

English 282
SPECIAL TOPICS IN FICTION-LYING TO TELL THE TRUTH

BULLETIN INFORMATION

ENGL 282 – Special Topics in Fiction-Lying to Tell the Truth (3 credit hours)

Course Description:

“Lying to Tell the Truth.” In this course, we will read fiction based on real events or people in order to gain an understanding of fiction as a genre.

SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW

In this course, we’ll tackle questions raised by the intersection of fiction and life: Is fiction a good way to learn about history, geography, and science? Can we look to the past to understand the present? Can fiction be more “true” than historical accounts? What insights and forms of experience does fiction offer that reporting does not? What are its limits? Do writers depicting tragedies have responsibilities to the real-life victims? Can fiction offer a potent critique of contemporary culture? What liberties do writers take, and which techniques do they use to make stories come alive? How does narrative make sense of the human condition? Along the way, we’ll encounter a few celebrity stand-ins and learn about a range of historical events, from the emigration caused by the Irish potato famine to the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, and from adventures of explorer Alexander von Humboldt to the short, notorious life of Billy the Kid.

ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of English 282, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate familiarity with a range of novels and short stories
2. Articulate insights into the purposes and methods of literary fiction
3. Identify and discuss fiction’s elements and techniques
4. Conduct a competent textual analysis, including deployment of close reading techniques
5. Write effective analytical essays interpreting literary texts.

SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS

1. All are required and available in paperback at the Russell House Bookstore
 - The Farming of Bones, Edwidge Danticat (Penguin 1999)
 - Measuring the World, Daniel Kehlmann (Vintage 2007)
 - Ship Fever, Andrea Barrett (Norton 1996)
 - The Intuitionist, Colson Whitehead (Anchor 2000)
 - The Haunting of L., Howard Norman (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux 2002)
 - Barabbas, Par Lagerkvist (Vintage 1989)
 - Senselessness, Horacio Castellanos Moya (New Directions 2008)

- I am Not Sidney Poitier, Percival Everett (Graywolf 2009)
- Love in Infant Monkeys, Lydia Millet (Soft Skull 2009)
- The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Michael Ondaatje (Vintage 1996)

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS

1. In addition to reading the books with care, attending regularly, and participating constructively, you will write two relatively short papers and take a midterm and a final exam. Instructions for the essays will be discussed and posted on Blackboard. Half of the final exam will focus on post-midterm reading and lectures; the other half will be cumulative.
 - Attendance and class participation/contribution: 20%
 - Essay 1: 20%
 - Essay 2: 20%
 - Midterm exam: 15%
 - Final exam: 25%
2. The following course grading scale will be used:
 94-100=A; 88-93=B+; 82-87=B; 76-81=C+; 70-75=C; 64-69=D+; 58-63=D; 0-57=F
 (Note: there are no “minus” grades, so a one-step reduction is, for example, B to C+)

SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS

- Week 1: Introduction to fiction and its elements
 Read “Sir Henry” by Millet and “The English Pupil” by Barrett
 Discussion section: short stories
- Week 2: The Farming of Bones
 Discussion section: The Farming of Bones
- Week 3: Finish The Farming of Bones
 Discussion section: history v. fiction in The Farming of Bones
- Week 4: Measuring the World
 Discussion section: Measuring the World
- Week 5: Finish reading Measuring the World, guest lecture by Prof. Laura Walls
 Read “Tesla and Wife” by Millet; guidelines for essay #1
 Discussion section: taking liberties with history
- Week 6: Ship Fever
 Discussion section: science in fiction
- Week 7: The Haunting of L.
 Discussion section: fiction as moral exploration

- Week 8: Essay #1 due; exam review
Mid-term Exam
- Week 9: The Intuitionist
Discussion section: The Intuitionist; using the unreal to depict reality
- Week 10: Barabbas
Colson Whitehead reads, 6 pm, Hollings library (attendance can be used to make up one absence or low participation day—talk to section leader for details)
Discussion section: finish reading Barabbas; morality, meaning, parable
- Week 11: Senselessness
Discussion section: Truth in fiction and the historical record; facts and lies
- Week 12: I am Not Sidney Poitier
Discussion section: finish reading I am Not Sidney Poitier, Character and identity
- Week 13: Read “Jimmy Carter’s Rabbit” by Millet; using real people
“Thomas Edison and Vasil Golakov” and “Love in Infant Monkeys” by Millet;
Guest lecturer Kevin Elliot: how ethics looks at human-animal relationships
Discussion section: read “The Lady and the Dragon” and “Chomsky, Rodents” by Lydia Millet; the advantages and limits of fiction v. philosophy and argument
- Week 14: Collected Works of Billy the Kid
- Week 15: Finish reading The Collected Works of Billy the Kid
What is fiction?; course evaluations
Discussion section: discussion: Is The Collected Works of Billy the Kid a novel?;
Essay #2 due

FINAL EXAM according to university exam schedule