

ENGE3290 Reading and Writing Short Stories

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Course description

The aim of the course is to introduce students to the art of the short story. Through reading well-crafted stories, students will learn how to appreciate short fiction and become familiar with the different elements of the short story form: plot, point of view, dialogue and action, character development as well as language, voice and style. A main focus of the course will be to look at how language is used and manipulated to create meaning in the texts.

Human beings tell stories to find meaning and make sense of their lives. We are born with the need to listen to stories – and to tell them. Students who are interested in writing short stories will be able to apply the techniques discussed in class to their own work and have their stories workshopped.

Learning outcomes:

After completing this course, students should:

- Be able to appreciate the short story form and its structure and style
- Be aware of the different elements that go into a short story
- Be able to discuss and analyze the effectiveness of a short story
- Be interested in writing and workshopping original short stories.

Assessment:

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| Writing journal | 5% |
| Lecture attendance & participation | 10% |
| Tutorial discussion & participation | 15% |
| Take-home writing task | 30% |
| Essay / Short Story | 40% |

Details of assessments:

Writing journal: Answer short questions about the stories and try out various creative writing tasks, including a Twitter fiction assignment also to be posted on Blackboard.

Attendance/participation: Do the readings before class and come to lecture ready to contribute to the discussion.

Tutorial discussion (10%) and participation (5%): Make use of tutorial meetings to exchange and deepen ideas on the stories. You will be responsible for the discussion of ONE story and will be given a prompt to help you structure the discussion. You will open and lead the discussion, offering your own ideas, referring us to the text, and inviting follow-up comments from your classmates.

Your opening remarks should not be longer than FIVE minutes. You will be assessed based on content, clarity, fluency and engagement.

Come to tutorials ready to participate in the discussion and to workshop each other's original short stories.

Take-home writing task: At the end of class in Week 12, you will receive a set of questions. Hand in your answers before 5pm on Friday.

Essay (8 pages): You can choose to write on any story or author covered in class. You can write on one single story, compare stories in the syllabus, or discuss an author and include his/her other works as well.

Original short story: Instead of writing a final essay, you can choose to write your own short story, drawing from the different elements of a short story covered in class. Those of you opting to work on a short story will need to **start early**, have your story **workshopped** and be prepared to write two to three **drafts** for your story. The first draft must be handed in on **March 23 (Monday)**.

Late submission of assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day late.

Course schedule

| Week | Topic | Stories |
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| Week 1 Jan 7 | Overview / Why short stories? | “The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant (1884) “An Old Man” by Guy de Maupassant (1882) |
| Week 2 Jan 14 | What makes a short story? / Change we can – or not? | “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin (1895) “Eveline” by James Joyce (1914) “The New Dress” by Virginia Woolf (1927) |
| Week 3 Jan 21 | What makes a story work? / Initiation | “Araby” James Joyce (1914) “A & P” by John Updike (1961) “The Flowers” by Alice Walker (1973) “The Lifeguard” by Mary Morris (1987) |
| Week 4 Jan 28 | <i>Chinese New Year holiday – no class</i> | |
| Week 5 Feb 4 | What makes a story honest? / Expressing the inexpressible | “Indian Camp” by Ernest Hemingway (1924) “Death of the Right-Fielder” Stuart Dybek (1990) “A Small, Good Thing” by Raymond Carver (1989) |
| Week 6 Feb 11 | Why write stories? / Turning point | “Miles City, Montana” by Alice Munro (1985) “Gravel” by Alice Munro (2011) |
| Week 7 Feb 18 | How to write stories? / Evil and savagery | “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson (1962) “The Shawl” by Cynthia Ozick (1980) |
| Week 8 Feb 25 | Writing short stories: Point of view | “I Stand Here Ironing” by Tillie Olsen (1961) “Reunion” by John Cheever (1962) “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid (1978) “Powder” by Tobias Wolff (1996) “Gravity” by David Leavitt (1990) |
| Week 9 March 4 | Writing short stories: Plot and characters | “The Lady with the Pet Dog” by Anton Chekhov (1899) “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner (1931) |
| Week 10 March 11 | Writing short stories: Dialogue | “Hills Like White Elephant” by Ernest Hemingway (1927) “Why Don’t You Dance?” by Raymond Carver (1978) “Say Yes” by Tobias Wolff (1985) |
| Week 11 Mar 18 | Writing short stories: Tone and voice | “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff (1995) “Incarnations of Burned Children” by David Foster Wallace (2004) |
| | First draft of original short story due 12 noon March 22 (Monday) in TA’s office Copies for workshopping to be distributed in the next class | |
| Week 12 Mar 25 | Take-home writing task distributed in class; To be handed in at 5pm March 27 (Friday) | |
| | Writing short stories: Language | “Pet Milk” by Stuart Dybek (1984) “Janus” by Anne Beattie (1985) “Snow” by Anne Beattie (1986) |
| Week 13 April 1 | <i>Reading Week – no class</i> | |
| Week 14 April 8 | Meta-fiction | “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood (1983) Extract from <i>If On A Winter’s Night a Traveller</i> by Italo Calvino (1980) |
| Week 15 April 15 | Workshop | |

Essay / original short story due 5pm on May 3 (Monday)

More stories for extended reading:

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| Margaret Atwood | “Death by Landscape” |
| John Barth | “Autobiography” |
| Donald Barthelme | “The Balloon” |
| Jorge Luis Borges | “The Garden of Forking Paths,” “Funes the Memorious” |
| Italo Calvino | “The Feathered Ogre” |
| Raymond Carver | “Fever,” “Cathedral,” “A Small, Good Thing” |
| John Cheever | “The Swimmer,” “The Enormous Radio” |
| Anton Chekhov | “The Darling” |
| Kate Chopin | “Désirée’s Baby” |
| Colette | “The Other Wife” |
| Isak Dinesen | “The Blue Jar,” “The Sailor-Boy’s Tale” |
| Nikolai Gogol | “The Overcoat,” “The Nose” |
| Nadine Gordimer | “Terminal,” “Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?” |
| O Henry | “The Gift of the Magi,” “The Cop and the Anthem” |
| Peter Ho Davies | “What You Know” |
| Ha Jin | “Saboteur” |
| James Joyce | “The Dead” |
| Franz Kafka | “A Hunger Artist” |
| D. H. Lawrence | “The Rocking-Horse Winner” |
| David Leavitt | “Braids,” “Territory” |
| Gabriel Garcia Marquez | “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” |
| Katherine Mansfield | “The Garden-Party,” “Bliss” |
| W. Somerset Maugham | “Rain,” “A String of Beads” |
| Guy de Maupassant | “The String” |
| Alice Munro | “How I Met My Husband,” “Wild Swans,” “Vandals,” “The Office” |
| Joyce Carol Oates | “Heat,” “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” |
| Tim O’Brien | “The Things They Carried” |
| Flannery O’Connor | “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” “Everything that Rises Must Converge” |
| Grace Paley | “A Conversation with My Father,” “Wants” |
| Anne Proulx | “Brokeback Mountain” |
| Susan Sontag | “The Way We Live Now” |
| Elizabeth Tallent | “No One’s A Mystery” |
| Amy Tan | “Two Kinds” |
| Timothy Tau | “The Understudy” |
| William Carlos Williams | “The Use of Force” |
| Virginia Woolf | “Kew Gardens,” “The Mark on the Wall” |

Recommended short story anthologies:

Fiction: A Pocket Anthology, edited by R. S. Gwynn

The Story and Its Writer, edited by Ann Charters

The Art of the Short Story, edited by Dana Gioia and R. S. Gwynn

Telling Stories: An Anthology for Writers, edited by Joyce Carol Oates

On Writing Short Stories, edited by Tom Bailey

The Oxford Book for American Short Stories, edited by Joyce Carol Oates

The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories, edited by Tobias Wolff

American Short Story Masterpieces, edited by Raymond Carver and Tom Jenks

Sudden Fiction: 60 Short Short Stories, edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas

New Sudden Fiction: Short-short Stories from America and Beyond, edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas

Examples of short story cycles

One Thousand and One Nights (one of the tales is “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves”)

The Decameron, Giovanni Boccaccio (1353)

Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer (1387)

Dubliners, James Joyce (1914)

Winesburg, Ohio, by Sherwood Anderson (1919)

In Our Time, Ernest Hemingway (1925)

Lives of Girls and Women, Alice Munro (1971)

Woman Warrior, Maxine Hong Kingston (1976)

Love Medicine, Louise Erdrich (1984)

The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan (1989)

The Things They Carried, Tim O’Brien (1990)

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Sherman Alexie (1993)

Drown, Junot Diaz (1996)

Olive Kitteridge, Elizabeth Strout (2008)

Some studies on the craft and history of short stories:

Bailey, Tom (2001). *A short story writer’s companion*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, John (1983). *The art of fiction: Notes on craft for young writers*. New York: Vintage.

May, Charles E. (2002). *The short story: The reality of artifice*. New York; London: Routledge.

Rule, R. & Wheeler, S. (1993). *Creating the story: Guide for writers*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

Feedback for evaluation:

Students will be asked to complete Course Evaluations for both the lectures and tutorials of ENGE3290 at the end of the semester. Comments and suggestions about the course content, teaching method and learning tasks are most welcome at any time during the semester.

Academic honesty:

The University has implemented a zero tolerance policy against plagiarism and has required all written work to be submitted via VeriGuide at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/veriguide> .

To comply with University regulations, you are therefore asked to:

- 1) submit your written work via VeriGuide before due date and print the receipt issued by VeriGuide
- 2) submit a hard copy of the work, along with the receipt from VeriGuide and the declaration of honesty (which comes with the VeriGuide receipt but is also attached here for your use).

Assignments without the receipt from VeriGuide and the signed declaration of honesty will not be graded.