to **engage** with the reading in some way that looks closer at a specific idea, specific scenes, or a specific issue and **does not merely summarize the reading**. If you summarize the reading only, you will not get credit. Also remember to include examples from the text, along with page numbers. These papers can be semi-informal, meaning you are free to use “I think” or “I believe,” but do be sure to have a main point, expressed in a **thesis statement**. Ultimately these are a way for you to narrow in on a specific aspect of the reading and then express your ideas on what you’ve read.

Format: Your papers should be typed in Times New Roman 12 point font, double-spaced, printed in dark ink, and have one-inch margins. Place your name, date, and my name in the upper left-hand corner of the first page. The length is up to you, though I’d imagine they’d be at least 2 pages. You should also include a centered, informative title. Number all the pages except page one, and **staple together** (and yes, the staple is necessary!). **Remember to have a main idea about two or more texts, expressed in a thesis statement.** Finally, please be sure to **PROOFREAD ALL WORK**.

Examples (just some ideas; don’t limit yourself by these):

- Consider the ways that individual characters meet with **challenges to their beliefs**. How does growing up and moving away from the community (or at least experiencing life outside the home) encourage characters to question their beliefs and customs? How do characters blend their family’s beliefs and customs with other beliefs or popular culture? What ways do doubts creep in? How do specific scenes reveal a character’s core beliefs about decency, right/wrong, desire, suffering, and so on? What are some beliefs characters have that aren’t necessarily “religious,” but just as deeply felt?
- Discuss the **style of the texts**: you could talk about how one writer’s conversational style mirrors an intimate conversation and how that allows her to reveal certain emotions and regrets, while another author has more of a stand-offish feel that seems to say she’s holding something back and not telling you all of the story. Ask how some authors are telling the story in a more direct way, while others hint at their message; how do character descriptions make you root for a character with an obvious vice, despite your own beliefs in decency, or how does language create an image of someone without coming out and describing them?
- Look at **historical and cultural representation**: when you’re reading the short stories and novels, be sure you know when they were written. For some, the historical setting will be more obvious, such as in Potok’s novel *The Book of Lights*, which focuses on World War II and the creation of the atomic bomb. But

even for stories such as Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh," the culture of the characters clashes with a much older historical site. Similarly, Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" reflects the short-sightedness of the 1920s and Tillie Olson's "O Yes" reflects the clash of racial tension in the 50s. Feel free to research time periods and historical issues as they come up in our readings, to add to your understanding.

- Look at **race or gender**: you could consider how African American authors Alice Walker and Jamaica Kincaid ask what it means to be a black female, or how Hemingway's depiction of masculinity compares to William Faulkner's or Ralph Ellison's male figures. Think about how beliefs about race and gender are challenged in these works, how certain notions of what it means to be black or Chinese or male or female, or straight or gay are upheld or confronted.

Grades:

To pass this course, you must: complete the mid-term and final exams, the five 2-page response papers, attend class, and participate in discussion.

Class Participation/ Etiquette:	10%
Reading Quizzes:	20%
Response Papers:	20%
Mid-term Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	30%

Office Hours:

Please think of my office as an extension of the classroom, and feel free to use my office hours to discuss any aspect of your reading or writing. I love to discuss literature, as you may have guessed. Come with questions about particular assigned texts, come with ideas you'd like to develop in your writing assignments, or just come to talk. You may also make an appointment with me; just ask.

Disability Services:

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with the WVU Office of Disability Services, located at G-30 in the Mountainlair (Phone: (304) 293-6700 Voice/TDD: (304) 293-7740 and email: access2@mail.wvu.edu) for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. Students who are already registered with the ODS and wish to receive accommodations in this course are strongly encouraged to share their Accommodation Letter with me in a timely manner.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

While this is not a writing class, per se, I still expect that **all writing you do in this class is your own**. Do not even copy a sentence of your response papers from another source or (obviously) your mid-term or final exams. Remember, too, that plagiarism counts as anything you hand in *as yours* that is *not yours*—whether you cut-n-paste portions from online, cut-n-paste a whole selection from online, have a friend write your paper, or hand in a paper written by someone else. Just don't do it and we'll remain friends. If you do, I will be your worst enemy... and you may fail the class.

Official Anti-Plagiarism Statement for the WVU English Dept: **Any attempt at plagiarism** will result in a 0 for the project and, in some cases, **for the entire course**. Plagiarism is defined as, "material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others" (English Department policy as outlined in JAC xiii). The policy also states that, "Academic dishonesty involves representing as your own work **any part** of work done by another; (and) submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent of all instructors concerned" (xiii). Such dishonesty not only includes taking work from other students and representing it as your own, but also taking whole papers or parts of papers or research from any other source (website, magazine, paper-writing services, etc.,) and representing them as your own work. This is never acceptable under any set of circumstances, and please know that I and the university take plagiarism *very seriously*. Both plagiarism and cheating are considered forms of academic dishonesty—a charge that will go on your permanent transcript from WVU. In clear cases, you will receive an F for the course and appropriate academic discipline. If you are ever in doubt about whether you're violating this policy, please talk to me.

Course Schedule: (assignments due on the day they are listed)

Date:	Reading Assignment:	Writing Assignments:
Mon. 8/20	Syllabus	
Wed. 8/22	“Belief in Higher Education: Why Tired Narratives Won't Do” (handout) Discuss history of the short story/ What do we mean when we talk about “belief”?	

Conflicts of Belief & Community/ Heritage

Fri. 8/24	Alexie: “What You Pawn I Will Redeem” (Web Link)	
Mon. 8/27	Walker: “Everyday Use” (776-782)	
Wed. 8/29	Achebe: “Marriage is a Private Affair” (Web Link)	
Fri. 8/31	Mukherjee: “The Management of Grief” (556-568); commentary (864-866)	Response Paper #1 Due (write on any 2 stories we've read up until this point)
Mon. 9/3	NO CLASS- LABOR DAY (get started on Chin novel over the break)	
Wed. 9/5	Chin: <i>Donald Duk</i> (Chapters 1-11, pages 1-85)	
Fri. 9/7	Chin: <i>Donald Duk</i> (Chapters 12-End, pages 86-172)	

Conflicts of Belief & “Freedom”

Mon. 9/10	Baldwin: “Sonny's Blues” (21-43)	
Wed. 9/12	Olson: “O Yes” (648-660)	
Fri. 9/14	Ellison: “King of the Bingo Game” (228-235); commentary (849-851)	
Mon. 9/17	Danticat: “A Wall of Fire Rising” (207-218)	
Wed. 9/19	Hurston: “The Conscience of the Court” (340-850)	
Fri. 9/21	Hemingway: “Hills Like White Elephants” (335-339); commentary (893)	Response Paper #2 Due (write on any 2 stories we've read since the last response paper was due OR on 2 scenes from the Chin novel OR on a scene from the novel and a scene from a short story)

Conflicts of Belief & War/Country

Mon. 9/24	O'Brien: “The Things They Carried” (603-615)	
Wed. 9/26	Roth: “Defender of the Faith” (PDF)	
Fri. 9/28	King: “Borders” (PDF)	
Mon. 10/1	Mid-Term review	
Wed. 10/3	Mid-Term exam	
Fri. 10/5	No class (get started on Potok novel)	
Mon. 10/8	Potok: <i>The Book of Lights</i> (read Chapters 1-4, which is all of Part One)	
Wed. 10/10	Potok: <i>The Book of Lights</i> (Chapters 5-7)	
Fri. 10/12	Potok: <i>The Book of Lights</i> (Chapters 8- the end of the novel)	Response Paper #3 Due (write on any 2 stories we've read since

		the last response paper was due, OR on 2 scenes from the Potok novel, OR on a scene from the novel and a scene from a short story)
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Conflicts of Belief & Gender

Mon. 10/15	Faulkner: "Barn Burning" (249-262)	
Wed. 10/17	Wright: "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (825-834)	
Fri. 10/19	NO CLASS	
Mon. 10/22	Gilman: "The Yellow Wallpaper" (302-313) and handout	
Wed. 10/24	Tan: "Rules of the Game" (712-719); Kincaid, "Girl" (429)	
Fri. 10/26	Olson: "Here I Stand, Ironing" (PDF)	

Conflicts of Belief & Relationships/ Home

Mon. 10/29	Cheever: "The Enormous Radio" (101-109)	
Wed. 10/31	Carver: "Why Don't You Dance" (PDF)	
Fri. 11/2	Mason: "Shiloh" (500-510); Beattie "Snow" (49-50)	Response Paper #4 Due (write on any 2 stories we've read since the last response paper was due)
Mon. 11/5	LeGuin: "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (454-458); article "Omelas State University" (Web Link)	
Wed. 11/7	Kahf: <i>The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf</i> (pages TBD)	
Fri. 11/9	Kahf: <i>The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf</i> (pages TBD)	
Mon. 11/12	Kahf: <i>The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf</i> (pages TBD)	
Wed. 11/14	Kahf: <i>The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf</i> (pages TBD)	
Fri. 11/16	No Class	
Nov. 17-Nov. 25	NO CLASS- THANKSGIVING BREAK	

Conflicts of Belief & Goodness

Mon. 11/26	O'Connor: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (616-627)	
Wed. 11/28	Vonnegut: "The Package" (PDF)	
Fri. 11/30	Carver: "Cathedral" (75-85); commentary (840-843)	
Mon. 12/3	Final Exam review day	Response Paper #5 Due (write on any 2 stories we've read since the last response paper was due, OR on 2 scenes from the Kahf novel, OR on a scene from the novel and a scene from a short story)
Wed. 12/5	Final Exam review day	
Fri. 12/7	Distribute Take Home Final; do course evaluations	