

## **WRITING WORKSHOP: FICTION (386)**

Writing Workshop: Fiction  
Tuesday, 5:30- 8:00, Simpkins 308.  
Professor Erika Wurth ([et-wurth@wiu.edu](mailto:et-wurth@wiu.edu))

The texts required for this course are *Burning Down the House* (Charles Baxter), *Girl Trouble* (Holly Goddard Jones) and *From the Hilltop* (Toni Jensen).

This class will be run as a hybrid online/physical course. See day by day schedule below.

My office is located in Simpkins 109 and my office hours are Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10-12 & 2-5 online or in person. When we're holding physical class (day by day schedule below) I will be extending my physical office hours and will be available Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10-12 & 2-5 and sometimes those same hours on Monday & Friday. Please feel free to come in (or email) with any questions or if you just want to chat – also try to reserve this time for any questions pertaining to your grade or questions specific to your particular projects. I'm also available via Skype or email me if you'd like to make a phone appointment, during the time when the course is online.

The focus of this course is to extend the fiction skills you learned in Introduction to Creative Writing. Though we'll be also looking a bit at form and language, we'll mainly be focusing on characterization, plot and point of view. I'd like to see you strengthen these basics, as they form the foundation of all fiction.

We will be reading one collection of essays on writing, and two collections of short stories. During the two week blocks we're having physical class, I'll have you read these, and we'll have a lengthy discussion on the texts. During the online portion of the course is when you'll be workshoping, via email.

Ask yourself, when we're looking at either the work of others in the class or of the selected writers, not only what do these stories mean but what are they doing & how are they doing it? What's appealing/not appealing & how are they achieving the effects that make them (hopefully) pleasurable to read? How do they sound? What is their form? What is the content & why?

Specifically, as to when we workshop remember, you want to be honest, but it's important that you're not a jerk. Be specific – when you make a comment, show evidence for that comment in the text (don't use generalizations). Think about what the story wants – rather than what you think it ought to be & aid in that vision. As to when your work is being workshoped, be open. Don't explain or apologize. It is important that we develop a community in this class that fosters the ability to be comfortable enough to risk with one another in our work and in our feedback. Keep in mind that feedback is not to be taken as a personal attack. It's to be taken as a

way to improve your work. Your feedback should address plot, P.O.V and characterization, and additionally any issues with language you see in the story. Remember, you're the ultimate judge of your own work but you can't be your own audience so listen carefully to what others have to say.

Your stories must be in Times New Roman, 12 font, and they should be double-spaced. They should also be 6-10 pages long and cannot be genre fiction (in other words, anything that fits easily into a genre – detective/mystery, romance, sci-fiction – nor should you try to fit into what you think is overly LITERARY i.e. don't try to copy Hemmingway – just write about life – made up or real). Make sure that attention to the three basic elements of fiction are paid adequate attention: character, plot and voice/point of view in addition to attention to language. Your work needs to be edited for basic grammar issues before you turn it in.

When it is your turn to workshop, your stories need to be emailed to me the week before it is to be workshopped. Then, I will email it to the rest of the class by the next day, and I will expect everyone to email me and the person who is workshopping their story their feedback by the next class date – the date they are technically workshopping. You must email AT LEAST a page of typed comments speaking to issues of plot, characterization, language, style and form, clearly demonstrating that you have read the entire story.

During the two week blocks that we hold physical class, I will meet with everyone one on one, to discuss the work that you're going to do, or have done, and during the beginning of finals week, your final portfolio. Physical class dates will be reserved for the outside reading material, and I will require you to bring in four questions for class discussion, based on the reading material. I will also quiz.

We will be discussing some of the history and biography behind the texts and we will also explore issues of gender, race and sexuality. If this is uncomfortable for you, you may consider taking the course at another time.

Your grades are mainly dependent upon your work but attendance (in terms of showing up to physical classes and turning things in on time online), quizzes and especially participation affect your grade. Participation is why we're here and it's what makes a class effective. I don't expect you to be Shakespeare, just occasionally speak in class, and turn your feedback in on time, and fulfill the requirements above.

Your final will be turning in a portfolio containing the original stories you workshopped (turn in the copies with my notes on them) and the revision of those stories. Because grading a creative piece is a truly sticky process, your grade will depend heavily on how much time you've put into the work before and especially after it's been workshopped - I want to see that you've processed your work & thought about it carefully rather than wrote something down haphazardly & changed two words after workshop. Your grade will also be heavily weighted by your quiz scores, attendance & as I said in the last paragraph, especially, by participation.

As for plagiarism, don't do it. I can't emphasize this enough. It isn't worth it as I don't expect that your work will be in the Hemingway category – at least at this point. It is so easy to spot plagiarism and the consequences are dire. At the least I have to fail you and in the worst case scenario you can be expelled. You must do your own work. Any act of plagiarism will result in at least an F grade in this course. If you have any doubts about whether or not you are using your own or others' writing ethically and legally, ask me. Work cannot be handed in for credit that is or was written for another class either here or elsewhere, even if it is much revised (say, for example, ENG 285). Work you did in high school is best left there. The whole idea is to give you new occasions to write, for you to discover fresh ways to imaginatively deal with the world around you. Please submit work written only during the current term. Western Illinois University's official Academic Integrity Policy is found at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>. Please read it, in its entirety. If you're having a problem, please come and see me.

*\* If you have a learning difference that requires accommodation or if, for any reason, you feel you need extra help in learning the material or demonstrating that you understand the material, please contact me.*

**\* Recommended books:** *The Midnight Disease, On Writing, Letters to a Young Poet, Writing Down the Bones, Bird by Bird and Creating Fiction and The Art of Writing; Notes on Craft for Young Writers*

## Schedule:

\*Tuesday August 23. I'm going to go over the syllabus and our schedule, and answer any questions you might have about the class. I'd also like to have a short discussion about what creative writing and English classes you've taken and who you like to read. I'm also going to hand out a sign up sheet for workshop. Then, I'm going to lecture about characterization, plot and point of view.

\*Tuesday, August 30. PHYSICAL CLASS. Have finished reading ALL of *Burning Down the House*. Come in with four questions for discussion, and be prepared to take a quiz. Folks who are workshopping Sept 6<sup>th</sup>, email me your story by Sept 4<sup>th</sup>.

\*Tuesday Sept 6<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Sept 13<sup>th</sup>, send me your story.

\*Tuesday Sept 13<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Sept 20<sup>th</sup>, send me your story.

\*Tuesday, Sept 20<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Next week, physical class – be prepared to have read the first half of Jones' *Girl Trouble* by Sept 27<sup>th</sup>.

\*Tuesday Sept 27<sup>th</sup>, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have read the first half of Jones' *Girl Trouble*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz. Make one on one appt with me.

\*Tuesday Oct 4<sup>th</sup>, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have finished all of Jones' *Girl Trouble*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz. Folks who are workshopping Oct 11<sup>th</sup>, send me your story.

\*Tuesday Oct 11<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 18<sup>th</sup>, send me your story.

\*Tuesday Oct 18<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, send me your story.

\*Tuesday Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Next week, physical class – be prepared to have read the first half of Jensen's *From the Hilltop*.

\*Tuesday Nov 1<sup>st</sup>, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have read the first half of Jensen's *From the Hilltop*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz. Make one on one appt with me.

\*Tuesday Nov 8<sup>th</sup>, PHYSICAL CLASS. Have finished all of Jensen's *From the Hilltop*. Have four questions, be prepared for quiz. Folks who are workshopping Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, send me your story by Nov 13<sup>th</sup>.

\*Tuesday Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. For those who are workshopping Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, send me your story.

\*Tuesday Nov 22<sup>nd</sup>, Thanksgiving break.

\*Tuesday Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Dec 6<sup>th</sup>, send your story.

\*Tuesday Dec 6<sup>th</sup>, all, send feedback to those who workshopped and cc me via email.

\*Finals week: Make one on one appt with me for either Monday Dec 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>. Submit final portfolio by Thursday, Dec 15<sup>th</sup>.