

**ENGLISH S404:
READING FICTION FOR CRAFT
MWF 1:00-3:15
Instructor: Adam Reid Sexton
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Office Hours: by appointment

Office Location: Trumbull College Basement Room 29

Texts (available at the Yale Bookstore):

Adam Sexton, *Master Class in Fiction Writing*

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

Readings that are hyperlinked are available online; others will be posted to Canvas

Course Description: In this course, you will learn to look at a work of fiction as the result of a series of craft-related choices made by its author. How does each writer we study *choose* to structure a particular work, and how does that structure contribute to the story or novel's function as a sort of "machine for reading"? How does each of these writers employ characterization, plot, description, dialogue, point of view, style, and voice? You then will incorporate techniques learned from the masters of fiction writing into your own work. Writing exercises will be assigned, and each student will present a short story in class for peer review before revising that story for submission at term's end.

Class 1

WHAT IS A STORY?

In-class exercise: Outline a story using narrative structure

Writing assignment due at next class meeting: Write a short-short story based on your in-class outline (500 words)

Class 2

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Sexton, Chapter 1 including James Joyce, "Araby"

Zadie Smith, "Miss Adele Amidst the Corsets" (available on Canvas)

Writing assignment due at next class meeting: Revise your 500-word short-short story, altering its *structure* as radically you can. Tell it in reverse, perhaps. Make it a list, or a list of questions and answers. Preserve the story's content, however, as well as its coherence.

Class 3

CHARACTERIZATION

Sexton, Chapter 2

Jamaica Kincaid, "Columbus in Chains," *New Yorker*, 10 Oct. 1983,
www.newyorker.com/magazine/1983/10/10/columbus-in-chains.

ZZ Packer, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere," *New Yorker*, 19 Jun. 2000,
www.newyorker.com/magazine/2000/06/19/drinking-coffee-elsewhere

Writing assignment due at next class meeting: Write a character sketch of someone you've known with whom you are no longer in contact (500 words)

Class 4

PLOT

Sexton, Chapter 3

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*

Writing assignment due next at next class meeting: Describe a place that you have not visited since childhood (500 words)

Class 5

DESCRIPTION

From Sexton, Chapter 4

John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," *New Yorker*, 19 Aug. 1961,
archives.newyorker.com/?i=1961-08-19#folio=024

John Updike, "Separating," *New Yorker*, 23 Jun. 1975,
www.newyorker.com/magazine/1975/06/23/separating

Writing assignment due at next class meeting: Describe a thing that has become obsolete (500 words)

Additional, fun assignment: www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/upshot/dialect-quiz-map.html?_r=0

Class 6

DIALOGUE

Sexton, Chapter 5

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants" (available on Canvas)

Raymond Carver, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" (available on Canvas)

Writing assignment due next class: Write a scene, *entirely in untagged dialogue*, in which one character tries to persuade another to hand over something that is precious to the second character (500 words)

Class 7

STYLE AND VOICE

Sexton, Chapter 8

Junot Diaz, "The Pura Principle," *New Yorker*, 22 Mar. 2010,
www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/03/22/the-pura-principle

Kristen Roupenian, "Cat Person," *New Yorker*, 11 Dec. 2017,
www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person

Writing assignment: Begin first draft of a complete short story of about 2500 words

Class 8

POV I: Participant Narrators

Sexton, Chapter 6

Serial first person: William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

Writing assignment: Continue first draft of a complete short story of about 2500 words

Class 9

POV I: Participant Narrators, cont.

First person plural: Julie Otsuka, "Come, Japanese!" *Granta*, 10 Feb. 2011,

granta.com/come-japanese/

Second person instructional: Lorrie Moore, "How to Be an Other Woman" (available on Canvas)

Writing assignment due to be emailed to instructor by next class meeting: DRAFT OF SHORT STORY

Class 10

POV II: Exclusively-Observant Narrators

Sexton, Chapter 7

Omniscient: Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

Class 11

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "Apollo," *New Yorker*, 13 Apr. 2015,

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/13/apollo

Workshopping of student stories 1-2

Class 12

Jhumpa Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter," *New Yorker*, 20 Apr. 1998,

www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/04/20/a-temporary-matter

Workshopping of student stories 3-4

Class 13

George Saunders, "Victory Lap," *New Yorker*, 5 Oct. 2009,

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/10/05/victory-lap

Workshopping of student stories 5-6

Class 14

Jennifer Egan, "Black Box," *New Yorker*, 4-11 June

2012, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box-2

Workshopping of story revisions 1-3

Class 15

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

Workshopping of story revisions 4-6

JULY 4: FINAL REVISION OF SHORT STORY DUE

Course Requirements

Assignments: You will be required to submit six short writing assignments, which will be graded pass/fail, as well as a draft and a thorough revision of a complete short story, both of which will be given a letter grade. You must come to every class meeting having read the assigned chapter in *Master Class* and the assigned short stories, novella, or novel, and prepared to discuss the craft choices made by the author of each work.

Format for written work: All written work should be typed in Times New Roman or Arial 12-point type, *double-spaced*. All exercises and both drafts of the short story must be submitted to me via email as Word documents (*not pdfs*). I will mark them using Word's "Comment" function.

Workshops: All students will present both drafts of their short-story to the class for peer review. Please TYPE your reactions (150 words minimum) to each workshop draft you receive, stating what worked best in the draft and how the writer might improve his or her work during revision. Make sure to put your name on these typed comments, and also on the draft you read; bring hard copies of both to class and give them to the writers at the end of workshop.

These workshops are crucial to improving your skills as a critical reader and thus as a writer. Failure to attend a workshop will hurt your grade, and failure to attend the workshop you're scheduled for will severely damage your grade.

Technology: Using laptops and/or cellphones is not permitted in class. Please come prepared to take notes some other way.

Attendance and punctuality: On-time attendance in class is required. Both absence and lateness can significantly affect your overall grade.

Grades: Your final grade will be based on the writing you submit (exercises as well as both drafts of your short story) and on your contributions to class. Class contributions encompass thorough preparation for and useful participation in all discussions, as well as thoughtful, constructive workshop feedback.

Final draft of short story: 30% of final grade

First draft of short story: 30%

Writing exercises: 20%

Participation and attendance: 20%