

Gilmour Academy
English 12: Contemporary Fiction
Gilmour course # 107A; KAP course #ENGL 103

Fall 2006

KAP

The KAP English course is designed to help students to develop skills in perceptive reading, critical thinking, and effective writing, through the study of significant literary texts representing a range of genres and chronological periods, and drawn from a variety of gender and cultural perspectives.

Course overview

Students will read, discuss, and respond to contemporary fiction including novels and short stories. We will read selections from *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and collections of the best short fiction from the past several years. We will look at trends in current fiction, study award winning modern works and look at the criteria for significant awards (and who chooses the award-winners). Students will read two contemporary novels of their choosing and write and present a paper on each (one at midterm, one at the end of the semester), analyzing and discussing a significant literary element or characteristic of the novel.

Instructor's goals

I assume that writing is a process, not a body of skills and information that can be conveyed through conventional, traditional teaching methods. A writing "teacher" is more of a coach, one who facilitates the process of thinking and learning, of self-discovery, that takes place in a good writing class. Our goal, together, is to construct new understandings about ourselves, each other, and the texts we are working with. I also assume that learning is a cooperative/collaborative effort that will occur only when each party invests the necessary time, energy and attention to make it work.

Course Outcomes

This senior English course and its stated objectives directly stem from the Gilmour Academy outcomes. It is our hope that our graduates are effective communicators, collaborative learners, critical thinkers, problem solvers, lifelong learners and morally responsible women and men.

The objectives of this course are as follows. Students will be able to:

- Understand and recognize the elements of literature
- Use the language of literary analysis appropriately in response to contemporary short fiction
- Analyze the use of the elements of fiction in the contemporary short story
- Write for an audience
- Use the elements of good writing to give and receive feedback on their own and other's writing

Course materials

a. Books:

Cassill, R.V., and Richard Bausch. *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*. 6th ed. New York: Norton, 2000.

Cassill, R.V., and Joyce Carol Oates. *The Norton Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. 2nd ed., New York: Norton, 1998.

Short stories and essays will be distributed in class.

Grading/assessment

Evaluation is based primarily upon student achievement in the composition of 4-6 essays, most addressing the texts studied, and additional in-class writing and informal assignments. Student essays typically range from 3-5 typed pages. Essays should be evaluated for the relative freshness and sophistication of their insights into the texts in question; their success in developing a focused and well-substantiated argument; their ability to analyze textual evidence, utilizing (as appropriate) close-reading skills; their stylistic control and clarity; their grammatical and mechanical accuracy. As they prepare some of their essays, students will be asked to complete research using

reference texts and scholarly sources. This course includes mid-term and final papers in which the student is expected to demonstrate understanding of the major concepts of the course (see instructor's goals, above).

A major component of KAP English classes is the informed and specific discussion of the assigned literature. Discussion should engage as many students as possible each day, and should encourage independent thought, clear articulation of ideas, and close analysis of specific textual detail.

a. Daily preparation

Preparation and participation are crucial to success in this course. Daily reading and writing assignments, formal and informal, individual and collaborative, in-class and assigned, will be used to assess preparation and growth in critical reading and writing skills. Socratic seminars and writing workshops will be regularly scheduled in order to support and promote fluency and sophistication in writing and in reading comprehension.

Daily homework must be completed in a timely fashion, as it will be impossible to engage in the in-class activities without adequate preparation. While I rarely give traditional tests in this class, there are daily in-class quizzes, writings and/or discussions. All students are expected to demonstrate that they have read and prepared for class. Failure to do so will result in a zero for daily work and may also result in exclusion from full participation in class activities, particularly in Socratic seminars and writing workshops where full participation by all students is expected. It is an expectation of the Gilmour English department that student work be made public.

If you know that you are going to miss a class, see your teacher to get the assignment. If you miss class due to illness or another unanticipated reason, e-mail your teacher. It is YOUR responsibility, NOT your teacher's, to inquire about making up any missed work. Be vigilant. I will adhere to the policy as stated in the Student Handbook: **If you are absent (excused) on the day a paper is due, it is due upon your return to class. You are expected to be fully prepared for class on the day you return.**

Approximately fifty percent of the grade is based on preparation and participation, including class discussion, Socratic seminars, and in-class writings and writing workshop. The other fifty percent is based on evaluation of exhibitions, including formal writing assignments.

b. Late/missing work

Work submitted late due to an excused absence will be accepted without penalty according to the guidelines set forth in the *2006-2007 Student-Parent Handbook*. It is due upon your return to class. Late papers will lose 10 points **per school day** for every day after the due date up to a maximum of 50 points. If a paper or assessment is not submitted within two weeks of the due date no credit will be given for that assignment. All assignments are due immediately upon return to school following an absence. If a student has missed part but not all of one school day, or if the absence is unexcused, assignments are due **THAT DAY**.

Seniors in Contemporary Fiction are permitted to submit ONE paper late each semester, with a grace period of up to one week. In order to use your extension, you must submit your request **IN WRITING** when the rest of the class submits the paper. If I don't receive notification at that point, the paper will be classified as late, and the late policy (see first paragraph) will be in effect. This only applies to major papers. There are no extensions for homework and daily work.

Computer malfunction will **not** be accepted as an excuse for late assignments. If your printer fails, come in early and print it in the library or find an alternative printing source.

The important thing to remember is this: If there are extenuating circumstances, discuss the situation with the teacher, and submit the late work within a reasonable amount of time, usually by the next class period. Communication is the key when you find yourself in a tough spot.

c. Extra credit

On the rare occasion that there are activities outside of the work of the course (a play, reading, or movie to attend, an extra book to read, etc.) that might enrich class discussion, the opportunity to engage in those activities for credit will be made available only to those students who have completed all assigned work to date.

Plagiarism:

"Plagiarism is the dishonest act of presenting the words or thoughts of another writer as if they were your own. You commit plagiarism whenever you use a source in any way without indicating that you have used it." (James A.W. Heffernan and John E. Lincoln, *Writing: A College Handbook*, 2nd ed., New York: Norton, 1986, 522.). Flagrant, unacknowledged use of another's material is a grave matter. All acts of plagiarism will be referred directly to the Honor Council.

Tentative schedule

(R= red book; B= blue book)

Aug

- 21 summer reading
- 23 reviews of *Old School* by Tobias Wolff
- 25 your review of *Old School*: writing workshop
- 30 the language of fiction R

Sept

- 1 applying the language of fiction
- 6 test on literary terminology
- 7 short story 1: "Pet Milk" (is this the beginning or the end of a relationship?) B
- 11 short story 2: "Cowboys are My Weakness" (how reliable is the narrator?) B
- 13 short story 3: "Emotion Recollected in Tranquility" (seminar question: does Philly love Dianne?) B
- 15 seminar on voice/point of view: (Which of the three narrators is most reliable/trustworthy?)
- 20 writing workshop
- 22 writing workshop
- 25 the contemporary novel: independent reading
- 27 "Not a Prayer"
- 29 "Big Me" (Dan Chaon)

Oct

- 2 seminar (what is this story about? What does title mean? How reliable is the narrator? What are the distinguishing literary characteristics?)
- 4 independent reading: what are the distinctive literary characteristics of your novel?
- 6 contemporary writing with a social or political purpose: Henry Louis Gates essay on Baldwin
- 11 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Jungle*
- 13 essays on political fiction ("the protest novel") paper on book due
- 16 "Extinctions" (Barbara Kingsolver)
- 18 "Homeland" (Barbara Kingsolver)
- 20 "Sonny's Blues" (James Baldwin) R

end of 1st quarter

- 25 "Blues for Mr. Charlie" (James Baldwin)
- 27 selection from *On Beauty* (Zadie Smith)
- 30 "Everyday Use" (Alice Walker) R

Nov

- 1 student choice
- 3 seminar: do contemporary writers of fiction do better job of balancing politics and art than past writers (i.e. Sinclair, Stowe, perhaps Baldwin)
- 8 "Mr. Difficult" by Jonathan Franzen (what makes high art (other than difficulty?))
- 15 selections from *Interpreter of Maladies* (Jhumpa Lahiri)
- 17 selections from *Ship Fever* (Andrea Barrett) R
- 28 selections from *Birds of America* (Lorrie Moore)

Dec

- 1 seminar
- 4 "Ones who Walk Away from Omelas" (Ursula Le Guin) R
seminar (How does one "walk away?")
- 6 "Revelation" (Flannery O'Conner)
- 8 "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings" (Gabriel Garcia Marquez) B
- 11 "One Holy Night" (Sandra Cisneros) B
- 13 "The Tenant" (Bharati Mukherjee) B
- 15 "Coach" (Mary Robison) B
- 18 "Gravity" (David Leavitt) R

Jan

- 3 writing workshop
- 5 writing workshop
- 8 writing workshop
- 10 writing workshop
- 12 papers due/last day of course (David Sedaris?)

end of semester