

Carleton University
Winter 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 3915A: Special Topics in Creative Writing
Character Creation

Prerequisite(s): a grade of B+ or higher in one of: ENGL 2901, ENGL 2903, ENGL 2915; or departmental permission.

Students who lack the prerequisite must submit a writing sample. Instructions can be found at <https://carleton.ca/english/>

This is a “repeatable” course: students who took ENGL 3915 previously, exploring a different special topic, may also take this workshop.

Instructor: Professor Nadia Bozak
nadia.bozak@carleton.ca

***** *This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term.* *****

Course Description:

This “special topics” workshop will take a deep dive into creating characters in fiction. Through assigned readings, discussions, targeted writing exercises, and our own fully-imagined stories, we will explore such questions as:

What is “character” in fiction? What is the role of a character in narrative? What do readers expect from fictional characters, and how do these expectations change?

How do writers create characters? What are some strategic approaches? How does a writer base characters on historical figures, mythological figures, or people in their lives? What should writers take into consideration when writing characters from communities not their own or with lived experiences the writer has not faced?

How is a narrative shaped by a character who is also a narrator? And in particular when that character-narrator is also unreliable, unsympathetic, or even abhorrent?

How does narrative point of view dictate how characters perceive or are perceived by the reader and by other characters? How do writers choose the narrative point of view that most effectively tells a particular story? We’ll explore this question by reading and writing characters in the first, second, third, and fourth-person point of view.

Learning Outcomes:

- Think, read, write, and discuss character creation in fiction deeply, with intention, and with the positionality of the writer and the cultural logic of fiction-writing factored in
- Continue to develop editorial skills by reading and responding to peer manuscripts with insight and tact
- Continue to hone skills in reading published fiction as writers and learning to write by reading widely, openly, and closely
- Build connections with peers and gain confidence in sharing and receiving feedback on creative work

Required texts:

Most of our required weekly readings (short stories, book excerpts, essays) will be available digitally on Ares or on short-term loan through the MacOdrum Library.

Course Requirements:

- 1) 10% Warming-up writing exercises
- 2) 15% Participation
- 3) 10% Reading journals or presentation
- 4) 50% two fiction manuscripts: 25% each; 5% of each grade is devoted to a reflection statement
- 5) 15% attend and review a community-based literary event