

Fiction Workshop

ENGL 206/306

Spring 2016

2:30-3:45 p.m., T,R (PA 213)

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"I think it's a beginning for authors to acknowledge that they are myth-makers and that, if they are widely read, will have an influence that will last for many years. I don't think there's a strong awareness of that now. And we have such a young culture that there is an opportunity to contribute wonderful new myths to it -- which will be accepted."

—Kurt Vonnegut, *interview with Walter James Miller, WNYC's Reader's Almanac (1974)*

Course Description:

What makes great fiction... *great*? And, in a world increasingly focused on the collection and analysis of pure data for political and economic purposes, where does storytelling even fit in? Does fiction still have the power to change the world?

In the Fiction Workshop, we will explore and discuss all elements of original, intelligent, meaningful, entertaining, and lasting storytelling. Students will learn, and practice, all the tools of professional writers and will end the semester as much-improved readers and writers of fiction.

Student Outcomes:

Through craft lessons, writing exercises, and workshop discussion we will deepen our knowledge of the purpose and craft of fiction while also acquiring the lifelong skills to become better storytellers. Students will learn professional, practical writing tools to create their own interesting, original characters, memorable moments, and kickass endings through structure and plotting, dialogue, defining a character's central desire, elevating tension, technique (unique voice), addressing common mistakes, dealing constructively with feedback, revision (where the writing really happens), arriving at theme, and

understanding fiction writing as a means to form a personal life philosophy that serves a higher purpose.

****The semester goal for each member of the Fiction Workshop is to complete a novel.**

An Up-Front Note on Attendance:

Yes, I notice when you're not there. For a high letter grade in this course, attendance is *essential*. You must inform the **professor** beforehand when you expect to be absent. Random, unexcused absences will hurt your overall grade for the course. Also, if you miss class, you are still responsible for completing the assigned work and turning it in on time. Please exchange phone numbers and/or emails with a classmate now.

Grading and Evaluation:

1. Attendance, Participation, and Writer's Notebook (50%):
Come to every class and engage thoughtfully and respectfully in lessons, discussions, and writing exercises to earn full credit for Attendance and Participation.

Use your Writer's Notebook for in-class exercises, annotating reading assignments, reflecting on and planning the writing of each craft essay, and to prepare for future class discussions. Writer's Notebooks can contain anything and everything that inspires and instructs your creative mind. I will review the content of your Writer's Notebook(s) for the mid-term and final of the course.

2. Personal Mission Statement (5%):
On the first day of class, write a statement of your purpose and practical objectives for learning the craft of creative nonfiction (1-2 pages, 250-500 words).

3. Novel (40%):
Sound impossible? It's not. At the conclusion of your semester in the Fiction Workshop, you will have completed the first draft of a novel between 25,000-50,000+ words. Really.

4. Reflective Essay (5%):
On the last day of regular classes, write a summary essay detailing your craft journey upon reflection of the goals you set in your Personal Mission Statement (1-2 pages, 250-500 words). Be introspective and honest, craft your writing well, and you will earn full credit.

Schedule (subject to change):

Week 1:

- Introductions. Course goals and format. Reviewing the syllabus. Syllabus class feedback exercise and Q&A.
- Why write? Purpose and personal vision. The equipment of a writer.
- Structure and Plot. Classic three-act structure. Twists and turns. Memorable moments.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.
- Write your Personal Mission Statement as a fiction writer.
- Schedule one-on-one office meetings to discuss goals for the semester.

Week 2:

- How Well Do You Write? Grammar, spelling, punctuation and other rudiments of being taken seriously as a communicator of ideas.
- Kinds of Stories – and How Best to Tell Yours: concept, literary format, and genre.
- A Writer's Material: personal experience, reading, keeping notebooks and journals.
- Lessons and group discussion on crafting your novel.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.

Week 3:

- The Basics. What is a sentence, beat, paragraph, scene, sequence, chapter, act, section, etc.?
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.
- Novel progress.

Week 4:

- Telling the Story: narrative technique, point of view, and making decisions as the writer.
- Creating interesting, original characters.
- Dialogue: how people really speak (but not really).
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.
- Novel progress.

Week 5:

- Where's the Heat? Drama and Dilemma: conflict, rising tension, narrative velocity, pacing, and the hero "failing her way to success."
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.
- Novel progress.

Week 6:

- Technique: discovering, and embracing, your singular style and voice.
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.
- Novel progress.

Week 7 (Mid-Term):

- Painting with Words: image and detail. Making your story *feel* real.
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.

- ****Mark novel progress. Mark content of Writer's Notebook.**

Week 8:

- Symbolism and Metaphor: What is happening in the story? *vs.* What is *really* happening in the story?
- Lesson and group discussion.
- Writing Workshops: Prompt, write, discuss.
- Novel progress.

Week 9:

- On Comic Tone: slapstick humor, satire, black comedy, irony, deadpan, and cult fiction. From Swift to Twain to Charles Portis, Lorrie Moore, and beyond.
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Novel progress.

Week 10:

- Story Resolution (or the lack of it): finale, climax, coda, and epilogue.
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Novel progress.

Week 11:

- Theme: philosophy, purpose, and truth.
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Novel progress.

Week 12:

- Revision: feedback, notes, reflection, problem solving, and the path to becoming a writer.

- Lessons and group discussions.
- Novel progress.

Week 13:

- Publishing: the business of fiction, agents, editors, professionalism, entrepreneurship, routine, and the responsibilities of being a paid writer.
- Lessons and group discussions.
- Writing Workshops: pulling it all together (polishing your work).
- Novel progress.
- Turn in Chapter One of your novel.

Week 14:

- Adaptation. Fiction as source material for film, television, and the Internet. A primer on the business of writing for entertainment. The uniquely different skills of the novelist and the screenwriter.
- Final lessons and group discussions on Chapter One, the full manuscript, revision, character, and theme.
- Write Reflective Essay.
- Present completed novel. Review of Writer's Notebook.
- Complete Course Evaluation.
- Class party. Official Novelist Ceremony.

Week 15:

- FINALS WEEK.

Student Conduct

Our Tuesday and Thursday meetings are in the "workshop-style" format so, to get the most benefit from the learning experience, regular, thoughtful, and courteous engagement in our lively discussions is not just encouraged – it's

required. Your grade is based 40 percent on Attendance, Participation and the use of your Writer's Notebook, so I pledge to always do my best to present challenging material, spark interesting discussion, moderate difficult topics, and steer our discourse to stay focused on the aspects most relevant to our purposes.

Please don't chew gum, or mess around with your cell phone, laptop, tablet, Google Glass, iWatch, Rubick's Cube -- or engage in any other rude, distracting behaviors. Show respect and ye shall receive it.

This class is *old school*. When necessary, I will provide handouts to accompany important lessons. Any in-class notes will be taken by hand in your Writer's Notebook, not typed into a device. Video and/or audio recording of class is not allowed – unless approved for special in-class purposes.

*****DO NOT THINK YOU WILL SPEND OUR TIME TOGETHER STARING INTO YOU OPEN LAPTOP AND/OR CHECKING YOUR MOBILE DEVICE.*****

It is a student's responsibility to be aware of assignment deadlines.

Computer problems, power failures, and Internet difficulties are not excuses for missed assignments. Have back-up plans for possible technical glitches.

Academic Accommodations:

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, students with a documented disability are eligible for support services and accommodations. If a student wishes to request an accommodation, please contact the Director of Academic Support Services, Henry Conover, at (775) 831-1314 x7534, hconover@sierranevada.edu or go to the OASIS offices on the third floor of Prim Library within the first week of the semester.

The SNC E-mail System:

The SNC e-mail system is the official communication vehicle among students, faculty members and administrative staff and is designed to protect the confidentiality of student information as required by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 Act (FERPA). Students should check their college e-mail accounts daily during the school year. Students have a right to forward their SNC e-mail to another e-mail account (for example, @hotmail or @gmail). However, confidentiality of student information protected by FERPA cannot be guaranteed for SNC e-

mail forwarded to an outside vendor. Having e-mail redirected does not absolve a student from the responsibilities associated with official communication sent to his or her SNC e-mail account.

Faculty/Student Honor Code:

The faculty of SNC believes students must be held to high standards of integrity in all aspects of college life in order to promote the educational mission of the College and to encourage respect for the rights of others. Each student brings to the SNC community unique skills, talents, values and experiences which, when expressed within the community, contribute to the quality of the educational environment and the growth and development of the individual. Students share with members of the faculty, administration and staff the responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment conducive to learning and personal development, where actions are guided by mutual respect, integrity, responsibility and trust. The faculty and students alike must make diligent efforts to ensure high standards are upheld by their colleagues and peers as well as themselves. Therefore faculty and students accept responsibility for maintaining these standards at Sierra Nevada College and are obligated to comply with its regulations and procedures, which they are expected to read and understand.

Consequences for Violating the Honor Code:

SNC students and faculty share the responsibility for maintaining an environment of academic honesty. Thus, all are responsible for knowing and abiding by the SNC Faculty/Student Honor Code published in the current SNC Catalog. Faculty are responsible for presenting the honor code and consequences for violating it to students at the start of their classes AND for reporting all incidences of academic dishonesty to the Provost. Students are responsible for knowing what constitutes cheating, plagiarism and fabrication, and refraining from these and other forms of academic dishonesty. Violations of the honor code become part of a student's academic record.

SNC's Disciplinary Sanctions for Honor Code Violations:

- 1st Offense: Student receives a zero for assignment/exam and counseling with faculty on the honor code, consequences for violating the honor code, and the value of academic honesty in learning.
- 2nd Offense: Student fails course and receives counseling with faculty on the honor code, consequences for violating the honor code, and the value of academic honesty in learning.
- 3rd Offense: Student is expelled.

The SNC Mission Statement:

Sierra Nevada College graduates will be educated to be scholars of and contributors to a sustainable world. Sierra Nevada College combines the liberal arts and professional preparedness through an interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasizes entrepreneurial thinking and environmental, social, economic and educational sustainability. Core themes are Liberal Arts, Entrepreneurial Thinking, Professional Preparedness and Sustainability.