

## FICTION (English 2312)

**Description:** Good stories entertain, provoke, and amuse us. They move us to laugh, cry, or think. They introduce us to odd, interesting, loveable, and detestable people; to strange, absurd, comic, and tragic situations; and to the meaning in the ordinariness of everyday. Short stories and novellas lend themselves well to a compressed term, and provide good material on which to hone writing skills. This course surveys short fiction in a variety of forms by many authors, with an emphasis on twentieth-century and contemporary fiction.

### Benefits of the course:

- Satisfies two University Curriculum Requirements: **Language and Literature** (Breadth) (or **CA2** in UC 2012), and the **W tag (Writing Proficiency)**.
- Improves your ability to write literate, readable prose
- Provides an opportunity to read fun stuff—for credit!
- Sharpens your responsiveness to language
- Heightens your appreciation of verbal art
- Improves analytical skills and critical thinking
- Engages the imagination
- Promotes empathy by inviting imaginative identification with a range of different kinds of (fictional) people. (See <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/novel-finding-reading-literary-fiction-improves-empathy/>)

### About the instructor:

I teach courses in Victorian literature as well as on fiction, poetry, and gender.

**Aims of the course:** to help you learn to fiction with pleasurable understanding, sharpen your responsiveness to language, and improve your ability to write lucid college-level prose.

### Required Text: PURCHASE HARD COPY ONLY

Charters, Ann. *The Story and Its Writer*, Compact 9<sup>th</sup> edition. Bedford/St. Martins.

### Student Learning Outcomes

#### *Language and Breadth:*

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of how a symbolic system communicates meaningfully within its language community.
2. Students will analyze or create text such as literature, films, or musical compositions.

#### *Creativity and Aesthetics II:*

1. Students will be able to analyze and construct clear and well-supported interpretations of creative or innovative work.

2. Students will be able to demonstrate the ways in which creative works reflect values and modes of thought (or ways of knowing) of individuals and/or cultures.

**Writing:** Through multiple opportunities supervised and/or directed by a professor, an editor or other authority, students will demonstrate proper use of language through completion of a substantial amount of purposeful writing appropriate for a specific or targeted audience.

#### **Required Work and Grade Breakdown:**

- 65%: 4 short papers (one of which may be a revision and extension of an earlier paper)  
 15%: Postings to class discussion/wiki comment board (see item #7 below, in Policies)  
 20%: Participation & preparedness (**includes preparation of a passage** from the reading and brief presentation to class, explained in item #8 below)

#### **Course Calendar (Subject to Revision)**

***Note: all page numbers refer to Charters, unless otherwise indicated. (In some cases I may have listed only the first page of the story.) You are expected to complete the reading before class on the day listed, and post a brief comment (1-2 sentences) to the class wiki/discussion for the day (by 10:00 am).***

***Always read the headnote about the author, on the page preceding the story (or on the page preceding the first story by the same author); and always bring your book to class!***

***This calendar does not reflect the time we will spend in class on writing, since I determine our writing discussions in response to what you produce. We will spend some time of many or most sessions discussing and looking at writing, and sometimes actually writing.***

1	May 17 (Th)	Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (416); Kincaid, "Girl" (530); Beattie, "Janus" (69-72)
2	May 18 (F)	Sittenfeld, "The Prairie Wife" (posted to Canvas); <b>Paper 1 due (approx. 750 words—about 3 pages)</b>
3	May 21 (M)	Bambara, "The Lesson" (53-60); Packer, "Brownies" (740-754); Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (767-770)
4	May 22 (T)	Joyce, "Araby" (453-457); "The Dead" (457-486); O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge" (679-690)
5	May 23 (W)	<u>Reading:</u> Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" (317-323); Allende, "An Act of Vengeance" (15-20) <b>Paper 2 due: (4 pages/1000 words)</b>
6	May 24 (Th)	<u>Reading:</u> Melville, "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (606-632); Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado" (761-766)
7	May 25 (F)	Diaz, "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" (277-279);

		Cheever, "The Swimmer" (158-165); Johnson, "Work" (446-451);
	May 28 (M)	<b>Memorial Day (No Class)</b>
8	May 29 (T)	<u>Reading:</u> O'Brien: "The Things They Carried" (664-677) <b>Paper 3 due (1000 words, or approx. 4 pages)</b>
9	May 30 (W)	Kafka, "The Metamorphosis" (494-528); Cortázar, "Axolotl" (249-252)
10	May 31 (Th)	Paley, "A Conversation with My Father" (756-759); Atwood, "Happy Endings" (27-29); Gass, "A Fugue" (386)
11	June 1 (F)	<b>Paper 4 due at end of class period, hard copy to my office, electronic copy to Canvas (approx. 1250 words or 5 pages)</b>

### COURSE POLICIES

**1. Communication:** Please be sure to check your email regularly for announcements I send out via Canvas. (You can adjust your settings so that the program does not send inessential updates.) If you wish to communicate with me between classes and there is some urgency, email is better than Canvas. I will post to Canvas copies of assignments and other documents I create.

I am accessible by e-mail, but e-mail is no substitute for a face-to-face in-office conference. I try to answer e-mail within 24 hours.

Please call me "Professor Newman" (or if you prefer, "Dr. Newman" or "Ms. Newman"), not "Mrs. Newman."

### **2. Classroom citizenship**

**Discussions:** To foster community and maximum learning from one another, I encourage you to participate in the following ways. (Note: **The language below reflects the criteria used to assess your participation.**)

*Ask questions to clarify text or the discussion, or to raise relevant issues you think we should address.*

*Respond to the professor's and to other students' comments and questions.*

*Offer support for others' arguments.*

*Disagree respectfully with others' arguments.*

*Offer alternative ways of approaching the material.*

*Comment on which approaches are most productive.*

*Question others in a constructive way.*

*Offer suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion.*

**Breaks:** We will take a break in our long class period about midway through. Kindly not disrupt class by coming late or leaving early, and above all **please do not disrupt class and distract me by leaving and returning in the middle of class, except in extraordinary circumstances.** (Non-emergency texts and calls do not count as "extraordinary circumstances.") If you must attend to physical exigencies—that is, get something to drink, go to the bathroom, etc.—please wait for the break.

**3. Devices:** This is a device-free class, and you must purchase hard copy of the book. I may occasionally invite members of the class to look something up on the web during class. But otherwise please keep your devices off your desk and out of your hands otherwise.

Why device-free? According to Ben Gose, “A New Generation of Digital Distraction” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 17, 2017)

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/Gen-Z-Changes-the-Debate-About/241163?cid=RCPACKAGE>

“Dozens of studies about devices in classrooms now exist. Among the findings: students stray off-task more than they think they do; device users fare slightly worse in classes than nonusers; and even those who use a laptop only for note-taking — with no off-task surfing or texting — perform less well than note-takers who write. (The theory is that students who write on paper are mentally processing the information, while laptop users are mindlessly transcribing.)”

#### 4. Papers

- **You must write all papers to pass the course.** Unless cleared with me at least one class in advance, late papers will be penalized one mark (e.g., B to B minus) for each day late, including weekends and holidays. This is the only way to be fair to everyone else.
- **Papers must be submitted electronically to Canvas and turned in as hard copy.** I will regard a paper as turned in when it is received on Canvas; but I will not read it until I have hard copy.
- Papers must all be **double spaced. Times New Roman 12** is standard for academic writing; please use it. Please print on one side of the page only. Pages must be numbered and stapled. Please do not use a cover page.
- Please help me read your papers anonymously by **placing your name (along with mine, the course number, and date) ONLY on the back of the last page of your paper, in the upper right corner.** Here is how to achieve that:
  - Do not put your name on the first page or in a header or footer.
  - When you have reached the end of your paper, start a new page. In the upper right, put the identifying information: your name, my name, course number, date.
  - **\*\*When you print your paper, flip that final page over so that it faces OUT. Then staple. I should be able to see your name on the “back” of your paper.**
- A general rubric for all papers for this course appears later on this syllabus and on Canvas.

#### 5. Citation and Academic Honesty—PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

The papers for this course are emphatically not research papers. Nor is the point for you to convey facts—*information*—about a fictional text. The point, rather, is for you to learn skills of analysis and interpretation. This has some important implications.

- **You must understand that “information” is different from “interpretation.”** You can probably find interpretations of many of the texts on our syllabus on the web in just a few keystrokes. Some of these interpretations are good to excellent. Others provide simplistic, high-school-student-level (or worse), dumbed-down, oversimplified, and/or glib readings, reinforcing all the wrong ideas about how and why we read literature. Finally, the problem with *all* of these is that

they do the work for you, whether they do it well or badly. That is what makes consulting such sources academically dishonest.

- **Therefore: you must consider Sparknotes, Cliff's Notes, Schmoop, and similar "study aids" off-limits for the purpose of this course.** If you look at them before or while you are writing a paper, they are very likely to influence not only your understanding of the text and your ideas about it, but even the way you articulate them.
- **Factual information can help you understand a text, and you are permitted—even encouraged—to find reputable sources to provide useful facts.** Examples: the identity of a historical or mythological person to whom the text refers; historical information relevant to the period in which a text is set or to the time it was written; geographical information about the setting in which events take place; even biographical facts about an author (though your task is not to report on the author's life, and the relationship between a text and the author's life is generally a complex matter). For the purposes of this course, Wikipedia will serve as a reliable source for basic factual information. **You must cite all such sources in a Works Cited.**
- I encourage you to make liberal use of good dictionaries, especially the *Oxford English Dictionary*. If you find it useful to refer to the definition in order to make your argument, you should cite it. If you have simply looked up a word to clarify its meaning in your own mind, then you need not cite it.
- **I enforce the SMU Honor Code strictly.** Remember that once you consult someone else's interpretation, especially if it's a good one, it can be difficult to think outside of it. **Any sources you use, as well as the assigned texts, must be fully and appropriately cited.** (Use the Chicago or MLA style.) Papers in this class will be run through Turnitin.com.

## 6. Attendance

Because of the brevity of May term, each class period is the equivalent of 4 classes. Therefore, except in extraordinary situations, absences in excess of one will reduce your participation grade (10% off for one class missed; possible administrative drop beyond that). I do not keep track of "excused" vs. "unexcused" absences except in the case of university-sanctioned absences. That said, we have a small class; do communicate with me about your absences if you are ill. I drop students who miss two classes in a row without contacting me. Additionally, SMU policies at the end of this syllabus apply.

## 7. Posting to the Wiki/Discussion (Homework)

For each class period (unless otherwise indicated), your homework is to read the assigned texts and then post one to two sentences about the story or to a "wiki" page in Canvas. (I will open one in Canvas for each day that the wiki is due.) Compose it in a document you save to your computer, but then copy and paste to the wiki page, which you will find in Canvas > Modules > Wiki Postings. You must post by **10 a.m.** if you wish to get credit, so that I have time to read and think about the postings.

Postings are worth 1 point--that is, they are essentially credit/no credit. Halfway through the term, I *may* increase the point value to reward the most thoughtful postings. The best comments are specific and non-impressionistic and expressed in clear sentences.

What should you post? Any observation or question about whichever text you are responding to. You might think about answering one of the questions below—unless you have a genuine question of your own that you'd like to ask.

*What strikes you? What stands out? What did you notice?*  
*What did you notice on a second reading that you did not notice at first?*  
*What feelings does the text arouse in you? What in the text produced them? Did they change as you read?*  
*Do you respond positively—or negatively—to a character?*  
*Is there anything you feel you need to understand but do not, or are unsure about?*  
*If others have preceded you, do you find yourself responding differently?*

After you have written your comment or question, copy and paste it to the day's Wiki page, which you will find in Modules on Canvas. **On the same line that your comment begins, please put your first and last name in boldface, followed by a comma.** I strongly suggest that you keep a copy of your postings, especially since if two people post at the same time, one of the postings might not be recorded. You might create a document for this purposes on your computer and add to it as the semester progresses.

### **8. Participation and preparedness**

Students will assess their own participation using a rubric posted to Canvas, taking into account the amount of participation, the quality of the participation, and the degree to which participation demonstrated preparation and mastery of the material. I will review each student's participation and enter a grade based upon both the professor's and the student's assessment of participation.

The participation grade may be penalized up to 100% for any of the following behaviors: sleeping in class, treating class members with disrespect, treating the professor with disrespect, engaging in behavior that is disruptive to the class, engaging in behavior that is intended to suggest boredom, indifference, annoyance with classmates, the professor or the class. See also attendance policy.

Coming to class without the book will be treated as evidence of incomplete preparation for that day.

**\*\*\*Preparation of one passage:** Once during the term, you will be responsible for choosing a page from the day's reading, isolating one passage from it, *reading it aloud confidently and with an effort to be expressive*, and then providing a close reading of the passage that comments on the language, narrative devices, and/or the significance of the passage to the rest of the text. **This will be graded credit/no credit.** It is important that you make liberal use of a good dictionary in preparing this assignment so that you know what the words mean and how to pronounce them.

#### **SMU POLICIES:**

**Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)

**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

**Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit <http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALEC/DASS> to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

### What the Grades Mean: Writing about Fiction

Writing about literary texts generally requires attention to both *content* and *form* (that is, to *what* is said and to *how* it is said). Persuasive writing about literature requires an argument that develops a *thesis*—a main point—that is not self-evident, or with which it is possible to disagree.

The best papers (like the best persuasive writing generally) demonstrate the validity of the thesis through a series of paragraphs that announce their own main subjects or topics through *topic sentences*, develop the topic by analyzing the text, and end on some kind of concluding sentence that nails down a point, making clear why the writer wants his or her reader to know all the stuff that preceded it. The best papers are also *nuanced*—that is, they acknowledge complexity, as well as textual oddness, which they try to account for rather than ignore.

Finally, the best papers are well written at three levels: whole essay; paragraph; sentence. Although the lack of grammatical errors does not mean you have written an A paper, my experience tells me that a persistence of them tends to stall paper grades at B- or below.

Below I provide the guide I use when I grade your papers. If you want to know what to strive for, look at “A.” If you want to know what to avoid, look at “C,” “D,” and “F.”

Grade	Some typical characteristics
A	<p><b>Excellent; distinguished; stands out among the rest.</b> <b>Content:</b> Illuminates the story or novel through careful close reading that accounts for many different aspects of the text. Makes a compelling argument. <b>Considers both content and form</b> of text(s) being analyzed—that is, both <i>what</i> is being said and <i>how</i> the text says what it says. Shows (with appropriate quotation and discussion) as well as tells. <b>Quotation</b> serves not only as “evidence,” but as an opportunity for nuanced, developed analysis. <b>Introduction</b> is specific to the paper and text(s), and does not waste time on a series of generalizations. <b>Body paragraphs</b> work towards a demonstration of the thesis through assertions supported by analysis grounded in the text. <b>Conclusion</b> does not recap the argument or repeat the introduction. Every sentence counts.</p> <p><b>Form:</b> The paper incorporates quotations smoothly into the essay. Uses acquired terms and concepts in the service of analysis rather than as a mechanical add-on. Well organized and rhetorically effective at all three levels (whole essay, paragraph, and sentence). <b>Avoids unnecessary and distracting references to “the reader.”</b> <b>Diction</b> is appropriate and <b>words are used carefully and correctly.</b> The paper is free or nearly free of grammatical and mechanical errors.</p>
B	<p><b>Good work; solid; competent.</b> Very likely, paper needs to push harder in some direction to be even better, probably by being more analytical. In both <b>form</b> and <b>content</b>, may have some characteristics of an A paper mixed with some characteristics of a C paper. So, for example, it may make many fine observations but not organize them into an argument. Or it may make those observations in language that does not always communicate them clearly, or that contains distracting or persistent sentence-level errors. Or the thesis may not correspond to the best part of its argument, or may be bland or require clearer articulation.</p> <p><b>Important note: if your paper contains a pattern of sentence-level grammatical errors</b></p>

	<p>(including but not limited to incorrect punctuation) it is unlikely to get more than a B-. The reason: such errors <i>do not belong in the prose of college-educated people</i>. I do not often discuss these errors in class. I do discuss them in conferences. I also recommend the CCC Guide to Grammar and Writing, posted to Canvas (<a href="http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/">http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/GRAMMAR/</a>). This searchable site contains useful tutorials and practice quizzes.</p>
C	<p><b>Skills need development. Content:</b> May be structured as plot summary. May need more points of contact with specific textual moments. May need to <i>do more</i> with those moments, using some of the analytical categories from class discussions and the textbook. May make assertions that aren't grounded. May lack a <b>thesis</b>. Introduction may be too general and mechanical.</p> <p><b>Form:</b> May contain a frequency of <b>grammatical and mechanical error</b> that distracts from the meaning. <b>Paragraphs</b> may lack appropriate shaping via <b>topic sentence, development of topic sentence, mini-conclusion</b>. <b>Transitions</b> may be absent. <b>Overall organization</b> may feel random, or may cling to the text's organization at the expense of some developing line of argument. <b>Quotations</b> may lack grammatical or contextual integration with the prose that surrounds them.</p>
D	<p><b>Borderline.</b> Shows little effort, little real engagement with the material, and/or a high level of persistent error at the sentence level. Alternatively, regardless of level of effort: falls below minimally acceptable standards of college-level writing and analysis.</p>
F	<p><b>Fails to complete the assignment.</b> In general, I reserve this grade for a paper that contains plagiarism or is entirely plagiarized—or is never turned in, or is turned in so late I can no longer count it.</p>