

LITERATURE 221W: Readings in the Short Story

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Textbook and Materials:

Recommended: How to Read Literature Like a Professor.

Materials: Notebook, dictionary, 3x5 cards.

Readings in the Short Story covers a sampling of material from the beginnings of the modern short story. The purpose of this humanities course is to acquaint you with the basic components of the history, technique, and aesthetics. The method is to read a variety of authors and evaluate their approaches and contexts, which includes a significant variety of cultures and styles. Consequently, a journal/logbook is required as a log of progress and as a control device that you can use to record your progress and your questions.

I make some assumptions that will be discussed in class: You like to read. You would like to know more about literature and culture. You would like to understand the relationships between the various components that have created the modern short story. You are pursuing a professional career in which analytical skills are applied. I assume you didn't know that teaching, business, the arts, technology, and the sciences all require the same habits of mind which a literature class asks you to practice. I assume that you came in knowing nothing about the subject, or at best, are as incompletely informed as I am. You don't have to like old stories and odd language to appreciate the literary components of human history. All of these assumptions affect your participation in the class, and the extent to which you will benefit from the course.

It's easier to follow this syllabus if you know **what counts towards the final evaluation:**

Notebook, Attendance, and Participation: 10%

Five short papers: 10% each = 50%

One long, supported paper (yes that means you researched something!): 25%

Presentation: 15%

Attendance: If you intend to be a professional, there's nothing to discuss.

If you are 'just a student,' then your attendance is required. Literature celebrates the community. If you are not a regular part of the community, your unpredictable appearance will be an annoyance to the rest of us. The policy for this course is consistent with the departmental policy. If you miss more than 3 hours (two classes) before midterm, I will initiate the college drop policy. If you miss 3 hours after midterm, I assume that you will initiate the withdrawal request. Feel free to discuss with me whether or not it is advisable for you to drop the course. You are responsible for missed information and assignments. Weather and illness policies are explained on the first day of class. Contracting the plague is negotiable.

Participation: the nature of the course lends itself to lecture. However, I am not interested in hearing myself talk. Questions, discussions, and presentations are encouraged and supported. If you are not used to being vocal in a group, don't panic, I can show you a variety of ways to have your

opinion included in the community's exchange of ideas. The note cards discussed elsewhere will assure you that you receive credit for your participation.

Written Assignments: All papers should be typed according to the MLA or APA guidelines. I will accept assignments on disk if they are in one of the Word formats used on campus. All informal work should be in blue or black ink with all of the standard courtesies observed. Since the composition courses are a pre-requisite for this course, I know you have already studied the methods of writing research papers. While a research paper is not a specific requirement in this course, it is difficult to support the positions presented in a longer academic paper without doing some research. You are required to execute such papers in the proper formats.

A written consideration of 5 stories must be submitted. **Late papers will not be evaluated.** The paper's thesis should specifically identify a technical, aesthetic, or conceptual dimension, and its use or importance in the story as a whole. The first sentence of each paper should identify the story, author, and the particular subject under consideration. Your thesis must provide the focus of your written essay.

Specific references to lines in the story should be included in your development and elaboration of the thesis. Specific references from the text about the cultural, technical, or conceptual discussion should be included also.

Each short paper should be at least two typed pages. The evaluation and grade on these papers will be based on how clearly and effectively the stated thesis is developed, supported and explained. You may use any one of the professional formats, as long as the paper is in standard written English. A paper will not receive a grade if it (and the instructor) suffer from serious grammatical errors, lack of coherence, disunity, or generally demonstrate less than collegiate/professional standards and skills. One opportunity to redo such work may be available if circumstances warrant.

Please pay particular attention to the quality of your notes and references. If you are not familiar with the concept of PLAGIARISM, or the attendant penalties, please let me know. The standard penalties will be enforced for using other people's work as your own. At the very least you will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

For both the short and longer papers, reference to the text and other external sources is strongly recommended. Again, remember to provide the appropriate bibliographic notations and credit lines. Submitting someone else's work as your own will create the potential for a failing grade for the course.

Late Assignments: Generally, late work is considered unprofessional and is not accepted. Do not leave papers in my mailbox, under my door, or with the secretary unless you have been asked to do so.

Negotiables: while there is no 'extra credit' factor in this course, there is opportunity for substitution should you find a particular area of special professional interest or importance to you. All substitutions should be discussed before beginning such projects.

Honors Option: Definitely. Pick up the paperwork and state your interest.

Presentations: While they can be done at other times, presentations are scheduled for the last five weeks of the semester. You will select and present/lead or discuss (it doesn't say lecture or require definite conclusions) on a short story that we have not discussed previously and that you want to share with the class. You should plan on 5 to 10 minutes. If the story is not in the text, it should be duplicated and passed out a week earlier.

This is a W course; as such it is an opportunity to fulfill the General Education Requirements. Because communication skills are such a fundamental part of any profession, and this course, you will not receive a passing grade if the assignments are "unreadable" due to grammar, sentence structure, thought pattern (coherency), or any major component of college level written communication. There may be an option to re-submit a work, but that would be a singular occurrence due to serious circumstances. Note that while this is a W course, it does not require any more writing than you would have done normally; it simply identifies certain work as fulfilling the W requirements. That includes the comment cards, the journal, and the awareness exercises.

To know how well you are doing in the course requires an awareness of your own personal learning style in conjunction with the evaluations. The problem, perhaps obviously, is that the graded items are relatively few and most come later in the semester. If you have a question about your progress, don't hesitate to stop by my office or ask after class.

Bear in mind that the college degree verifies that you have a number of skills and abilities that are used in all courses, in daily life, and your profession. These "General Education Abilities" have been identified in conjunction with universities and employers as essential to continuing your education or continuing in the workplace.

This course provides you with a significant opportunity to practice the ability to (1) communicate effectively in reading and writing; (2) communicate effectively in speaking and listening; (3) think critically; (4) access, analyze, and use information; (5) value and practice citizenship/interact productively with others; value diversity.

THE NOTEBOOK: With every reading assignment I would like you to note your questions, thoughts, and reactions to what you've read. Such notes will help you with your analysis and the classroom discussions. I will evaluate the quality of your response, not the length. Responses can begin at an easy level; for example, what didn't you understand? What do you think someone else might not understand (even though you did)? This could be anything from a word, a dialect, an archaic concept, or a complex idea. It may be as simple as "why would anyone read this stuff?"

Guidelines: 1.) Identify the text and title you're referring to—add the page and the line number where appropriate. 2.) Avoid summary. We've already read the work. You and I need to know what you think, not what you read. 3.) Relate your response to the themes and topics we discuss in class.

You will receive a number of short awareness exercises at least once a week to start. Enter them in the notebook as you do them. (We actually only need the results, not the process.) All entries should be dated. This notebook will be collected periodically. Your responses and your notes will be helpful during presentations and evaluations, so thoroughness is recommended.

DAILY ASSIGNMENT: Using one 3 x 5 card, write at least one question you have about the material you read for the day. On the reverse, write a discussion idea that builds from the ideas or the literature we've covered. Relate it to your professional interests where possible. A card will be expected at each class; put your name on it, since that will be the only 'attendance' taken.

If you do not have a question, provide an idea for discussion. Think in terms of your profession and 'you're leading the discussion.' What would be an important point that others should recognize or understand? You can also include questions that you believe others should be able to answer in order to demonstrate their understanding of the material.

Sample Journal Exercises (full explanations will be provided in class). Exercises will be provided for developing skill in recognition of perspective, point of view, composition, etc. Among other ideas, you will be asked to

Record an anecdote
Record a family story
Record one of your own initiation stories
Record a joke, including comments on delivery

Paper topic suggestions:

Short papers should be, generally, a two page perspective of what we probably already covered in class. But focus on one element if possible. The same topics can be expanded for the longer paper.

Examples: Analyze and evaluate **one** of the following in a story: character/characterization; setting; point of view; structure; imagery; plot; language; dialogue; theme and motif; symbol; style and tone; irony; initiation; technique.

Long paper ideas: keep in mind that the main theme of the course is "How do you know when something is 'good'?"

One story
One author's works
A description/explanation of your guidelines and approaches (aesthetic theory)
A comparison of two stories which use the same technique or approach
A comparison of two authors' styles as demonstrated in one or more their works
An explanation of the effects of an author's socio-cultural period on their work

Readings will be explained during the first week of classes. Initially we should cover one story a week. After the first three weeks we will move to one story per class, and by the sixth week we should be able to overview two stories per class. If you have problems with your reading speed or comprehension, see me. Note that this is one of those 'mythical' college classes where you really are expected to spend at least two hours of study time per one hour of class time (even though you thought that was a joke to scare freshmen).