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CRWR 210A.01: Introductory Fiction Workshop

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CRWR 210A-01: Introduction to Fiction

- Instructor: Emmett Knowlton
- Meeting Day/Time: Tuesday/Thursday 12:30 pm – 1:50 pm
- Classroom: LA 102
- Office: LA 216
- Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:00 – 2:00 pm (via Zoom)
- Mailbox: LA 129
- Email: emmett.knowlton@umontana.edu

Course Goals

Some of the specific purposes of this course are:

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing, and writing short fiction
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to fiction
- Practice the art of writing and revising short fiction
- Learn to critique the quality of your own work and that of fellow students

Texts and Materials

- Online, print, and PDF documents that I will distribute to you. No books to purchase.
- Moodle page designed as an online aid to this class. **Check it daily.**
- Your student email. **Check it daily.**
- Copies of the written exercises you deliver to the class.
- Remember to keep all your writing assignments, journals, news clippings, workshop notes, and feedback letters.
- Suggested Supplemental Reading: *How Fiction Works* by James Wood, *On Writing* by Stephen King, *The Penguin Book of the Modern American Short Story*, edited by John Freeman

Course Assignments/Requirements/Format

The beginning of our course will focus on developing our understanding of the short story as a format, building our skills as readers and writers. Topics of study will include characterization, voice, point of view, plot, scene and summary, dialogue, and more. Work will include weekly readings, writing assignments, reading responses, and generative exercises. In the second portion of the class, we will shift to student workshops, which will involve large class discussions of creative work by your classmates.

- **Readings:** Students will read 2-4 pieces each week, including short stories and discussions of writing as a craft. Eventually, this will also include short creative work by your classmates. **Students should be prepared to discuss our readings in class and will be required to write a short response on a reading of their choice each week, to be posted before class on Thursday.**
- **Writing Exercises:** Throughout the duration of this course students will complete both in and out of class writing exercises to put the techniques we discuss into practice and further

the development of our writing skills. All writing exercises must be turned in on the date due and must be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins (unless otherwise specified). Exercises will vary in length and content and should be added to your portfolio once handed back and kept until the end of the semester.

- **In-Class Writing:** We will frequently engage in short in-class writing assignments—come prepared to write. This means mental preparation, yes, but also pen/paper/etc. I may occasionally devote an entire class period to writing, in which case I may allow you to work from home.
- **Weekly Writing:** Each week, you will be required to submit a 1-3 page (double spaced) writing sample on Moodle, to be turned in on Tuesday (thereby giving you the weekend to write). These short pieces can be musings, imitations, descriptions, ideas, scenes, pieces of dialogue, or complete stories. Usually, I will provide a prompt that you are encouraged to ignore if you choose.
- **Conversation and Events Notebook:** Each of us will keep a small notebook (perhaps a literal notebook, perhaps a standalone Note in one's phone's Notes App, perhaps something else entirely) in which we will record/scribble/jot/transcribe bits conversations we overhear. This can be as short as one surprising line yelled by a cyclist on the Higgin's St. Bridge or as comprehensive as a 10-minute fight between two dog owners in the park. The point is to get in the habit of recording what we hear and see. We will share these in each class (I will ask you what you've been record) so please be diligent about this!
- **Workshop Stories:** You will draft one original short story, 10-20 pages in length (Times New Roman size 12 font, double spaced) to be workshopped by the entire class. You are responsible for providing each of your classmates with a **printed copy**, during the class one week prior to your workshop. This means if your workshop is on Tuesday, November 16th, you must bring copies of your story to class on Tuesday November 9th. If you do not own a printer, plan accordingly.
- **Workshop Letters:** During the workshop portion on this course, you will **type** a one to two page (double spaced) response to each of your classmates' stories, highlighting the strongest and weakest parts of their piece by using what you've learned in class thus far. Your letters must maintain a professional, kind, and courteous tone with respect for your classmates, but should not shy away from the difficult questions of concern. Remember we are all on the same team; the goal here is to be helpful. Always print two copies of your letter, one will go to me and the other to the author of the story.
- **Final Revision:** For your final you will edit and **significantly** revise your workshop story AND expand and revise two (2) of your weekly writing exercises. You must turn in a copy of the original pieces alongside their revisions in order to receive full credit for the assignment.

Grading

- Participation (discussions, workshops, and workshop letters) = 40%.
- Daily work (writing exercises and reading responses) = 30%.
- Final portfolio (polished story and 2 revised exercises) = 30%.

Grading guidelines:

A Superior participation shows initiative and excellence in written and verbal work. The student helps to create more effective discussions and workshops through his/her verbal and written contributions. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail. In workshop, suggestions to group members are tactful, thorough, specific, and often provide other student writers with a new perspective or insight.

B Strong participation demonstrates active engagement in written and verbal work. The student plays an active role in the classroom but does not always add new insight to the discussion at hand. Reading and writing assignments are always completed on time and with attention to detail.

C Satisfactory participation demonstrates consistent, satisfactory written and verbal work. Overall, the student is prepared for class, completes assigned readings and writings. In workshop, suggestions to group members are tactful and prompt, but could benefit from more attentive reading and/or specific detail when giving comments.

D Weak participation demonstrates inconsistent written and verbal work. The student may be late to class, unprepared for class, and may contribute infrequently or unproductively to classroom discussions or small group workshops. Reading and writing assignments are not turned in or are insufficient.

F Unacceptable participation shows ineffectual written and verbal work. The student may be excessively late to class, regularly unprepared, and not able to contribute to classroom discussions or small group workshops. This student may be disruptive in class. Reading and writing assignments are regularly not turned in or are insufficient

Preferred Name & Preferred Gender Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Students with Disabilities

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please contact me with a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

Academic Conduct

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code.

Plagiarism

Don't do it. Do not claim someone else's work as your own. Ask me if you're unsure where those boundaries lie.

Covid-19 Safety Information

- Mask use is required within the classroom, regardless of vaccination status.
- Free vaccines are available from Curry Health Center for all students on a drop-in basis.
- Specific seating arrangements will be used to ensure social distancing and support contact tracing efforts
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom (which requires mask removal)
- Stay home if you feel sick and/or if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms
- If you are sick or displaying symptoms, please contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330
- Up-to-Date COVID-19 Information from the University of Montana · UM Coronavirus Website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus> · UM COVID-19 Fall 2020 website: <https://www.umt.edu/coronavirus/fall2020.php>
- Students are strongly encouraged to remain vigilant outside the classroom in mitigating the spread of COVID-19

Covid-19 Learning Accommodations

Due to the unique situation in which we find ourselves this semester, a number of changes to normal class procedures will be necessary:

- Office hours and conferences will be remote via Zoom or telephone. I will be available during my office hours to begin a Zoom chat. If possible, please let me know beforehand if you wish to digitally attend my office hours.
- While all effort should be made to attend class in person, **DO NOT COME TO CLASS IF YOU ARE ILL**. When in doubt, stay home or go to Curry Health Center. If you stay home out of an abundance of caution, but would still like to participate in class, I will make every effort to make Zoom attendance available. Such instances will not count as an absence for the course attendance policy.

Assignment Due Dates

All assignments are due **one minute before the beginning of class** on the date listed in the syllabus, unless otherwise noted. You may not complete homework assignments during class time. **All assignments must be submitted in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, and with one inch margins.**

Class Attendance/Absence Policy

Students who are registered for a course but do not attend the first two class meetings may be required to drop the course. This rule allows for early identification of class vacancies to permit other students to add classes. Students not allowed to remain must complete a drop form or drop the course through CyberBear to avoid receiving a failing grade.

Students who know they will be absent should contact me in advance.

If you miss a class, YOU are responsible for finding out about work missed in class or any additional homework. Do not expect me to email you.

Students are expected to attend all class meetings and complete all assignments for courses in which they are enrolled. I may excuse brief and occasional absences for reasons of illness, injury, family emergency, religious observance, cultural or ceremonial events, or participation in a University sponsored activity. (University sponsored activities include for example, field trips, ASUM service, music or drama performances, and intercollegiate athletics.) I will excuse absences for reasons of military service or mandatory public service; please provide appropriate documentation (see below).

Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student's customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.

Students in the National Guard or Reserves are permitted excused absences due to military training. Students must submit their military training schedule to their instructor at the **beginning of the semester**. Students must also make arrangements with the instructor to make up course work for absences due to military service.

Reasonable Program Modifications

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction for students with disabilities in collaboration with instructors and Disability Services for Students, which is located in Lommasson Center 154. The University does not permit fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications.

More than two absences from a Tuesday-Thursday class will compromise your grade. 6 or more absences from a Tuesday-Thursday class will result in a failing grade. Here's the breakdown:

4th absence: final grade drops one letter grade (example: A drops to B)

5th absence: final grade drops two letter grades (example: A drops to C)

6th absence: final grade is an F

Here's the reasoning behind the attendance policy. Without attending class, you cannot perform your role as a student involved in learning, planning, inventing, drafting; discussing reading and writing; learning and practicing rhetorical moves and concepts; or collaborating with your instructor and classmates. A few absences are allowed; please reserve those for emergencies.

I reserve the right to adjust the policy in cases of significant, documented illness or emergency. Please note that instances of poor time management on your part do not constitute extenuating circumstances. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or

assignments for the class from a classmate, including workshop pieces. Make sure you talk with me in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

Students with a documented illness may have the option to “zoom” into class from their home. We will discuss this in class.

If a student in our class is being tested for Covid-19, it is likely that we will not be permitted to meet face-to-face as a class while we wait for the results. **These absences will not count against you (as it is a matter of public safety); however, you are still expected to complete assignments on time,** and if class is being held online, you are expected to participate. I will expect documentation (a note from Curry Health Center is fine) confirming that you have, in fact, been tested.

Participation

Participation includes coming to class prepared and on time, taking part in class discussions, asking questions, contributing your knowledge and insights in whatever form is appropriate, and striving to make all your contributions excellent. It also includes doing the required reading and writing for each class. Lateness will hurt your grade because it is an unnecessary interruption and because latecomers are likely to miss valuable information. Please see *Participation Grade Descriptors* for more information.

Late Policy

- Homework assignments *will not be accepted late*. Emailing assignments is only acceptable if illness causes you to miss class; students who miss class due to illness must still bring in a written copy the day they return (this is the only exception to the lateness policy—I will accept a homework assignment the next class if I received an emailed version from a sick student by class time on the day it was due).
- Late assignments will be **docked one letter grade per day** unless you get my approval for an extension **before** the due date.
- If you are absent the day your story is due you must contact me to discuss the situation—you are not automatically given an extension until the next class period.
- You are always welcome to complete assignments early if you will be missing class.

Course Schedule and Assignments

All assignments and readings are subject to change as the semester develops. Please regularly check Moodle and your university email for the most up to date information.

WEEK 1

Tuesday (8/31)

Introductions, syllabus, in-class writing exercise, Choctaw Bingo ...

For next class: *Bird by Bird* (excerpt) by Anne Lamott, "Bullet in the Brain" by Tobias Woolf, "Taking Care" by Joy Williams; reading response via Moodle

Thursday (9/2)

Discussion of readings, in-class writing exercise

For next class: "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson, "A Good Man is Hard To Find" by Flannery O'Connor; Writing Exercise #1

WEEK 2

Tuesday (9/7)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #1; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: "Cathedral" by Raymond Carver; "Emergency" by Denis Johnson; reading response via Moodle

Thursday (9/9)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #1; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: "The School" by Donald Barthelme, "Rise, Baby, Rise!" by George Saunders (craft talk); Writing Exercise #2

WEEK 3

Tuesday (9/13)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #2; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: "How to Become a Writer" by Lorrie Moore, "How to Date a Brown Girl (Black Girl, White Girl, or Halfie)" by Junot Diaz; reading response via Moodle

Thursday (9/16)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #2; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “The Lady with the Lapdog” by Anton Chekov, “The Five Forty-Eight” by John Cheever; Writing Exercise #3

WEEK 4

Tuesday (9/21)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #3; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “The Husband Stitch” by Carmen Maria Machado; “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid; “Axolotl” by Julio Cortazar; reading response via Moodle

Thursday (9/23)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #3; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “Civilwarland in Bad Decline” by George Saunders, “Incarnations of Burned Children” by David Foster Wallace; Writing Exercise #4

WEEK 5

Tuesday (9/28)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #4; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried” by Amy Hempel, *How Fiction Works* (excerpt) by James Wood; reading response via Moodle

Thursday (9/30)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #4; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “The Metal Bowl” by Miranda July, “A Vintage Thunderbird” by Ann Beattie; Writing Exercise #5

WEEK 6

Tuesday (10/5)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #5; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “Another Manhattan” by Donald Antrim; “Last Night” by James Salter; reading response via Moodle

Thursday (10/7)

Discussion of readings & of Writing Exercise #5; in-class writing exercise(s)

For next class: “Cremains” by Sam Lipsyte; & “The Sentence is a Lonely Place” (craft reading) by Gary Lutz

WEEK 7

Tuesday (10/12)

For next class: “Story of your life” by Ted Chiang

Thursday (10/14)

For next class: “Endings that Hover” (Craft) by Nelly Reifler

WEEK 8

Tuesday (10/19)

For next class: Peer Workshop #1

Thursday (10/21)

PEER WORKSHOP: Max & Sierra

For next class: Peer Workshop #2

WEEK 9

Tuesday (10/26)

PEER WORKSHOP: Aaron & Payton

For next class: Peer Workshop #3

Thursday (10/28)

PEER WORKSHOP: Olivia & Dante

For next class: Peer Workshop #4

WEEK 10

Tuesday (11/2)

PEER WORKSHOP: Kyie & Jack

For next class: Peer Workshop #5

Thursday (11/4)

PEER WORKSHOP: Anela & Jessie

For next class: Peer Workshop #6

WEEK 11

Tuesday (11/9)

PEER WORKSHOP: Austin & Justis

For next class: Peer Workshop #7

Thursday (10/28)

VETERAN'S DAY, NO CLASS

WEEK 12

Tuesday (11/16)

PEER WORKSHOP: Alex A & Rylee

For next class: Peer Workshop #8

Thursday (11/18)

PEER WORKSHOP: Tucker & Maddie

For next class: Peer Workshop #9

WEEK 13

Tuesday (11/23)

PEER WORKSHOP: Alex C.

Thursday (11/25)

THANKSGIVING — NO CLASS

WEEK 14

Tuesday (11/30)

ON REVISION

WEEK 15

Tuesday (12/7)

ON REVISION, cont'd.

WEEK 16 — EXAM WEEK

Final portfolios due on 12/15