

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS
University of Virginia, Academic Sponsor

Voyage: Fall 2014
Discipline: English
ENWR 2559: Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction
Division: Lower
Faculty Name: Ruth K. Setton
Credit Hours: 3; Contact Hours: 38

Pre-requisites: None.

“I apologize for writing a long letter. I didn’t have time to write a short one.”
--Mark Twain

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide an introduction to the craft of writing short fiction, focusing on the short-short story. Students will consider fundamental aspects of fiction and the relationship of narrative structure, style and content, exploring these elements in their own work, and in assigned readings in order to develop an understanding of the range of possibilities open to the fiction writer. Readings will be drawn from contemporary writers of Europe, the United States, and Latin America. The course is conducted as a workshop, in which students will have their own pieces of short fiction read and discussed in a supportive, respectful, yet challenging atmosphere.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course will help hone your skills as readers & writers. You will practice “reading as a writer,” i.e., learning to dissect a piece of fiction—with heart, care, & sharp-eyed lucidity—not simply to tear it apart, but in order to understand how it was put together, & to use these lessons in your own work. You will read critically acclaimed contemporary short fiction & you will have your own stories read & discussed in a supportive, respectful yet challenging workshop. The purpose is to become the best writer (&reader) you can be. To that end, you will write in and out of class, fiction exercises as well as critical analyses, as you explore the soul of a tale. The more sensitive, discerning and aware you are as a reader, the more powerful you will be as a writer.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: ed. Tara L Masih
TITLE: Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction; Tips from Editors, Teachers, and Writers in the Field

PUBLISHER: Rose Metal Press
ISBN #: 978-0-9789848-6-1
DATE/EDITION: 2009, 1st edition

AUTHOR: Robert Shapard & James Thomas
TITLE: Sudden Fiction International: 60 Short-Short Stories
PUBLISHER: Norton
ISBN #: 10: 0393306135
DATE/EDITION: 1989

AUTHOR: Italo Calvino
TITLE: Invisible Cities
PUBLISHER: Harcourt Brace & Jovanovich
ISBN #: 10: 0156453800
DATE/EDITION: 1978

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Southampton- August 23:

A1- August 25: Introduction to the course, goals, requirements, journals. Fiction & the Magic of Place.

A2-August 27: Discuss “Don’t You Blame Anyone” by Julio Cortazar; & “Di Grasso” by Isaac Babel (S); and from Rose: “A Short Short Theory (102-104) & “Flash in the Pan (121-124). Discuss “Postcard Story” assignment.

St. Petersburg: August 29- September 2

A3- September 3: Share St. Petersburg Postcard Stories. Discuss Part 1 (Calvino); & “The Myth-ing Link,” pp. 24-30 (Rose).

A4- September 5: Discuss pp. 150-157 (Rose); & “The Laughter” by Heinrich Boll; “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid, “The Falling Girl” by Dino Buzzati; & “The Other Wife” by Colette (S).

Hamburg: September 7-11

A5- September 12: Discuss pp. 54-64 (Rose); & “Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood; “The Blue Jar” by Isak Dinesen; & “Disappearing” by Monica Wood (S).

Antwerp: September 14-16
Le Havre: September 17-19

A6-September 20: Discuss “10 Writers, 10 Countries, 12 Very Short Stories,” *World Literature Today*, pp. 46-62. (reserve)

A7- September 22: Story #1 due.

Dublin: September 24-27

A8- September 28: Workshop

A9- September 30: Workshop

Lisbon: October 1-2

In transit: October 3

Cadiz: October 4-5

A10- October 7: Discuss Postcard Stories; Share & review journals. Discuss Part II (Calvino).

Casablanca: October 8-11

A11-October 13: Discuss Moroccan Postcard Stories. Discuss “Looking for a Rain God” by Bessie Head (S); & pp. 109-120 (Rose)

A12- October 15: No class: conferences.

Dakar: October 16-19

A13- October 21: Discuss “The Elephant” by Slawomir Mrozek; “The Grass Eaters” by K. Varma; & “Terminal” by Nadine Gordimer (S).

A14- October 23: Story #2 due.

Takoradi: October 25-26

Tema: October 27-28

A15- October 29: Workshop

A16- October 31: Workshop

Study Day: November 2

A17-November 3: Workshop. “Rio Unit.” In preparation for our visit to Brazil & our Field Lab in Rio, discuss Latin American Magical Realism in “August 25, 1983” by Jorge Luis Borges; “The Fifth Story” by Clarice Lispector; “Mr. and Mrs. Martins” by Edla Van Steen, & “One of These Days” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (S).

A18- November 5: Discuss Field Lab in Rio—Samba as a form of creative expression: role-playing, ritual & ceremony—and the writing assignment: Tale #3 in the Sequence of Tales. Watch *Black Orpheus*, the classic Marcel Camus film that explores the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in

the context of Samba in the favela.

Rio de Janeiro: November 7-9

In-transit: November 10-11

Salvador: November 12-14

A19- November 15: Share responses to Rio Field Lab, & read Samba stories.

A20- November 17: Story #3 (“Samba”) due.

Study Day: November 19

A21-November 20: Workshop

Bridgetown: November 22-24

A22-November 25: Workshop

A23- November 27: Final portfolios due. Discussion of Flash Fiction—implications, reverberations, legacy.

Havana: November 29- December 2

Study Day- December 3

A24-December 4 (A Day Finals): Final class readings

FIELD WORK

Field lab attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Please do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of our field lab.

FIELD LAB:

1. The Samba of Brazil (the last day in Rio)

For this field lab we will spend the day exploring the samba, a rhythmic dance imported from Africa during the slave-trading days of the 19th century that is now recognized as the “national dance of Brazil,” and is closely associated with the annual Carnival celebration in Rio de Janeiro. Students will learn about the history and development of the samba and other Brazilian-based dances from an authority in Brazilian history. Students will also visit a samba school, where they will observe the many phases of carnival, from costume making and float building to instrument selection and rehearsals. From the samba school the students will travel to

Casa Rosa, a local restaurant located in the backstreets of Favela Maloca and housed in one of Rio's most famous historic brothels. Students will enjoy a meal of Feijoada (a Brazilian national dish) and have a chance to practice your new samba skills on the dance floor.

Academic Objectives:

1. Students will observe and participate in a samba school in Rio, where students will see first-hand the importance of Carnival to Brazilians and the level of engagement in Carnival preparations by the community.
2. Learning about the history of Carnival, imported from Europe, as well as samba, a dance with African roots, and how these different streams of cultural influence have intertwined in the creation of a uniquely Brazilian Carnival culture and set of traditions.
3. Applied instruction in samba dancing and other Carnival activities to be able to experience the beloved tradition of samba, a key element of Brazilian cultural identity.
4. Students will learn to take notes and photographs for their travel essays, while observing and participating in cultural activities.

FIELD ASSIGNMENTS

1. This course will focus on Character and Setting as two primary elements in creating strong works of fiction. In each port of call, students are required to fulfill assignments relating to close observation of people and place. In several ports, they will be asked to interact with the local culture, and to write about it.
2. Writing is an act of empathy and discovery: in the act of entering another character's life, we learn not only about them, but about ourselves. The stories the students write will be part of a sequence of stories about people in different areas in the world. This will broaden their perspectives, give them a taste (both literal and metaphorical) of the richness of the world, and teach them how to express this richness with words.
3. One of the tales in the students' Sequence of Tales will be set in Rio, and will be written in response to our Field Trip in Rio.

Students will take notes while participating in the field lab experience. They will then review and edit their notes and write fiction based on observation, participation and interpretation.

Students will be given a field assignment in every port around which to focus their journal

entries, which will be reviewed and shared in class.

During class workshop/presentations, students will share and discuss each other's stories.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC

60 %: Writing Assignments:

3 stories: A Sequence of Tales (including Story #3, which will be set in Rio).

3 Postcard Stories

Journals, and short writing assignments.

20%: Field Lab and Field Assignments

20%: Attendance and Participation: This class is a hands-on craft writing workshop, which means everyone's voice is a vital part of the whole. Students are graded on their attendance and preparation for class—assigned readings completed, journal entries written, and port assignments completed.

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

AUTHOR: Robert Shapard and James Thomas, eds.

TITLE: Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories

PUBLISHER: Gibbs Smith

ISBN #: 10: 0-87905-265-1

DATE/EDITION:

AUTHOR: Jorge Luis Borges

TITLE: Labyrinths

PUBLISHER: New Directions

ISBN #: 10: 0811216993

DATE/EDITION: rpt, 2007

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

AUTHOR: Robert Shapard

ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: "The Remarkable Reinvention of Very Short Fiction" + "10 Writers, 10 Countries, 12 Very Short Stories"

JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: WLT (World Literature Today)

VOLUME: Volume 86, #5

DATE: September/October 2012

PAGES: 46 – 62

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 1) DVD: *Black Orpheus* (The Criterion Collection). Director: Marcel Camus. DVD release: 2010. 2 discs. Studio: The Criterion Collection. ASIN: B003N2CVOU

HONOR CODE

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."