

Carleton University  
Department of English  
Fall 2020

ENGL2903A: Fiction Workshop  
Wednesday 8:30 am to 11:30 am

**Online Synchronous Meetings Via Zoom**

Prerequisite: Second year standing or permission of the instructor

Instructor: Richard Taylor

E-mail: [taylorswave@gmail.com](mailto:taylorswave@gmail.com)

**APPLYING TO THE COURSE:**

Like all the writing workshops in the English Department, students are admitted to the Fiction Workshop by permission of the instructor and the submission of a portfolio.

**If you are thinking about taking the Online Fiction Workshop, please email me beforehand for a chat at [taylorswave@gmail.com](mailto:taylorswave@gmail.com)**

Before the term begins you must submit a 5-10-page double-spaced portfolio. It must include a brief biographical sketch about who you are and why you want to take the workshop and if you have taken any other creative writing workshops. You can include any of the following examples from your writing: stories, postcard stories, parts of novels, or creative nonfiction like blogs, magazine pieces, personal essays, memoir, travel writing or poetry. You can submit excerpts from longer pieces of work but describe how the excerpt relates to the longer piece.

**Portfolios should be emailed to the English Dept. at [english@carleton.ca](mailto:english@carleton.ca) Please include a cover page with your name, Carleton student number, Carleton email address and telephone number. Students are advised to register in an alternate course while awaiting a decision on your writing portfolio submission.**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This Online Fiction Workshop offers instruction in creative writing with an emphasis on short stories, post card stories and novels, although creative nonfiction will be briefly discussed. Each participant must be prepared to submit committed work and to further the group's on-going dialogue on the pieces submitted. Early workshops will consist of fun, stimulating writing exercises. Participants are expected to use these prompts for warm-up purposes and to hone their skills and to explore new territory. Time will be devoted to learning how to balance inspiration and discipline, finding a personal voice, choosing a subject, and developing a sense of structure. There will be group critiques of works-in-progress.

**PLEASE TAKE NOTE: (Subject to Covid Considerations and Improvisational Changes)**

**The Fiction Workshop will be offered Online with synchronous meetings via ZOOM 3 hours once a week. Participation in this course will require students to have reliable, high-**

**speed internet access and a computer with a webcam and microphone. As much as possible I want our Online Fiction Workshop to replicate as close as possible my face-to-face Fiction Workshop I have taught for years. (I recently finished teaching a 12-week Online Virtual Writing Workshop with 18 writers, and it went swimmingly.)**

The Fiction Workshop will not be directed toward any particular genre or style. We should be trying to understand something of the complexity and mystery of storytelling and writing, wherever it occurs. I am looking for enthusiastic, committed people in the thrall of books and writing who are interested in developing and honing what talent already exists. Each participant must be prepared to submit committed work and to further the group's ongoing dialogue on the pieces submitted. All kinds of original, imaginative writing are welcome, and freedom of expression for all points of view is zealously maintained. Every week several writers will submit a manuscript to be workshopped and critiqued for the next class. Each writer will read each manuscript and write comments about what makes it work and what might make it work better. I'll give you guidelines – **Things to Consider When Critiquing a Piece of Writing**. There is no text required for this workshop. However, you will be required to read many handouts and examples of published material, some by fairly well-known writers and some from published former workshop students. You will have to read and edit the work of fellow student writers. It is the responsibility of each student to email their work the week preceding the workshop. Each manuscript must be page-numbered, double-spaced in legible typeface and include the writer's name and email.

You must be willing to come to every class and to deal with forthright analysis of your work in a select but public forum. Your text (manuscript) at first will have to speak for you. **Online**, the discussion, in one form or another, will go around the table of workshoppers; you will listen; I will listen; then perhaps sum up and sometimes interject, or occasionally take the discussion in a new direction. We will all be trying to communicate what makes each manuscript work and what might make each manuscript work better. The sessions will be lively, resembling at various times an encounter group session or debating society. There will also be quiet moments of communication, humour, revelation and probably as much person to person with the instructor and others in the group as you would wish. At all times you must participate with sensitivity and respect.

## **EVALUATION:**

Early on there will be a few very short in-class warm-up writing assignments and Story Prompts and a False Statement Exercise. You will get feedback from the instructor and fellow students.

The class will be broken down into Peer Editing Groups. You will submit all your writing to your own Peer Editing Group. Your work will have a chance to be read and improved by your Peer Editing Group before it gets into the classroom to be workshopped by the entire class. There will be three specific writing assignments: A short postcard story, 500 words or less. A short story, 1,500 words or less. A group mini novel assignment, 1500 words or less. In teams of 3 writers each group member will write a short chapter of a group mini novel.

There will be no mark for individual pieces. Each piece of your writing will be read and commented on by your Peer Editing Group. Then it will be brought into class to be read out loud (all of it or an excerpt) and workshopped by the entire class. You will have a chance to revise it and email it to me along with a half page to full page commentary about your revision process. Because this is a creative writing workshop, there will be opportunities for spontaneity and improvisation, but you must be willing to read, write, edit, and fully participate. I will give you a final email commenting on all the work from the term. Your final course grade will be based on the following factors:

- 1) (70%) Quality and originality of your writing and your ability to revise and polish your work.
- 2) (20%) Your oral and written editorial comments on the work of others, and your discussion contribution. The energy, depth, and enthusiasm with which you contribute to the collective process.
- 3) (10%) ATTENDANCE!

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Plagiarism: See the university's Academic Integrity Policy here:

<https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>

## **FICTION WORKSHOP WEEKLY SCHEDULE, Fall 2020**

**(Subject to Covid Considerations and Improvisational changes)**

“All good writing is swimming underwater and holding your breath.” F. Scott Fitzgerald.

### **Week 1 (Sept. 9)**

- Brief introduction of instructor and each class member
- Only trouble is interesting
- Unfolding and withholding
- Conflict, crisis, resolution
- Character and narrative arc
- Showing vs Telling, Scene vs Summary
- *Shitty First Drafts* by Anne Lamott
- Absolut Vodka Story Contest Winner: *While We Lay Naked*
- Using the five senses
- Immediate Reality Memory Imagination
- Warm up writing exercises
- Story Prompts (Homework)

## Week 2 (Sept. 16)

- Do writing exercises
- False Statement Exercise
- Finding the right style, tone, mood, mysterious tension.
- *How to Become a Writer* (Bookmark)
- *Things to Consider When Critiquing a Piece of Writing*
- Break class into Peer Editing Groups
- Workshop Story Prompts

## Week 3 (Sept. 23)

- Trouble and Desire
- Break long projects into parts
- Voice, Character, Point of View, Dialogue, Setting
- Postcard Stories, Flash Fiction
- Geist Postcard Story Contest Winners
- *Miss Teen America* by Andrew Forbes; *The Double Knot* by Mariam Toews
- **POSTCARD FLASH FICTION STORY ASSIGNMENT, 500 WORDS OR LESS**
- (Assign manuscript schedule. We will generally deal with around 6 per evening)
- Workshop manuscripts

## Week 4 (Sept. 30)

- Literary Short Story & Other Stories
- Short story, *Dark Blue* by Andrew Forbes
- *How I Write a Short Story: Dark Blue*
- *I Married Jane Austen*, T.C. Boyle
- *The Girl with Bangs*, Zadie Smith
- Reading short stories to see how they are put together and how they work
- **SHORT STORY ASSIGNMENT, 1,500 WORDS OR LESS**
- Workshop manuscripts

## Week 5 (Oct. 7)

- Read more short stories
- Workshop Postcard Stories

## Week 6 (Oct. 14)

- A plethora of novels: romance, thriller, mystery, sci fi, literary, graphic, satirical, erotic, dystopian, young adult.
- Bestsellers vs Literary novels: Carl Hiaasen vs Michael Ondaatje
- Laying a foundation for a larger story
- In the Beginning... *Happy Endings* by Margaret Atwood

- What's at stake - Something must be set in motion the reader wants to discover
- Opening up your narrative
- Plot: And then and then the mysteries began...
- Story Circle template
- **GROUP MINI NOVEL CHAPTER ASSIGNMENT, 1,500 WORDS OR LESS**
- Workshop Postcard Stories

### **Week 7 (Oct. 21)**

- Everyone needs a little poetry in their life
- *Is About* by Allen Ginsberg
- *Letters & Other Worlds* by Michael Ondaatje
- *Radiant Desire* (Shelley, Keats, Byron & Co.)
- *Evolution* by Sherman Alexie
- *Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes* by Billy Collins
- Jesus and Elvis, *In Bermuda* by Michelle Desbarats
- Workshop Short Story manuscripts

**(October 26 – 30 Fall Break. No Classes)**

### **Week 8 (Nov. 4)**

- Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
- All memory is fiction – Spalding Gray
- All life once lived is fiction – Norman Levine
- Any story told twice is fiction – Grace Paley
- Some of these stories or incidents are drawn from real life
- Examples of autobiographical fiction
- Monster in a Box: Writer's Block,
- How to organize and revise drafts
- Revision is the Essence of the writing process
- Redrafting and Editing
- Workshop Short Story Manuscripts

### **Week 9 (Nov. 11)**

- All writers are travellers
- *When the Best Minds Wander*
- *Map That Route* or *Winging it*
- *The Sun Also Rises*, travelling and writing with Hemingway
- *On the Road*, and Jack Kerouac's long, sad, incredible journey to find home
- *The Magus* by John Fowles: writing about a Trip, a Quest or a Journey
- *A Small Place* by Jamaica Kincaid
- Workshop Short Story manuscripts

### **Week 10 (Nov. 18)**

- Writing is Rewriting
- Working with Editors and Mentors, Publishers
- Workshop Short Story Manuscripts

### **Week 11 (Nov. 25)**

- Workshop group mini novels

### **Week 12 (Dec. 2)**

- Workshop group mini novels

### **Week 13 (Friday Dec. 9)**

- Final Class and Celebration
- Workshop Last Manuscripts

how to continue reading and writing  
live, write and read as though each  
precious day were your very last  
follow your obsessions  
try to have fun  
take chances  
take care  
aloha

Instructor:

Richard Taylor has been at Carleton since 1995, when he was Carleton Writer-In-Residence. He has lectured in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature and since the mid 90s he has taught the Fiction Workshop, and for the last 9 years the Creative Nonfiction Workshop. He has taught writing in Hong Kong, Australia, Tuscany and over 160 private, eight-week workshops in Ottawa. For 14 years he has offered an annual summer writer's retreat, Write by the Lake, in Val-des-Monts, Quebec near a waterfall at his beautiful lake house, Monet Bay. He has published a collection of short stories, *Tender Only to One* and a novel, *Cartoon Woods*, an Australian travel memoir, *House Inside the Waves: Domesticity, Art and the Surfing Life*, and many feature magazine articles. Hundreds of his writers have published work as a result of taking his workshops. While surfing and open water swimming around the world, he is working on a book about swimming with writers, *Water and Desire*.

## **Requests for Academic Accommodation**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

**Religious obligation:** write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

**Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

### **Survivors of Sexual Violence**

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

### **Accommodation for Student Activities**

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

<https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>