

**Carleton University
Department of English
Summer 2018**

ENGL2903A: Fiction Workshop

Schedule: Tuesday 6:05 pm – 8:55 pm

Location: TBA

Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor

**Instructor: Richard Taylor
E-mail: taylorwave@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 Fiction Workshop, please email me beforehand for a chat at taylorwave@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. 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 or travel writing. 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 The deadline for submission is the middle of April. 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:

The 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:

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. Everyone will write and submit work to the group for critiquing by all participants. 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 (story, chapter) to be workshopped and critiqued for the next class. These manuscripts will be taken home. Each writer will read each manuscript with a pencil or pen in hand 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, but you will be required to read many handouts and examples of published material, and read and edit the work of fellow writers. It is the responsibility of each student to pay for and reproduce sufficient copies of your work for each of your classmates and to hand them out the week preceding the workshop. Each manuscript must be typed, double spaced and double sided in legible typeface.

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; the discussion, in one form or another will go around the table of workshopppers; you will listen; I will listen; then perhaps sum up and sometimes interject, or occasionally take the discussion in a new direction. 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.

EVALUATION:

There will be three specific writing assignments: A short postcard story, 500 words or less. A short story, 2,000 words or less. A group mini novel assignment, 2,000 words or less. In teams of 3 writers each group member will write a short chapter of

a group mini novel. Before the end of term each writer will also submit a revised and edited version of their post card story and short story.

There will be no mark for individual pieces. 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. Your final course grade will be based on the following factors:

- 1) (60%) Quality and originality of your writing.**
- 2) (30%) Quality of 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!**

Plagiarism: See the statement on “Instructional Offences” in the Carleton University Undergraduate Calendar.

Academic Accommodation: Students with special needs/disabilities, or students who require academic accommodations are invited to contact the Paul Menton Centre, 613-520-6608.

FICTION WORKSHOP OUTLINE, Summer 2018 (Subject to Improvisational changes)

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

Week 1 (May 8) Introduction with Australian Byron Bay Surfboard

- Fill out Writing Workshop Questionnaire
- ONLY TROUBLE IS INTERESTING
- UNFOLDING AND WITHHOLDING
- CONFLICT, CRISIS, RESOLUTION
- SHOWING VS TELLING and 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
- Writing Exercises and Story Prompts

Week 2 (May 15) Books About Writing

Read Story Prompts

Do writing exercises

Finding the right style, tone, mood, mysterious tension.

False Statement Writing Exercise

How To Become a Writer (Bookmark)

Week 3 (May 22) Short Short Stories, Postcard Stories, Flash Fiction.

- Trouble and Desire
- Break long projects into parts
- Voice, Character, Point of View, Dialogue, Setting
- 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**
- *Things to Consider When Critiquing a Piece of Writing*
- (Assign manuscript schedule. We will generally deal with around 6 per evening)

Week 4 (May 29) The Literary Short Story and 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
- *Bullet In the Brain* by Tobias Wolf
- Reading short stories to see how they are put together and how they work
- **SHORT STORY ASSIGNMENT, 2,000 WORDS OR LESS**
- **Break class into groups of 3 writers for peer editing and 3 Chapter Mini Novel**
- Workshop manuscripts

Week 5 (June 5) A Plethora of Novels: Romance, Thriller, Sci Fi, Graphic, Satirical, Erotic, Dystopian, Chick Lit, Young Adult, Mystery, Literary...
(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, 2,000 WORDS OR LESS**
- Workshop Postcard Story manuscripts

Week 6 (June 12) Everyone Needs To Find 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 Postcard Story/Flash Fiction Manuscript

Week 7 (June 19) 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
- *In Praise of the Humble Comma* by Picco Iyer
- Workshop Short Story Manuscripts

Week of June 26) SUMMER BREAK, NO CLASS June 20-July 3

Week 8 (July 3) 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
- Workshop Short Story manuscripts

Week 9 (July 10) Revision, Writing is Rewriting

EACH TERM WE HAVE A FEW VISITING WRITERS.(During the term we will have several visiting writers who will pop in from time to time.)

Working with Editors and Mentors

Workshop Short Story Manuscripts

Week 10 (July 17) Humour, a Little Levity for Those Dark Nights of the Soul

- David Sedaris and other funny writers...
- *Writing Is Easy* by Steve Martin
- If you want God to have a good laugh, just tell him your future plans - Anne Lamott
- Stress Worry Angst and the Void
- Workshop Short Story Manuscripts

Week 11,12,13 (July 24, 31 August 7, Workshop Group Mini Novels

Week 14 (August 14) FINAL CLASS CELEBRATION PARTY

Workshop last minute 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 20th Century Literature and since the mid 90s he's taught the Fiction Workshop, and more recently also the Creative Nonfiction Workshop. He has taught writing in Hong Kong, Australia, Tuscany and over 140 workshops in Ottawa. For the last 12 years he has offered a 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*.