ENGL 5383: Craft of Fiction

Course Information
Professor: Dr. Bridget Adams  
Time: W 6:00pm-8:30pm  
Location: Ferg 183  
Email: Bridget.Adams@sfasu.edu  
Office Hours: M/W, 10am-1:00pm, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is designed to create fluency with, and mastery of, the craft principals of fiction writing. We will spend time reading published works of fiction and discussing why and how they work, based in craft principles (POV, structure, language/sensory detail, scene, dialogue, etc.). We read other writers with the purpose of adding to our own toolkits, and as well as to find new possibilities within older techniques. You will write a paper on your findings, focusing on particular course readings. You will also compose your own original fiction, using the techniques we have learned from our reading, and we will workshop this piece. You will leave this course with an understanding of the components of fiction and further development of your own creative abilities.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
By the end of this course, you will have:
- Developed a regular reading and writing practice
- Mastered the critical vocabulary necessary to discuss fiction (your own, as well as that of contemporary fiction writers and your peers)
- Demonstrated an awareness of various genre conventions within fiction writing, and an ability to identify those conventions in the work of your peers, yourself, and others
- Created one polished full-length work of short fiction, illustrating your understanding of the craft of the genre

REQUIRED TEXTS/TECHNOLOGY:
- *Burning Down the House*, Charles Baxter
- *Beloved*, Toni Morrison
- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Shirley Jackson
- Access to Brightspace, where additional readings are linked
- Laptop with ability to connect to the internet
- Pencil and journal, if you choose to free write by hand

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE/GRADE EVALUATION/LATE WORK:
Active participation in class discussion, workshops, and preparedness in class all factor heavily into the course grade. *Assignments turned in late will be reduced a letter grade per day—not per class meeting.* Drafts will
be graded on completeness and potential—not on editing or other mechanical issues. Your final grade will be determined by the following percentages:

A. One craft analysis paper (20%)
B. One short fiction draft for workshop (20%)
C. Final Portfolio (25%)
   1. The two craft mini-essays that you are most proud of, with a 250-word discussion of why
   2. The two workshop letters from your peers that were most helpful, with a 250-word discussion of why
   3. A SIGNIFICANT revision of your workshop piece
   4. A 500-word process note that explains the way that the workshop and your assigned readings directed your revisions
D. Discussion Leader (15%):
   1. Lead one workshop of a peer (500-word discussion plan & questions)
E. Participation (20%)
   2. Active, frequent, engaged in-class participation
   3. Workshop responses (250-500 words, hard copy, submitted on Brightspace)
   4. Reading responses (500 words, submitted on Brightspace)

FINAL GRADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 – 92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73 – 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70 – 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 – 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67 – 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63 – 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 – 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60 – 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 – 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 – 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 – 59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ATTENDANCE

More than three absences will impact your ability to complete the course. If you are late to class three times, it will be counted as an absence. It is your responsibility to contact another class member—
not me—to find out what you’ve missed when you are absent. Participation in this course is essential to the function of the course, and if you are absent, you are unable to participate. Please reach out to me to discuss any extenuating circumstances you may be facing.
This continues to be an unpredictable time and we will be flexible with each other as we navigate it. If you feel sick, DO NOT COME TO CLASS. Absences for illness will be excused.

**PARTICIPATION**
This class requires vocal, frequent, respectful participation. Participation is 20% of your grade for a reason: this class is in a discussion format, and it will not function if you are not actively discussing and engaged with the reading, especially with the work your peers. To keep you on track, you will receive a weekly participation grade from me, posted to Brightspace.

**MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS**

**Craft Analysis Essay & Presentation:** You will be assigned one short story or chapter of a novel/novella and will write a 1000-word paper on the craft concepts within the story, utilizing class discussions of published work and Baxter’s assertions in *Burning Down the House*. You will use at least one more additional source to develop your essay. You will present your findings to the class during a class period. Your grade will be composed of both the paper and your presentation. You will want to quote all of your sources, and please use MLA format and include a works cited page.

*Your essays are due on: Friday, March 8 at 5pm*
*Your presentation date will be assigned.*

**Mini-Craft Essays:** Each week, you will write a 500-word response to the craft elements in the short stories we read. Remove yourself from whether or not you like the character’s voice, their opinions, their worldview, or the choices they make within the narrative. What strategies and techniques do these writers use, and can you use those craft techniques yourself? What can these writers teach you? A quotation or two is a good idea.

**One Original Short Fiction Piece**
You will generate one full-length short story of 7-15 pages (~1500 to ~4000 words). All workshop submissions should be typed, double-spaced, paginated, and 12 pt font. Your short story can be about any subject, in any structure, as long as it is fiction and follows the conventions of the genre (which we will explore in the assigned reading before we begin workshopping).

*You will submit your pieces on Brightspace prior to your workshop. Your piece is due on: Wednesday, March 20**
We will not workshop drafts that come to the class less than 72 hours before the scheduled workshop, and work that is **at all** late will be docked a letter grade per calendar day (NOT per class day).

**Final Portfolio**
The several components of your portfolio are meant to demonstrate your mastery of the concepts we have discussed in class, and to show the ways that your work has changed and grown throughout the semester. It is also a place to show which writers, in-class and out of class, impacted you. You will include the craft essays you are most proud of and the best feedback you received, explaining your process and the impact of the work. You will revise your workshopped piece thoughtfully, thoroughly, and significantly, and hand in the draft at the end of the semester. You will include a separate 500-word process note with the piece, explaining why you made the choices you did, and how those choices are based in the craft concepts we discussed this semester.

**Workshop Responses (submit on Brightspace, and email to peers):** You will write a 250-500 word response to the craft elements within the work of your peers, and you will bring two copies to workshop with you (one for me, and one for your peer). Your strategy here should be different from responding to the published work in the reading response. In these responses, you will give a generous, focused, and good faith reading of your peer's work, focusing on how best the craft elements of this short fiction can be improved. You will want to give craft-based, specific suggestions about how they can reach their narrative/creative goals.

**Workshop Discussion Leader Assignment**
During one peer workshop, you will act as discussion leader, and you will submit a 250-500-word discussion plan and set of questions on Brightspace before class. You will lead discussions of a peer’s work during our workshops.

**Fiction Prompts and Journals:**
Some class periods will be spent working on a prompted or open-ended writing assignment. These assignments will be informal and are designed to keep your creative mind elastic and flexible, and create an environment where you are able to write without the pressure of sharing your work. You might choose to expand some of these journal entries into full short stories, but your only requirement in writing the journals is to work on the prompt to the best of your ability.

**COURSE POLICIES**

**Civility**
I will tolerate neither disruptive language nor disruptive behavior. Disruptive language includes, but is not limited to, violent and/or belligerent and/or insulting remarks, including sexist, racist, homophobic or anti-ethnic slurs, bigotry, and disparaging commentary, either spoken or written (offensive slang is included in this category). While I do not disagree that you each have a right to your own opinions,
inflammatory language founded in ignorance or hate is unacceptable and will be dealt with immediately. Disruptive behavior includes the use of cell phones or any other form of electronic communication during the class session (e-mail, web-browsing). Disruptive behavior also includes whispering or talking when another member of the class is speaking or engaged in relevant conversation (remember that I am a member of this class as well). This classroom functions on the premise of respect, and you will be asked to leave the classroom if you violate any part of this statement on civility. We will treat the workshop drafts as what they are: an in-progress rendering of fictional characters. Treat others with respect, and always give them the benefit of the doubt.

Content Warnings
As a class, we will develop a policy regarding content warnings and I will then provide warnings on the works I assign to you where necessary.

A Statement on Explicit Content
Some of the texts with which we will engage over the course of the semester are explicit in their treatment of racism, sexism, and violence. Reading and discussion will be demanding in a way that is perhaps new and certainly challenging. There is never any reason to repeat, out loud in class, the offensive language you may see represented in fiction.

Academic Integrity
The Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outlines the prohibited conduct by any student enrolled in a course at SFA. It is the responsibility of all members of all faculty, staff, and students to adhere to and uphold this policy.

Articles IV, VI, and VII of the new Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outline the violations and procedures concerning academic conduct, including cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and misrepresentation. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) Copying from the test paper (or other assignment) of another student, (2) Possession and/or use during a test of materials that are not authorized by the person giving the test, (3) Using, obtaining, or attempting to obtain by any means the whole or any part of a non-administered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program, or using a test that has been administered in prior classes or semesters without permission of the Faculty member, (4) Substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for one’s self, to take a test, (5) Falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other records or academic work offered for credit, (6) Using any sort of unauthorized resources or technology in completion of educational activities.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of material that is attributable in whole or in part to another source or the use of one’s own previous work in another context without citing that it was used previously, without any indication of the original source, including words, ideas, illustrations, structure, computer
code, and other expression or media, and presenting that material as one's own academic work being offered for credit or in conjunction with a program course or degree requirements.

Collusion is the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any provision of the rules on academic dishonesty, including disclosing and/or distributing the contents of an exam.

Misrepresentation is providing false grades or résumés; providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit for oneself or another individual or to injure another student academically or financially.

Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (5.5)
Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the coursework because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course to compute the grade point average. For additional information, go to https://www.sfasu.edu/policies/course-grades-5.5.pdf.

Students with Disabilities
To obtain disability-related accommodations, alternate formats, and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services promptly may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/.

Student Wellness and Well-Being
SFA values students’ overall well-being, mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, emotional well-being, alcohol and other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help, SFA provides a variety of resources to support students’ mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.

On-campus Resources:
The Dean of Students Office (Rusk Building, 3rd floor lobby)
www.sfasu.edu/deanofstudents
936.468.7249
dos@sfasu.edu

SFA Human Services Counseling Clinic Human Services, Room 202
www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp
936.468.1041

The Health and Wellness Hub “The Hub”
Location: corner of E. College and Raguet St.

To support the health and well-being of every Lumberjack, the Health and Wellness Hub offers comprehensive services that treat the whole person – mind, body, and spirit. Services include:

- Health Services
- Counseling Services
- Student Outreach and Support
- Food Pantry
- Wellness Coaching
- Alcohol and Other Drug Education
  www.sfasu.edu/thehub
  936.468.4008
  thehub@sfasu.edu

Crisis Resources:
- Burke 24-hour crisis line: 1.800.392.8343
- National Suicide Crisis Prevention: 9-8-8
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
- johCrisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741
# COURSE CALENDAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>In Class Activity</th>
<th>Homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit 1  Craft Concepts</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td>Course Intro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No class</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td>Course Intro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| W, 1/24 | Syllabus/Intro What is Fiction Writing How to Read Fiction with Saunders' "In the Cart" | Baxter  
POV Response due Tuesday 1/30  
"Goodbye My Brother," John Cheever  
"The Solutions to Brian's Problems," Bonnie Jo Campbell (CW: Self-harm)  
"The Dungeon Master," Sam Lypsite |
| **Week 3** | POV/Voice | |
| W, 1/31 | POV/Voice | Baxter  
"The Man Who Knew Belle Star," Richard Bausch  
"Meet the President!" Zadie Smith  
"The Mother," Lydia Davis  
*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, pp.1-110 |
| **Week 4** | Structure/Plot | Baxter  
"Bullet in the Brain," Tobias Wolff  
"A Natural History of My Earlobes," Evans  
*We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, pp.110-end |
| **Week 5** | Character | Baxter  
"Pet Milk," Stuart Dybek  
*Beloved*, pp. 1-50 |
| **Week 6** | Sensory Detail | Baxter  
"Visitor," Bryan Washington  
*Beloved*, pp. 51-100 |
| **Week 7** | Dialogue | Baxter chapter  
"Playing Metal Gear Solid..." Jan Jamil Kochai  
*Beloved*, pp. 101-150 |
| **Week 8** | Place | CRAFT ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE FRIDAY 3/8  
*Beloved*, pp. 151-200 |
<p>| <strong>Week 9</strong> | SPRING BREAK | |
| <strong>W, 3/13</strong> | NO CLASS | <em>Beloved</em>, pp. 250-end |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| W, 3/20 | Review  
Craft Presentation 1 & 2  | WORKSHOP PIECES DUE |
| Week 11 |  |  |
| W, 3/27 | Workshop 1 & 2  
Craft Presentation 3 & 4  | Reading  
Workshop responses |
| Week 12 |  |  |
| W, 4/3 | Workshop 3 & 4  
Craft Presentation 5 & 6  | Reading  
Workshop responses |
| Week 13 |  |  |
| W, 4/10 | Workshop 5 & 6  
Craft Presentation 7 & 8  | Reading  
Workshop responses |
| Week 14 |  |  |
| W, 4/17 | Workshop 7 & 8  
Craft Presentation 9 & 10  | Reading  
Workshop responses |
| Week 15 |  |  |
| W, 4/24 | Workshop 9 & 10  | Reading  
Workshop responses |
| Week 16 | LAST WEEK OF CLASS |  |
| W, 5/1 | Revision workshop, Publishing Strategies  | Final Portfolio Due May 10 @ 5:00pm |