**ENGL 2005 Section 4: Intro to Writing Short Stories**

**Tues & Thurs 1:30 – 2:50 59 Allen Hall**

**Instructor: Julia Carey Arendell** **jcarey5@lsu.edu**

**Office Hours: Allen 212-T Tuesdays, 11am – 1pm or by appointment**

**Objectives:** Students will explore the foundations of writing fiction, including plot, characterization, and point of view, in a threefold structure: composing their own creative work, workshopping their peers, and reading contemporary published stories. Our goal is to change our perspective and begin to read as writers and editors who look for organization, technique, voice, and form. Most importantly, we will embrace the unending process of writing as creation and revision.

**Required Materials:** Reliable access to the internet and printing. Both can be utilized in Middleton Library. There is no required textbook for this course, as all readings will be scanned and posted to Moodle or available via hyperlinks.

The syllabus and course schedule are subject to change depending on how our class progresses and will be updated in a timely fashion on Moodle. Please check it routinely so you are prepared for every class.

**Conduct:**

No electronic devices allowed in class, including laptops, cell phones and tablets. These should remain powered off and put away. The only exception will be when we discuss the published stories, which you may read electronically, but when the brief discussion of that work is completed, these devices should be stowed. I will communicate each class when that time has come. Any in-class writing exercises will be handwritten. Please no eating of food during class.

**Success in this class relies upon:**

1: Your active participation. We are gathered together to share our thoughts about writing, and to collaborate upon our projects. Obviously, one cannot participate if they do not attend, so attendance is vital. Further, you may write truly insightful feedback on the author’s story, but it will not benefit the rest of us if you do not share those ideas. Speak your thoughts in class so they can be debated and appreciated. This will only help the writer see how their work is received. Your comments should reflect your sophistication and education as college students, reaching beyond “I liked it,” or “it was good.” Tell us why and how, what worked for you, and what didn’t. Give your perspective.

2: Respect of your colleagues. Honesty is pivotal in a workshop. No one can expect to improve their writing if they are not given candid feedback, and this can always be done in a manner that is respectful of others’ feelings. As the author, remember that the world of writing is about rejection and revision – so I recommend you record all of your peers’ perspectives and opinions, and sort through them later. If someone always tells you that your writing is brilliant, they are not giving any service to your work. Remember to keep your comments constructive and try to offer suggestions for improvement, not just complaints or compliments.

3: Turning your work in on time. Writers work on deadlines, which are never flexible. If you miss your deadline, the opportunity is over. Also, this is not like any other writing class where the relationship to the work owed is only between you and the instructor. All of the other students require your composition in order to get their reading and commenting prepared for class, so tardy work inconveniences everyone in the course. Be respectful of their time management.

4: Completion of all assignments. No late work will be accepted. There is no midterm or final in this course, so failure to turn in even one assignment can endanger a passing grade.

**Course Requirements:**

Participation: 10%

Presentation: 5%

Short Story #1: 20%

Short Story #2: 20%

Short Story #3: 20%

Workshop Comments: 10%

Final Portfolio: 15%

The “journal” will be a collection of responses to each published short story we discuss in class. I will collect it twice in the semester -- once at midterm, and again at the conclusion of our course. The stories will be scanned from contemporary literary journals and uploaded to the Moodle page. Students should read these stories and have their responses prepared *before* class so you are able to discuss them. I recommend you keep your journal typed and organized in a word processing file. It will be due in its entirety as part of your final portfolio and should be in the chronological order of our reading. Suggestions for approaching these entries include: examining the point of view, studying the problems or motives of the main characters, analyzing how the conflicts are presented, looking for moments of epiphany, dissolve, or reconciliation, studying how the setting of time and place are important to the atmosphere of the story and how it adds or detracts from the action, or your instinctual reaction to some aspect of the story. None or all of these are required; they are merely suggestions to help get you going. Each entry should be one page, single-spaced with the name of the story at the top.

The “presentation” will be an oral introduction of the assigned reading for the class. It need not be formal (such as a powerpoint), but instead a way to begin the conversation about the piece. Required in this presentation are: 1) a statement about the journal in which the story appears. Tell us who this journal is, what they publish, how often, and what their history might be. 2) State a fact about the short story and why that is important. For example, “In this story, none of the characters’ names are capitalized. Because they are all disenfranchised in some manner, perhaps the author is making a statement about their powerless positions in the world.” 3) Present a question about the work. Such as, “Why are we not given any idea of what gender the narrator ‘Mac’ might be?” Presentations should not sound like simple summaries, but rather examinations of the structure and thought behind how the work was composed.

Each short story will have different requirements for length, and will be discussed as they are assigned. The author will be responsible for e-mailing the story to the entire class the day it is due and bringing one hard copy to class for the instructor. All stories should be in 12pt Times New Roman and double-spaced with the date, author’s name, word count, and title of the work at the top of the first page. Please number your pages.

Your workshop comments should be thorough and thoughtful responses to your peers’ work. It does not matter if they are handwritten or typed, as long as they are legible and about a page in length. Remember that these responses are the entire purpose of a workshop – so a writer can learn how their work is interpreted and can then make a decision about how such matches their intentions. Comments and reactions in the margins are always helpful, as are any grammatical suggestions or indications of confusion, but these, called “line edits,” are not necessary.

**Further guidelines for stories and workshop:**

We all write from our experiences – things we saw, places we’ve been, people we encounter. But the trick of writing believable stories, even if they are true, is to build a lush and vivid context for them. If you find yourself having to defend, “but this really happened!” in your workshop, then the story wasn’t built in a way that invited believability or gullibility for the reader.

It is best to avoid the cop-out endings of something being “all a dream” or a hallucination from a drug trip. These are too easy, and we are trying to grow our sophistication by practicing the challenges of literary conflict.

While I do not discourage you from writing genre stories – horror, fantasy, romance, children’s etc., I do not necessarily encourage you either. If this is your passion, then go ahead, but we will be studying the structure of realism. Usually these genres fill niches, and are not published in the sort of sources we will be researching.

**Plagiarism:**

“Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student...” (Sec. 5.1, C. of the LSU Code of Student Conduct).

I expect all of the work you turn in to be your own. Cases of academic misconduct and plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of Students for further possible sanctions.

**Disability Services:**

According to the LSU General Catalogue, “The Office of Disability Services assists students in identifying and developing accommodations and services to help overcome barriers to the

achievement of personal and academic goals. Services are provided for students with temporary or permanent disabilities. Accommodations and services are based on the individual student's disability-based need.”

Students must provide current documentation of their disabilities. Please contact the disabilities office early so accommodations can be arranged.