

Creative Writing: Fiction

English 233
Fall 2008
Cedar Crest College
Section 70/80, T 7-9:30PM
BHA 202

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(All e-mail correspondence must utilize Cedar Crest College e-mail accounts.)

Books:

Bell, Madison Smartt. *Narrative Design*; New York & London; W.W. Norton & Company. © 1997, Madison Smartt Bell. *Required text.*

Doctorow, E.L. *Sweet Land Stories*; New York; Random House Trade Paperbacks. © 2004 by E.L. Doctorow. *Required text.*

Other Texts:

Course Website

Your own creative work and that of your classmates

Course Description: English 233 focuses on the process of writing fiction through intensive practice and through critical assessment – by the individual student in writing and by the class as a whole in discussion – of creative work. Students will read the work of established (that is, frequently published) writers as well as that of their peers. The role of the instructor is to assign readings and writing exercises that strengthen the student writer’s knowledge of and facility with techniques for creating effective stories; to guide workshop discussion of written work in a manner that will benefit both the writer of the work at hand and the other writers present; to define and explain important elements of short fiction and the writing process; and to evaluate the performance of students as developing creative artists, as critical readers, as focused and responsible workshop participants, and as members of a mutually supportive community of writers.

Course Outcomes, Objectives, and Assessment:

English 233, Creative Writing: Fiction is designed to facilitate the following educational outcomes:

- Students will demonstrate creativity and writing ability

- Students will demonstrate close reading and analytical/critical thinking skills
- Students will demonstrate the ability to edit and revise written creative work
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic literary terms

To attain these outcomes, English 233 pursues the following course objectives:

- At the completion of this course, students will be able to write complete short stories
- Students will be able to analyze and critically evaluate short stories written by others and to provide suggestions for improving them
- Students will be able to critically evaluate, edit and revise their own short stories

English 233 achieves its intended educational outcomes through the following forms of assessment:

- Students will demonstrate their creative writing abilities through the completion of writing exercises and the writing of complete short stories
- Students will demonstrate close reading and analytical/critical thinking skills through written and oral assessment of works written by established writers and by their workshop peers
- Students will demonstrate the ability to edit and revise creative work through written and oral assessment of works written by established writers and by their workshop peers, and through revision of their own written work
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of basic literary terms through written and oral assessment of works written by established writers and by their workshop peers

Policies & Procedures

Grading:

[Writing exercises and stories](#) will be letter graded according to the scale below:

A: Strikingly original creative work, distinguished by its effectiveness in meeting the requirements of the assignment and by its stylistic power. Sensory detail, sonic effects, figurative language, allusion, etc. can be seen to work together toward achieving the writing's intention. The reader is impressed by originality in imagery, analogy, phrasing, etc. The work conveys a freshness of perception and insight. There are no clichés. Errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and other basic elements are absent or very nearly so.

B: All requirements of the assignment have been met, and there is clear evidence that the writer has attended to elements of style. Errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and other basic elements are absent or very nearly so. The writing is free of cliché and demonstrates the writer's interest in pursuing fresh insights and perceptions.

C: Average work; the writing meets most or all of the requirements of the assignment, and the reader is not significantly distracted by errors in grammar, etc. Some evidence that the writer has attended to elements of style is present. A clichéd image, phrase, analogy, etc. may appear.

D: The work demonstrates inadequate attention to the details of the assignment, and/or to the requirements of English grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc. It is not clear that the writer has attended to elements of style (sentence variety, figurative language, allusion, alliteration, assonance, etc.). The work may contain multiple clichés in imagery, analogy, phrasing, etc.

F: The work, whether a writing exercise or a complete story, was not completed as scheduled or fails to satisfy the basic requirements of the assignment.

All work (writing exercises and/or complete stories) graded D must be revised within one week of its return to the writer. (See “Turning in Work,” below.) Writing exercises graded C, B or A may be revised at the writer’s discretion and turned in at any time up to our class meeting in week ten of the semester (October 28). An effective revision (one that improves significantly upon the original) will raise the letter grade given to the work; an ineffective revision (one that does not significantly improve upon the original, or makes it less successful) will result in either no change or in a lower letter grade, as appropriate. Revisions of work graded D that are turned in later than one week after their return will not be graded. Revisions of work graded F will not be accepted.

[Contribution to discussion](#) of readings (stories in the Bell and Doctorow books, website materials, handouts, and works created by your classmates) will be noted and used in determining your course grade, as will the quality of your [written comments](#) on stories written by your classmates.

[Quizzes](#) which test your knowledge of writing devices, terms, and conventions, website content, and possibly of stories and/or other assigned reading materials will also count in the assignment of final course grades.

Final course grades will be calculated according to the following weights:

Original creative work (stories and writing exercises): 60%

Workshop contribution (discussion and written comments): 30%

Quizzes: 10%

Individual Conferences: It is advisable to meet with me to discuss your ideas regarding the revision of a complete short story. One of our class meetings will be dedicated to these individual conferences, but I am certainly available to meet during my regular office hours, as well. You may also schedule a meeting to discuss revision of a writing exercise, if you wish; the use of my scheduled office hours is encouraged, though alternative times may be scheduled if needed.

Attendance: In order to derive the full benefit from this class, and to do your part for the other members of the writing workshop, you must attend on a regular basis. **One absence from class is permitted without penalty, but each subsequent absence will lower your final course grade by one increment (A to A-, for example).** If you know in advance that you will miss a class, you are still responsible for reading and commenting upon the week’s work. You are also responsible for completing any other assigned reading and/or writing exercises. (Exercises will

be a regular feature of class meetings during weeks 1-7; class meetings thereafter will be devoted to workshop discussion of your short stories.)

Turning in Work: All work written outside of class is to be posted to the course web site as scheduled in standard manuscript format (click “**Story Format**” under “Criticism” at left for details). **Work must be in the '97-2003 compatible Word format (that's the .doc file extension, not .docx)** and must be posted to the appropriate “**Doc Sharing**” category (**Dialogue Exercise, Short Story, Short Story Revision**, etc.).

Workshop Procedure (for complete stories): Each class member will open the stories to be read for the next class meeting in the appropriate **Doc Sharing** category and make the written comments/edits/suggestions she feels appropriate. (See “**Workshop Procedure for Short Stories**” at left for more details.)

A copy of each story with your comments included must be posted to the instructor in the “Comments” **Dropbox**.

Each class member must *print* a copy of each work that she has commented upon and bring that copy to class. These printed copies will help to guide our discussion of each work. Your name must appear at the top of the first page of each work, and you must give your copy to the writer of the work when we have finished discussing it. It is permissible to add handwritten comments to the work during class discussion; bear in mind, however, that I will use the copies posted to me, which will include only your typed comments, in assessing your written comments on the work of your fellow writers.

Honor Philosophy: The Honor Philosophy of Cedar Crest College obliges all students to uphold community standards for academic and social behavior to preserve a learning environment dedicated to personal and academic excellence.

In terms of the workshop environment, this philosophy requires honest, *constructive* comments about each other's work, with due attention paid to the tone and language used.

Writers and readers alike must remember that our goal as a community of writers is to assist each member in refining and polishing her written work. Writers must guard against taking critical comments personally (whether positive or negative), and readers must be respectful in their written and spoken comments. In the unlikely event that I find comments that are disrespectful when reviewing written critiques, I will caution the person responsible once; repeated violations of the trust invested in each workshop member by the group as a whole will result in a failing grade for Workshop Contribution. (Note: I have very rarely had to caution anyone about her written comments on a story.)

Academic Honesty: Original creative work is the essence of this class. Everything that appears with your name on it must be yours in its entirety. My policy regarding plagiarism is to immediately assign a failing grade for the course. If you have any questions as to whether something you might do in completing an assignment constitutes plagiarism, talk to me about it before turning the work in.

Classroom Environment: Enthusiastic, attentive, respectful, and supportive. That's the atmosphere that will enable us to do our best work. To help maintain our energy and focus and avoid unnecessary distractions, please turn off your cell phone or any other potentially disruptive devices before class; also, please don't bring food. Drinking in class (that is, drinking coffee, tea, soda, milk, and such) is fine. The use of laptops in class is prohibited. Please don't arrive late or leave early without prior approval. Don't bring guests. And *always have constructive things to say about the work we'll be discussing.*

E-mail Policy: E-mail correspondence between students and the instructor must utilize Cedar Crest College e-mail accounts. I will not reply to messages that do not come from your cedarcrest.edu address.

Special Accommodations: Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Advising Center.

Course Schedule
English 233, Section 70/80
Tuesdays, 7-9:30PM
Fall 2008

<u>Date</u>	<u>Scheduled Class Activity</u>
8/26	Course Introduction: The Instructor; The Syllabus; & How a Writing Workshop Works. Introduction to Writing Fiction: The 5 Essential Tools Writing exercises: Figurative Language; response to photo. Assigned reading: "A House on the Plains" in <i>Sweet Land Stories</i> ; Carolyn Chute's "Lizzie, Annie and Rosie's Rescue of Me with Blue Cake" in Bell; Syllabus, "5 Tools," "Imagination" and "Bricks and Mortar" on course web site.
9/2	Discussion of photo response exercise. <i>Imagination: the writer/reader partnership</i> -- <i>Bricks and Mortar: building reality on the page</i> Discussion of readings. (Focus: Point of View and Setting) Writing exercises: (Setting) Third Person Limited and First Person descriptive.

Assigned reading: “Walter John Harmon” in *Sweet Land Stories*; Mary Gaitskill’s “Daisy’s Valentine” in Bell; Setting and Dialogue materials under “Imagination” on course web site.

9/9 Discussion of Setting exercises.

Discussion of readings. (Focus: Dialogue)

Empathy: emotional imagination

Writing exercise: (e/motivation) Character in action.

Assigned reading: “Baby Wilson” and “Jolene: A Life” in *Sweet Land Stories*; “Empathy” and associated materials on course web site.

9/16 Discussion of Character exercise.

Discussion of readings. (Focus: Motivations/Character)

Primary, Secondary, Background: character functions and development

Writing Exercise: (emotional texture) [Tipping] The balance of desires

Assigned reading: “Child, Dead, in the Rose Garden” in *Sweet Land Stories*.

9/23 Discussion of writing exercise.

Discussion of reading. (Focus: Character Functions and Desires)

Love of language: style and substance

Writing Exercise: Sound and scene.

Assigned reading: William Vollman’s “Red Hands” and Craig Berardini’s “Depth Charge” in Bell; “[Love of] Language” and associated materials on course web site.

9/30 Discussion of writing exercise.

Discussion of readings. (Focus: Style)

Sense of Story: Finding it, Shaping it

Writing: A complete short story; see the Workshop Schedule under “[Ability to Accept and Learn From] Criticism” on the course web site for the date by which your story must be posted to Doc Sharing.

Assigned readings: Miriam Kuznets' "Signs of Life" and Percival Everett's "Hear that Long Train Moan" in Bell; "Story Sense" and associated materials on course web site.

10/7 Discussion of readings.

Accepting and Learning from Criticism (your own and others'): Where ambition meets humility, and stories are born.

Assigned reading: "[Ability to Accept and Learn From] Criticism" and associated materials on course web site.

10/14 Fall Break; No class meeting.

10/21 Short Story Workshop

10/28 Short Story Workshop. Revisions of exercises graded A & B due by today.

11/4 Short Story Workshop

11/11 Short Story Workshop

11/18 Revision Discussion and Consultations

11/25 Revision Workshop

12/2 Revision Workshop [Final class meeting; 12/9 is a Final Exam day for evening classes]