

## **CRWT 2301.501.16F Introductory Creative Writing**

Fall 2016, Section 80101: Tuesday: 7:00PM to 9:45PM

JO 3.908

### **Required Texts:**

*Ron Carlson Writes a Story*, by Ron Carlson

*The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories*, edited by Tobias Wolff (1st Edition)

*Battleborn*, by Claire Vaye Watkins

### **Instructor:**

Blake Kimzey

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Classroom: JO 3.908

Office Hours: Before class, by appointment

### **Student Learning Objectives:**

1. Describe and apply methodological processes: Students will be able to describe and apply basic methodologies and processes by which aesthetic judgments are made.
2. Describe effective communication skills: Students will demonstrate effective oral and written communication skills.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of creative writing principles and history: Students will demonstrate a broad knowledge of the principles and history of at least one major form of artistic expression.
4. Gain experience and expertise: Students will gain experience and expertise in at least one area of the creative and performing arts.

### **Suggested Course Materials:**

During the semester, each of you will be up for workshop twice. This means each student will be expected to provide photocopies of 2 original stories to each member of the class for each workshop (a total of 20 copies each time). Students will also turn in 2 copies of each written critique. This means that students enrolled in this class should be prepared to incur some photocopying and/or printing expenses.

### **Course Overview:**

“First, find out what your hero wants, then just follow him!” - Ray Bradbury

Serious writers are serious readers. There is a popular writer’s motto that says, “Read 100 books, write one.” In the next 16 weeks we are going to read 20 (or more) published short stories and along the way you'll write two of your own (with a revision of one of the stories due at the end of the semester). You'll also read and respond to peer stories submitted to the workshop.

At the end of our 16 weeks together I want you to be a more voracious, engaged, and passionate reader. That is the only way you will grow into a serious writer. Lucky for you, there is a simple formula for the beginning writer, which you should follow: read (a lot), practice (a lot), and don't give up. And because I trust you, I'm going to give you the secret formula that our most accomplished writers follow: they read (a lot), they practice (a lot), and they haven't given up.

Writing is personal. The fiction you write is your own. What you write about and how you write it is up to you, with a few guidelines that we'll discuss in class and talk about at length over the semester. The style and voice you come into the class with are yours to keep, though I'm willing to bet you will see a subtle or even radical shift in the way you write. Reading does that.

British novelist Martin Amis summarizes the process of writing artful, personal fiction this way: "What you're trying to do is be faithful to your perceptions and transmit them as faithfully as you can." Sounds simple, but you can't artfully or effectively *transmit your perceptions* in fiction without first understanding the fundamental elements of writing. So we're going to look very closely at the elements of fiction within individual pieces of writing, such as: character, setting, dialogue, tension, tone, narrative stance, and point of view, among many others.

I'm here to help you grow as a reader and develop as a writer. At times you will be frustrated. By design you'll have to work very hard every week. American writer Steven Pressfield wrote, "The most important thing about art is to work. Nothing else matters except sitting down every day and trying." And that is exactly what we are going to do this semester.

Now for the fine print:

You will turn in the following assignments over the next 16 weeks, all typed, double-spaced, **stapled**, using Times New Roman 12 pt. font:

1. Two original short stories between 2500 and 5000 words each (yes, you can go *a little bit* over the 5000 word mark if the story calls for it).
2. Revision of your strongest story due at the end of the semester (Tuesday, 12/6).
3. One-page critical reading response ("Critique") for all student stories submitted to workshop. Roughly 500 words each.

**IMPORTANT:** I will not accept any of these assignments via e-mail. This is a hard copy class.

Critiques: Critical reading responses for student workshop stories are an opportunity for you to help fellow student writers. What's working well in the story? Why? What could be improved in the story? Don't re-write the story for the writer. Understand what the story is trying to do and comment accordingly. Offer suggestions based on what you've

learned in class. And be respectful of the work. On the day we are to workshop student stories, bring one copy of your response for the writer and one for me.

**IMPORTANT:** I will not accept late critiques under any circumstances.

We'll talk about the concept of "workshop" in class. In short, we'll be discussing your writing during class with a critical eye. **When your story is up for workshop you will bring a copy of your story for everyone in class, including one for me, one class period before.** For example, if your story is going to be workshopped on Tuesday 9/13, you'll bring stapled copies of your story on Tuesday 9/6. You'll get all of these copies back at the end of your workshop session. Students will read the story TWICE, make comments and suggestions on the manuscript, write their name on the front page, write a one-page critical reading response and come to class prepared to discuss the story.

Please be aware that reading assignments may change over the course of the semester and that there may be periodic writing exercises that I will collect but not assign a letter grade. Turning them in will be part of your overall participation grade.

Attendance:

Your participation grade is dependent on your *thoughtful* in-class contributions, which means you can't miss class. You have to show up to contribute. Attendance is also important in learning how to be a better reader and writer. If you miss two classes, it means one full drop in your final letter grade. If you miss three or more classes, it means a fail. If you need to be absent, please email me beforehand.

In-Class Rules:

- **Politeness:** Being a human is an exercise in collaboration; participating in a fiction workshop, doubly so. Absolutely no rudeness, hostility, etc., will be tolerated in this classroom. To workshop your writing is to make yourself vulnerable – in order to do so successfully, all students must feel safe in this environment. Being truthful about someone's work is in no way mutually exclusive with treating it kindly. Giving a constructive, thoughtful comment on a weakness in a piece of fiction requires you to be articulate and sophisticated. Life requires you to be articulate and sophisticated. Consider this an object lesson in being a successful adult.
- **Diversity of voices:** This workshop is very much a community, and in order for the community to function, everyone needs to participate and everyone needs to feel *invited* to participate. If you're shy, bring notes! No one will judge you. If certain students, on the other hand, dominate discussion or participate to the extent that other students feel uncomfortable or cannot make their voices heard, they will be thanked for their enthusiasm but asked to leave room for other participants.
- **Electronic devices:** These are not allowed during class. This includes cell phones, laptops, reading devices and tablet computers. **IMPORTANT:** If I see you on an electronic device during class you will be marked absent.

- **Formatting**: All submitted work must be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12pt. font and **stapled**. When submitting your stories for the class to workshop, bring a copy of the story for everyone in the class including yourself and the instructor.
- **Preparation**: Read the assigned material and come to class ready to discuss it. I will employ pop quizzes if I feel the class is not prepared to discuss the reading.
- **Promptness**: Come to class on time. IMPORTANT: For every two times you are tardy I will record an absence.
- **Late Work**: Late work is not accepted. No exceptions. Stories not submitted according to the workshop schedule will receive an “F” rather than disrupt the process for everyone else.
- **Make-Up Work**: No make-up work will be assigned; no extra credit projects will be offered, and no absences will be excused except those mandated by the administration of this university.
- **Emails**: Email is the primary way I communicate with the class. You are responsible for checking your UTD email account *at least* once every 24 hours, and you are responsible for understanding and complying with all information and instructions emailed to the class.
- **NOTE**: Descriptions and timelines in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the professor. Always bring the book we are currently reading to class. Emailed manuscripts or reading responses are not accepted.

### **Final Grade Breakdown**

- 30% Two Original Short Stories (each story 2500 to 5000 words in length)
- 30% Class Participation: I keep track of who participates in class and contributes to discussion in a *meaningful* way.
- 30% Written Critiques
- 10% Quizzes on assigned reading material

### **CRWT 2301.501 Course Calendar (subject to change):**

#### **Week One**

- 8/23: READ: *Ron Carlson Writes a Story* (read entire book; at 112 pages, it is a very quick read)  
 IN-CLASS: Introduction to course. Short Quiz. Reading discussion. Writing exercise.

#### **Week Two**

- 8/30: READ: Kate Braverman, "Tall Tales From The Mekong Delta," Raymond Carver, "Cathedral."

#### **Week Three**

- 9/6: READ: Mary Gaitskill, "A Romantic Weekend," Barry Hannah, "Testimony of Pilot."  
 IN-CLASS: Practice Workshop of "Testimony of Pilot."

**Week Four**

9/13: READ: Thom Jones, "A White Horse," Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl."  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #1 (2500-5000 Words): 1, 2, 3.

**Week Five**

9/20: READ: Robert Stone, "Helping," Joy Williams, "Train."  
 ASSIGNMENT: Workshop Story #1 (2500-5000 Words): 4, 5, 6.

**Week Six**

9/27: READ: John Edgar Wideman, "Daddy Garbage," Ann Beattie, "A Vintage Thunderbird."  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #1 (2500-5000 Words): 7, 8, 9.

**Week Seven**

10/4: READ: Susan Power, "Moonwalk," Allan Gurganus, "Minor Heroism."  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #1 (2500-5000 Words): 10, 11, 12.

**Week Eight**

10/11: READ: Tim O'Brien, "The Things They Carried," Richard Ford, "Rock Springs."  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #1 (2500-5000 Words): 13, 14, 15.

**Week Nine**

10/18: READ: Denis Johnson, "Emergency," Mona Simpson, "Lawns."  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #1 (2500-5000 Words): 16, 17, 18.

**Week Ten**

10/25: READ: "Ghosts, Cowboys" & "The Last Thing We Need," Watkins.  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #2 (2500-5000 Words): 1, 2, 3.

**Week Eleven**

11/1: READ: "Rondine Al Nido," Watkins.  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #2 (2500-5000 Words): 4, 5, 6.

**Week Twelve**

11/8: READ: "The Past Perfect, The Past Continuous, The Simple Past," Watkins.  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #2 (2500-5000 Words): 7, 8, 9.

**Week Thirteen**

11/15: READ: "Wish You Were Here," Watkins.  
 ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #2 (2500-5000 Words): 10, 11, 12.

**Week Fourteen**

11/22: SCHOOL HOLIDAY (WINTER BREAK), NO CLASS  
 READ: "Man-O-War" & "The Archivist" & "The Diggings," Watkins.

**Week Fifteen**

11/29: ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #2 (2500-5000 Words): 13, 14, 15.  
READ: "Virginia City" & "Graceland," Watkins.

**Week Sixteen**

12/6: ASSIGNMENT DUE: Workshop Story #2 (2500-5000 Words): 16, 17, 18.  
Also Due 12/6: Final Draft of Story (#1 or #2, your choice). This is a major revision of a story. **IMPORTANT**: You need to include a one-page, typed description of what you changed in your story revision as well as the original copy of the story that you turned in earlier in the semester. Also, if you do not include a self-addressed, stamped envelope you will not receive notes on your final revision. **NOTE**: No final exam will be given in this course.