

Introduction to Creative Writing

Professor Merrill Cole
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English 285, Section 002
Spring Semester 2014

Office: Simpkins 109
Hours: MW, 1:00-2:00; T, 1:00-3:00

MW, 2:00-3:15 p.m.
Simpkins 308

Texts

There will be materials to download on my website, faculty.wiu.edu/M-Cole/

The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. Shorter Seventh Edition. ISBN: 0393926125
Shaefer, Candace and Rick Diamond. *The Creative Writing Guide. ISBN: 0321011236*

Course Objectives

This course offers the opportunity to begin exploring the limits of the imagination in the context of words. Becoming a writer concerns more than learning to craft a compelling story, to spell out convincing dialogue, or to fashion a vibrant poetic image: it also means developing critical awareness of ourselves and of the world around us. Creative writing can help us to live up to the potential of who we are and to explore who we might become.

The best writers are the best readers, for contrary to popular belief, writers must carefully study other writers to excel at their art. We will read poems, non-fiction pieces, and short stories, as well as the helpful writer's advice of Schaefer and Diamond. The poems and narratives will serve to increase the understanding of literary language, to widen the vocabulary, to cultivate the appreciation of diverse styles, and to inspire our own experiments.

This course is also a writing workshop, where participants will regularly submit writing in progress. Writers need practice—and then more practice. Accordingly, we will also have routine homework exercises, in addition to occasional classroom writing exercises.

There will be focused writing assignments; but at other times, students will be able to write as they please. Discipline alone is the death of creativity. Freedom without discipline leads nowhere interesting. In balancing the two, the course is designed to produce better writers.

Requirements

This is a portfolio course, meaning that each student will present a final portfolio of twenty pages, or a little more, at the end of the course. The portfolio may consist of poems (no more than one per page), short stories, non-fiction prose, a combination of the above, one longer short prose piece, or one long poem. Around midterm, there will be a mini-portfolio assignment consisting of five pages of poetry.

This course also involves a journal. There should be two entries every day, each of at least a short paragraph: one on the interior life—feelings, thoughts, moods—and the other observing the outside world—people, places, events. I will not read the journals, but I will scan them at the end of the semester to give students credit (or not). Journal entries can serve as the launching point of more developed creative work. There will be regularly assigned readings, and students will be responsible for leading small group discussions on a rotating basis. When it is your turn, you will prepare three typed, double-spaced questions for discussion and turn them in to me at the end of the class.

Everyone *must* actively participate. Lack of participation will damage your grade. This means doing the homework, completing the readings, and *joining in the workshop of other students' writing*. It also means submitting writing to the class on a regular basis. You will need to photocopy your own writing for *all* of your classmates. Not doing so will affect the participation grade. Please see <<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/>> for student rights and responsibilities.

Grading

Homework / Discussion Questions:	15%
Class Participation:	20%
Mini-Portfolio:	5%
Journal:	10%
Portfolio:	50%

Missing classes will affect the participation grade. *More than three unexcused absences means automatic failure for the course.*

Visiting My Office

Please take the opportunity to meet with me during my office hours, or by appointment, to talk about the readings, or your writing. *I very much appreciate any kind of feedback about the course.*

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will make academic accommodations for any student who notifies me of the need. For me to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must provide me documentation from Disability Support Services. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to ask. Students who require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e., fire, tornado, etc.) should tell me the most appropriate procedures to follow. Please contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512.

Schedule

Week 1: January 13 & 15

Introduction to the course. Haiku. General techniques.

Week 2: January 22

Concrete detail. Selected readings: short poetry.

Beginning of poetry workshop.

Week 3: January 27 & 29

Imagery, word choice, figurative language, allusion & symbolism. Sound & rhyme.

Selected readings.

Poetry workshop.

Week 4: February 3 & 5

Poetic Meter. Poetic forms. Selected readings. Imitation poem assignment.

Poetry workshop.

Week 5: February 10

Selected readings.

Poetry workshop.

Week 6: February 17 & 19

Literary non-fiction. Selected readings.

Short non-fiction assignment.

Week 7: February 24 & 26

Mini-Portfolio due February 24

Literary non-fiction.

Week 8: March 3 & 5

Introduction to fiction: short short fiction. Jamaica Kincaid. Kate Chopin.
Short short story assignment. Character in conflict assignment.
Non-fiction workshop.

SPRING BREAKWeek 9: March 17 & 19

Eudora Welty. Flannery O'Connor.
Plot assignment & point of view assignment.
Fiction workshop.

Week 10: March 24 & 26

Flannery O'Connor. Willa Cather.
Unreliable narrator assignment.
Fiction workshop.

Week 11: March 31 & April 2

D. H. Lawrence. Franz Kafka.
Fantasy assignment.
Fiction workshop.

Week 12: April 7 & 9

James Baldwin. Katherine Mansfield.
Fiction workshop.

Week 13: April 14 & 16

Edwidge Danticat. William Faulkner.
Fiction workshop.

Week 14: April 21 & 23

Selected readings.
Fiction workshop.

Week 15: April 28 & 30

Open workshop (poems, non-fiction and/or fiction).
Portfolios due in class on Wednesday, April 30.

Final Exam Week

Student reading. Time & place to be arranged.