English 243, The American Short Story: Readers, Reading
University of Rhode Island, J Term 2017
Monday-Friday, 2:00 – 5:00 pm, Swan Hall Rm. 202 – Section 0001

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ABOUT THIS COURSE

From the course description: ENG 243: The Short Story, 4.0 credits. Critical study of the short story from the early nineteenth century to the present.

Course Objectives and Outcomes

1. Identify and define the short story as a literary form, from its 19th-century beginnings to the present day
2. Use appropriate terminology for the formal elements of the short story, including genre, fiction, narrative, narrator, character, theme, setting, image, irony, metaphor, point of view, symbol, and structure
3. Develop the skills of close reading as an interpretive practice, while learning to navigate and negotiate the plurality of meanings that close reading makes possible
4. Acquire a capacity for effective critical writing, while utilizing the same both in formal essay assignments and required online responses to literary texts
5. Recognize the evolving historical contexts within which short stories have been created, and apply this recognition of contextual complexity to textual interpretation
6. Appreciate the productive interplay between literature, culture, and society, developing a special sensitivity for the literary expression of questions involving race, class, gender, ethnicity, and power

General Education. This course provides general education credit for the following outcomes:
7. Humanities
8. Writing

Grading. This is the grade structure for the course:

20% Week #1 Exam
20% Week #2 Exam
20% Week #3 Exam
10% Blogging
10% Participation (attendance, classroom contributions, quizzes, and caring)
20% Critical Essay: Close Reading

* Please note that you must successfully complete all assignments to pass the course.

We will use a standard grading scale, with the usual parameters for “plus” and “minus”: 100-93=A; 92-90=A–; 89-88=B+; 87-83=B; 82-80=B–; 79-78=C+; 77-73=C; 72-70=C–; 69-68=D+; 67-60=D; and 59-0=failing. Please note that each assignment will have its own criteria for assessment.

Course Content:

This course examines the American short story, with special emphasis on the interpretive strategies that we as readers use to make sense of our surroundings. Historically, short fiction in the full variety of its forms has been an important part of those surroundings. Thus we’ll proceed with the understanding that it was and continues to be
the changing nature of how literature circulates in the world – in this respect, we’ll consider such mixed communications media as giftbooks, literary annuals, newspapers, magazines, anthologies, and the Internet, in more or less chronological order – that shapes the ways actual readers have read short prose in the United States. With these ideas in mind, we will pursue three broad areas of interest this term:

**Nation:** First, we will examine short fiction as an American phenomenon. If there’s little about the short story that seems peculiarly “American,” the historical origins of this literary form do coincide with the emergence of the U.S. nation. That nation was politically independent by the end of the eighteenth century. It was equipped to meet its peoples’ unique needs for cultural expression by the early decades of the next century. What those needs were, and how the short story evolved to accommodate them, constitutes just one of our subjects of study.

**Texts & Contexts:** Second, we are concerned as well with both the message and medium of the short story. Stories consist not only of words on a page from which we make meaning; they also involve a tangible medium that extends outside the frame of any given text into an everyday world where paper (not to mention money) changes hands. This coincidence of medium and message goes some way toward explaining the terms “readers, reading” from our course’s subtitle. These terms suggest that short stories aren’t simply polished artistic products crafted for our entertainment. They’re meaning-making occasions in which we, as readers, play an instrumental part.

**Genre:** Third, we will examine the American short story as a genre, identifying the formal properties that define this literary field as we strengthen your capacity for close reading, critical analysis, and purposeful expression. In deciding what the American short story is, we can better assess what it does within American society at large. *More important, our sustained engagement with short stories will sharpen your ability to read the wider world.*

As we interrogate these topics, our course will unfold in three major units:

- The Origins of the Form
- The Modern Short Story
- The Postmodern Short Story

### REQUIRED TEXTS

- ENGL 243 course pack (Faflik, ENG 243 sec. 0001), available for purchase @ icopy, Kingston Emporium

### Instructional Methods:

Class time should enhance the work that you do independently, outside of class. The topical-contextual lectures that we undertake together in class, as well as our focused group discussions, will only prove productive if you prepare for each of our meetings in advance. Considering, then, the brief format of the short story as a literary form, you will want to read each of our assigned texts not only dutifully but deeply. In fact, you will want to read some or all of our texts multiple times as you work toward a more complete understanding of their arguments and formal complexities. We will dwell together in class on selected texts. But you will also need to undertake close, critical reading on your own.

*To make our time together as meaningful as possible, I ask that you set aside all electronic devices (phones, headphones, laptops, tablets, etc.) for the duration of our classroom meetings. Drinks are fine; food is not.*

### COURSE POLICIES

**ATTENDANCE:** I take attendance daily, and we both need you to be here if our course is to succeed. Your absences in any case directly affect your participation grade (see below). More than two absences will cause you to receive an “F” for participation. To exceed three absences (for whatever reason) will mean that you fail the course. Note that it is your responsibility to keep track of your absences and to find out from a classmate what you have missed when absent. Note, too, that you cannot make up any quizzes or writing assignments that you might miss.
PARTICIPATION: a full 10% of your final grade derives from your daily contributions to class. This means:

1. You must come to class, and you must arrive and leave on time.
2. You will bring a copy of each day’s assigned reading. Otherwise, you will be counted absent.
3. You must demonstrate a positive level of commitment to the course, both in class and on the class blog (see below). I expect you to make a meaningful contribution to each and every class meeting.
4. Do not just talk; also listen, especially to your classmates. Demonstrating a proper regard for mutual exchange will ensure that we achieve true dialogue.

For my part, I need to set our agenda, and keep class meetings lively, interesting, and edifying. I can only fulfill my responsibilities if you fulfill yours.

SHORT STORY BLOG

The goal of this collaborative blog is to allow you to engage more deeply with our assigned short stories. Although the writing that you perform here will not be the same as what you put forth on a formal paper, this work is to be taken seriously – all the more so, since it occupies an online space that anyone can visit:
http://dfaflik.wordpress.com

PAGE AUTHORING:

For the majority of our class sessions, about half of you will be posting written work to our blog. As you can see from the “Course Schedule” below, I indicate blogging days with the word “BLOG” in capital letters. I also indicate who will be blogging for that day (based on the first letter of your surname, whether A-M or N-Z), and the topic of that day’s blog, which will typically concentrate on some particular literary element that we will address with that day’s assigned story (for example, characterization, setting, plot, etc.).

Please proceed as follows as you prepare and post your blogs:

1. Any blog entry that you post should run to about a full page (no more, no less) of single-spaced writing, as measured by the formatting standards of a MS Word document that uses 12-point typeface.
2. At the latest, all blog entries will be made by midnight on the day before a blog post is due. Thus, you need to complete your reading – and writing – well before we meet each afternoon.
3. Your posts need to be analytical in nature, rather than merely descriptive.

You will want to proceed as follows:

- Avoid plot summaries. There’s no need; we have all read the same story.
- Work with the actual words from a text to show us the claim that you are making.
- Do make an interpretive claim, or argument, that you substantiate with evidence from the text.
- Read what others before you have written, the better to avoid repetition on the same blog page.
- Don’t merely “agree” or “disagree” with what someone else has already said.
- Be careful not to simply repeat what we’ve discussed in class, without offering further analysis.
- On occasion, enhance our understanding of the stories by drawing on relevant secondary criticism.
- Avoid the Internet, as it is more likely to inhibit than enhance your thinking about the texts.
- Utilize the appropriate critical literary terminology so as to familiarize us all with its correct usage.
- Practice the compositional conventions of spelling, grammar, and direct textual citation.
PAGE MONITORING:

Each of you will post to the blog several times a week. But we are all expected to regularly monitor the activity on the page as it happens, the better to sustain the conversations that we will conduct in class. Indeed, I will sometimes display your postings in class as a way for us to enter into our discussions. Remember, then, that your posts are not only being graded; they are being shared in a public space with an audience of your peers.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: All written work that you submit must be your own. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, visit the following Web site: http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/hc/plagiarism.html. Also note that, unless I provide specific instructions otherwise, we will not be consulting any sources other than our assigned texts. For your written work, especially, you will want and need to stay away from the World Wide Web, for what should be obvious reasons. I want the thinking and writing that you do to be your own.

DISABILITY NOTICE: If you have a documented disability, please contact me early in the semester so that we may arrange reasonable accommodations to support your success in this course. Also be sure to take advantage of the resources available at Disability Services for Students, Office of Student Life, 330 Memorial Union, (401) 874-2098.

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COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: This schedule is tentative. If we need more time to complete a task or pursue a point of interest, we will do so, within reason. You are responsible for all class meetings and assignments as well as any announced changes.

UNIT I: THE ORIGINS of the FORM

1-2: Course Introduction / (Re)Learning to Read / Blogging
What Stories, Why Stories, How Stories
BLOG: Signing on

1-3: Sentimental Heroines
READING: Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “New Year’s Day” (1836)
BLOG (A-Z): Characterization

1-4: Allegorical Hawthorne
READING: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836)
BLOG (A-Z): Setting

1-5: The Plot Thickens
READING: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841)
BLOG (A-Z): Plot

1-6: Double Interpretive Trouble
READING: Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (1855)
BLOG (A-M): Tone
BLOG (N-Z): Point of View
Close Reading Essay Assigned
In-Class Exam #1 (75 mins.)
UNIT II: THE MODERN SHORT STORY

1-9 American Literary Realism  
READING: William Dean Howells, “Editha” (1905)  
BLOG (N-Z): Mood

1-10: Local Color  
READING: Mark Twain, “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (1865)  
BLOG (A-M): Dialogue

1-11: Color Lines  
READING: Charles W. Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine” (1887)  
BLOG (N-Z): Racial Representation

1-12: Literary Modernism  
READING: Ernest Hemingway, “The Killers” (1927)  
BLOG (A-M): Narrative Structure

1-13: Narrative Time  
READING: William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily” (1930)  
In-Class Exam #2 (75 mins.)

UNIT III: THE POSTMODERN SHORT STORY

1-16: NO CLASS – MLK Day Holiday

1-17: Literary Vernacular  
READING: Eudora Welty, “Why I Live at the P.O.” (1941)  
BLOG (A-M): Narrative Voice

1-18: Madcap Postmodern  
READING: Thomas Pynchon, “Entropy” (1958)  
BLOG (N-Z): Narrative Structure(lessness)

1-19: Literary Trajectories  
BLOG (A-M): Narrative Space

1-20: Metafiction  
BLOG (N-Z): Theme  
Course Evaluations  
In-Class Exam #3 (75 mins.)

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*** 1-21: Close Reading Essay due (PDF format only) in Sakai drop-box by noon