

## **ADVANCED FICTION (486 001)**

Thursday 5:30--8:00 Simpkins 308  
Professor Erika Wurth ([et-wurth@wiu.edu](mailto:et-wurth@wiu.edu))  
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The text for this course will be a packet, available for purchase in the bookstore.

My office is located in Simpkins 109 and my office hours are Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday, 12:00-2:00. 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.

For our first day, I'm going to go over the syllabus & 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 & who you like to read. I'm also going to hand out a sign up sheet for workshop.

The week after, I want you to have FINISHED reading the essays from the packet; King's chapter from *On Writing*, Lerner's "The Ambivalent Writer," Flaherty's chapter from *The Midnight Disease* and "What is Experimental Literature" an interview of Steinberg. The next week I want you to have FINISHED reading the three stories in the packet by Lahiri, Jensen and Mcleod. I WILL quiz, and thoroughly both weeks.

As this course is the most advanced that you can take in fiction workshop as an undergraduate, the focus is mainly on your work, via workshop. Everyone will have a chance to workshop at least two stories.

Basic Workshop format: The class date BEFORE your work is to be workshopped, bring in enough copies for everyone. If you do not, this will result in an F for the course. The day your story is workshopped, read a small section from the story & then be silent while the class workshops the piece (& class, don't ask the writer any questions during this time). After the class has finished critiquing, the writer can then ask or be asked questions.

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 with each other in class, 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). 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. 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 workshopped, be open. Don't explain or apologize. 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.

Please bring in at least half a page of typed comments for me and the author, clearly demonstrating that you have read the entire story. If you don't, this will result in an F for the course.

In this class, it's important that our focus go towards language and form and the refining of your language and form so that you begin to evolve a unique voice. Additionally, the work that is in the packet is of an advanced nature; they're longer pieces that deal with longer stints of time (Lahiri), and/or pieces that deal with form in such a way that is innovative & sophisticated (Jensen & McLeod). Pay attention to the way in which the language of each piece effects the content of the piece, how the form and/or the way they deal with time, effect the content as well.

Your stories must be 8-12 pages long and, as in your previous classes, you must pay attention to the basics of Plot, POV and Characterization. Your stories must be in Times New Roman, 12 font, and they should be double-spaced. They 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).

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.

I do take attendance and after missing two classes your grade will lower with each subsequent absence. I do not need or want any doctor's notices, stories or excuses of any kind if you have not missed two classes (simply email me or talk to me if you need to get the missed assignment). And if you have missed more than two, I still don't want them because that is what they're there for. If you have a truly special problem and still want to attend, please talk to me and maybe there's something we could work out. As concerns tardiness, basically, if you're late so much that I begin to notice it, your grade will lower (I would say after four). Also, please do not ever get up and leave before I've dismissed class. I never keep people over the assigned time limit, so if you need to leave early, tell me before class begins. Please respect me and other members of the class. And don't talk continually to somebody else while I'm talking or while the class is having a discussion (if I have to tell you not to talk, this will effect your participation grade).

Your grades are mainly dependent upon your work but attendance, 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 raise your hand and speak. Participation can change your grade and it's also a way to make up for missing over the allotted amount of classes or if you've messed up on a quiz. If your only goal in my class is to receive an "A" – you may want to drop. There are only 2 ways to earn an A in my class; the first is to do very well on quizzes and attendance & receive an A on your work, the second is to do well on quizzes and attendance & participate nearly EVERY DAY & more than once per class period. A grade of A is supposed to reflect excellence, therefore, I must reflect that in my grading policies. The great majority of my students receive a grade somewhere in neighborhood of a B & very few receive an A.

Your final will be turning in a portfolio containing the original stories you workshopped in class and the revisions that you've gone through after that piece has been workshopped. 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 or 386). 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*

