2014

310-01 Creative Writing

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CREATIVE WRITING: Fiction ENGL 310  Fall 2014

Professor Trudelle Thomas  Office: 242 Hinkle Hall (Academic Mall)
Office Hrs: 3-4 PM on MWF & BY APPT..  Let me know when to expect you.
Campus phone: 745-3492  Mailbox: Hinkle Hall Atrium
Email:  thomas@xavier.edu  I reply to email during regular work hours (9 AM -5 PM, M-F)

Don’t send assignments via email!  But DO check your XU email every day.
Face-to-face and email are my preferred modes.  You can also contact classmates through the
Courses menu/Canvas.

Materials needed:
LaPlante – The Making of a Story
POCKET FOLDER (not manila folder) for keeping track of exercises and other work.
Loose-leaf notebook for taking notes, etc.

Beware:  A Word about Attitude, Humility, and Respect

This course requires a genuine commitment to writing about personal experience
transformed into fiction.  Because of the workshop format, it also requires an uncommon degree
of humility, courage, and respect.  It is uncomfortable receive feedback on creative writing; it is
also sometimes uncomfortable to read such writing.  In the past students have written about
substance abuse, anorexia, divorce, break-ups, sexual orientation, death and other highly-charged
subjects.  (They’ve also written about travel, love, work, sports, healing, kids, music, and more.)

If you stay in this class, you must commit yourself to offering respectful and supportive
feedback to all other students.  You must also commit to Confidentiality:  Do not talk about
others’ writing outside of class.  What is shared in class stays in class.

You’ll also need to be self-directed and self-motivated in keeping up.
I’ll do my best to make this a constructive, supportive, maybe even inspiring class.  (I plan
to write and share my own work right along with you.)

Yet this is a class and not a counseling group, so you need to exercise restraint in
choosing which writing you will share.  Please do not share your own writing about unresolved
trauma, illegal activity, or other persons known to class members.  (You can write whatever you
want in your Writer’s Notebook, which is private.)

Decide now if this is what you want.  Others are waiting to get into this class.  If you feel
uncomfortable with a degree if self-disclosure, this is not the class for you.

Course Goals
1.  Write better in different genres (description, narration, dialogue, etc.).  Ypu’ll gain skill in the
tools of characterization, plot, setting, point of view, theme, symbol, imagery AND MORE.
2.  Read better (others’ stories and textbook chapters).
3.  Speak with greater skill, confidence, and tact.  You’ll get better at giving and receiving
constructive feedback. 4. Enhanced powers of observation and creativity.
4.  Develop new interpretive practices—new ways of viewing and reflecting on fiction.
4.  Understand the contribution of literature and the other imaginative arts to a worthwhile and
happy life.

Methods include presentations by prof and students, discussion, writing in and out of class, role
plays/improv, and workshop critique (feedback from prof & classmates).
How will my work be evaluated?

*Keep track of your own points.*

| 150 | **Participation.** Showing up consistently will earn you 75%. For more points, plan to contribute generously to class discussions and workshops, ask intelligent questions, and bring fresh materials to class. Students reluctant to speak in class are welcome to contribute via emails to prof prior to class. |
| 50 | **Professionalism** in preparing for your turn in whole-class workshops. You’ll have numerous chances to share your work with others for feedback. This will happen at least twice with the entire class responding, and more times with small response groups.  
   - “Professionalism” means getting clear hard copies of your work to classmates and prof in advance, marked with some questions of your own.  
   - “Professionalism” also involves learning to give and receive (non-defensively) feedback (though of course you don’t have to act on it).  
   - Finally, it means SHOWING UP ON TIME for conferences with prof. |
| 150 | **Weekly quizzes** on reading, about ten 15 point quizzes. Quizzes cannot be made up. Will be averaged together and multiplied to reach 150. |
| 300 | **Weekly writing exercises** (approx. ten, 1-2 pp. in length) – All will be averaged together to get a percentage grade (x3). Revise these so they are concise. Keep all these in your pocket folder. |
| 150 | **First Story.** Three-five pages. |
| 200 | **Second Story.** Five to eight pages. |
| 200 | **Final exam.** Multiple choice and essay. Based on readings and lecture. |

**Total possible points.**

**Extra credit:** Writing in a journal or blog several times a week is an excellent habit for an aspiring writer. Let me know (early) if you’d like to try this.
Fall 2014  Reading & Writing Schedule (add’l stories will be assigned; changes in pacing are also possible)

Our weekly pattern will be something like this:

Mon.   Read the assignments (including short story or essay, 20-40 pp.)
Quiz on the readings.
Weds.  Complete the assigned exercise for class (two copies), using tools from readings.
Fri.   Workshop in which we write in class and/or respond to the completed exercises.
(Start on reading and writing for the following week.)

Week 1  Getting Started
Aug. 25-27-29:  Skim Ch. 1 and closely read Ch. 2 The Splendid Gift of Not Knowing; Shitty First Drafts (p. 574)

Week 2  Plot
Sept. 3-5 [no class on Mon.]  Read Ch. 4 The Shapely Story;
What Makes a Short Story?
Read “Missing” on Canvas (2 pp.)
PRINT OUT and MARK UP ALL CANVAS STORIES.

Week 3  Characterization
Sept. 8-10-12:  Read Ch. Read Ch. 10 Recognizable People;
Read “Fathers” on Canvas (6 pp.)

Week 4  Dialog
Sept. 15-17-19  Read Ch. 8 You Talking to Me?;
Read “The Nanny” on Canvas (3 pp.)

Week 5  Revision
Sept. 22-22-24:  Read Ch. 13 Learning to Fail Better;
Read “Rapunzel” on Canvas (2 pp.)
and “Roommates” on Canvas (3 pp.)

Week 6  Conferences
Sept. 29-31-Oct. 2
Read “The Blind Barber” on Canvas (9. pp.)

Week 7  First Story due.
Oct. 6-8-[Fri. no class-Fall Break]
Read “The Key” on Canvas (8 pp.)

Week 8  Narration/Showing
Oct. 13-15-17:  Read Ch. 5 Why You Need to Show and Tell;
Read “Lost Love” (7 pp.)

Week 9  Concrete Details & Setting
Oct. 20-22-24:  Read Ch.3 Details, Details.
Read “Floyd” on Canvas (5 pp.)
Week 10  Point of View
Oct. 27-29-31:  Read Ch. 6 Who’s Telling This Story, Anyway?;
Read “Spouses, Friends, and Benefits” 3 pp.) on Canvas

Week 11  Enhancing Plot
Nov. 3-5-7:  Read Ch. 9 The Plot Thickens

Week 12
Nov. 10-12-14:  Readings TBA

Week 13 a
Nov.17-19-21 Reading TBA

Week 13 b  Conferences with Prof
LAST DATE TO WITHDRAW
Nov. 24 [no class Weds. and Fri.—Thanksgiving Break] Reading TBA

Week 14 Conferences with Prof
Dec.1-3-5 Reading TBA

Week 15 The Business of Writing: Publishing Your Fiction & Living the Writer’s Life
Dec. 8-10-12 Reading TBA Panel Presentation :
Living the Writer’s Life and Publishing.
Second short story due.

Exam Week runs Dec. 16 through 19. Exam period for this class: ____________.
Final exam (first hour) & Class celebration and read-around (second hour).

Policies and Expectations
Accommodation for special learning needs. Any student with a (documented) disability should let me
know, and also contact Cassandra Jones at the LAC in Room 514 CLC to coordinate reasonable
accommodations.

Electronic Devices. Silence cell phones and turn off laptops while in class. I expect your full attention. If
I notice you receiving messages via phone or computer, you’ll be warned once; the second time I’ll
confiscate them for the rest of the class period. Don’t make me embarrass you. If you need to use a laptop
to take notes, see me.

Attendance and participation. Class contribution constitutes a large portion of your final grade. We
meet three times a week for fifteen weeks; each class absence will reduce your final class grade 12 class
points (equal to one percentage point of your final grade). If you have a sports trip, are too ill to come to
class, or are involved in an emergency, email me before class, and contact another student to see what
you’ve missed. Documented illness or sports trips won’t result in loss of points, but if you miss too often,
please see me about whether you’re likely to complete the coursework.

Grading Scale (for final grade only)
93-100=A 90-93=A- 87-89=B+ 83-86=B 80-82=B-
77-79=C+ 73-76=C 70-72=C- 67-69=D+ 63-66=D
60-62=D- Below 60 =F

“Incomplete” (I) will be given only when student makes arrangements in advance, due to extenuating
circumstances. Students who stop attending class will receive a VF (Vanishing Failure)
Late work. Written assignments must be turned in during class on the day they are due. If you haven’t finished an assignment, come to class anyway and get your paper to my mailbox in Hinkle Hall ASAP. A paper turned in later than this will lose 5% points for each calendar day late. Don’t fall behind! (If you anticipate a problem completing a SHORT STORY on time, contact me a week before, and we can work out an extension of up to four days.)

Punctuality. I expect you to come to class on time and to remain attentive till the very end of class. If you have a situation that causes you to be late, inform me.

Format. Your final drafts of stories should be double or 1.5 spaced in 11 or 12 pt. font in blue or black. Insert page numbers, and staple together. In the upper right corner, type your name, the name of the assignment, and course number, and the date, as shown. (No cover sheet is needed. Use both sides if poss.)

Diligent Daniel Darko
ENGL 310 – Story 1
Sept. 28, 2014

Academic honesty. From the Xavier catalogue: “All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student’s own . . . Penalties for violation of this policy may include one or more of the following: zero for the assignment, F in the course, and expulsion from the University. The Dean of the student’s college will be informed in writing of all such incidents.” This will become part of your “permanent record.” When in doubt, cite.

Food and drink. I don’t mind you bringing food or drinks to class as long as it doesn’t interfere with you paying attention.

Bonus elements: Daily Meditations; Occasional improvisation. Costumes for Halloween (e.c.).

Additional Resources

Writing Center. 745-2093. Second floor of CLC. Call for an appt. or just walk in. The center has a nice library of writing resources, including many textbooks. While tutors there will not proofread your papers, they can offer help in coming up with ideas, developing a paper, and citing sources, and more.

Learning Assistance Center (LAC). 745-3280. Also on the second floor CLC, 514 Conaton. The center offers help with study skills, staying organized, managing your time, etc. Students with documented disabilities can arrange to take tests in a non-distracting environment or with extended time.

McGrath Counseling Center. 745-3022. 1714 Cleneay. Help with stress, relationships, time management, priorities, etc.

Career Planning Center. 5th floor of CLC. Help with choosing major, career path, internships, preparing resumes, finding jobs, etc.
Weekly Exercises.
Week 1 Getting Started. I will supply a prompt in class.

Week 2 Plot.
A. Write a scene in which two people who will eventually fall in love meet for the first time. Because the structure of a romance requires that they not fall in love immediately, you’ll have to consider both the character traits that will eventually bring them together and the ones that will keep them apart.

Week 3 Characterization.
Choose a character. Fix him/her in your mind. Write down two lists: One of the sins of commission (things she/he did) and one of sins of omission (things she/he didn’t do) that are on his/her conscience. For an example see p. 437 in LaPlante.

Week 4 Dialog.
C. Write a scene in which two people who know each other engage in a dialog; each takes the opposite side of an issue or problem. This is a verbal dance, not a shouting match. For example, whether to spend money on a vacation or put it into a savings account. Keep it simple and emotionally close to the two people involved. Keep in mind that the subtext—what the scene reveals about the speakers’ relationship—is as important as the text. Be sure to use THAD (talking head avoidance device).

Week 5 Revision.
D. Revise one of your previous exercises with them in mind. Use imagery subtly to reinforce the conflict and theme of the story.

Week 6 Conferences; no exercise.  Week 7 First Story due; no exercise.

Week 8 Narration/Showing.
E. Write a scene between two people who each want the same place—a house each wants to buy, a piece of land each wants to inherit from their parents, or any other place of your own choosing. It will of course be necessary to describe this place and to consider why each person wants it so badly. OR Write a scene from a story in which a stranger comes to town. Describe the person and the place, drawing a sharp contrast between them.

Week 9 Concrete Details and Setting
F. Write a scene in which a character tries to solve a mystery through observation. For example, you might describe a detective looking at a crime scene, a man trying to tell from his sweetheart’s behavior whether she’s cheated on him, a woman trying to determine from the things missing in her friend’s apartment where his friend has gone.

Week 10 Point of View
G. Write a scene in which a character embarks on a journey. Give serious thought to which point of view is right for your character and his/her journey. Consider not only first person vs. third, but also emotional, temporal, and geographical distance. What suits a mythological quest? What suits a trip to the liquor store? What suits a search for a lost dog? Be prepared to discuss your POV choice and its pros and cons.

Week 11 Enhancing Plot
H. Write an opening scene to a story where it is immediately clear that two characters are at odds with one another and each has a great deal at stake. (You can use an earlier exercise and raise the stakes if you want.)

Week 12 Preparing for conferences and publication.
I. Write the beginning of a story in an biographical style, beginning “She/he was born.” The main character is a writer (you). Tell how her/his interest in writing developed, and how she/he developed this interest over a lifetime. This could include publishing, personal writing, teaching, writing a screenplay, or whatever other hopes and dreams you conceive. Be sure to include anticipated obstacles.
Student Record    Fall  2014 ENGL 310

name                      student number

phone number (10 digits)      local  address

home address  (include zip)

home phone

grad or undergrad:?    your major          three words your friends would use to describe you?

______________________________________________________________

Evaluation

How will my work be evaluated?

Keep track of your own points.

_________150 Participation

_________ 50 Professionalism

_________150 Weekly quizzes

_________300 Weekly writing exercises

_________150 First Story. Three-five pages.

_________200 Second Story. Five to eight pages.

_________200 Final exam. Multiple choice and essay. Based on readings and lecture.

__________________________

_________1200 Total possible points.

1. What do you hope to get from this course?

2. Have you taken a course in creative writing? Describe.

3. Do you write outside of class?  If so, circle in which genre(s):

   Poetry  lyrics  journal  blog  short stories  novel  plays
GET-ACQUAINTED PAGE  Optional info.

1. What other courses & profs are you taking this semester?

2. Magazines or newspapers you read.


4. A favorite get-away place. . . .

5. Any hobbies or collections

6. List your prior schools (name, type, place) and prior degrees.

7. List prior work experience, paid and unpaid:

8. Are you working now? How many hours? Doing what?

9. Family responsibilities/ birth order

10. Goals

11. Anything else you’d like me to know about you?