

Fall 9-1-2018

CRWR 491.02: ST: Short Fiction Character Development

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Recommended Citation

Gadbow, Kathleen M., "CRWR 491.02: ST: Short Fiction Character Development" (2018). *Syllabi*. 8118.
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CRWR 491.02
Special Topics: Characters in Short Fiction

Instructor information:

Instructor: Kate Gadbow

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2 - 4 p.m. Thursdays 2 - 4 p.m. and by appointment via e-mail.

Course description:

This reading course for writers will focus on character development in short fiction. We will read, discuss, and write responses to a variety of short pieces—mostly contemporary short stories of varying length, but also a few story classics, novel excerpts, and personal essays. We will examine the ways in which accomplished writers bring life to their characters through gesture, appearance, dialogue, thought, work, obsessions, and fears. We will discuss the relationship between well-developed characters and the ways stories move. Students in this course will bring assigned written responses to one of the several stories discussed each week and will lead off discussion based on those responses. In addition, each student will write two longer pieces to be turned in at specified deadlines. To earn graduate credit, a third longer piece will be required.

Required readings:

For the first half of the semester, I will e-mail you three stories as *pdf* attachments on each Thursday before our class meets. Since most of the stories we'll discuss come from recent or archived issues of the New Yorker, I ask that you subscribe to the digital version of the magazine for 12 weeks at their Student-Educator rate of \$6 (total!). Go to subscribe.newyorker.com and click on the Student-Educator Subscriptions in the upper right.

During the second half of the course, each of you will send the class a story for discussion on a specified date, and you will give a presentation of the story and moderate our discussion. Stories or essays you present must be published, but they can come from any source. You have the option of bringing hard copies for everyone to the class before your presentation date, if scanning and/or sending electronically don't work for you.

Required assignments:

1. Close reading of three stories per week. A 1-3 page response to one story, as assigned.
2. A mid-term paper of 6-12 pages (12pt., double-spaced) which can take any of these forms: an essay discussing an aspect of character in fiction or nonfiction; an imitation of one of the assigned works; a dream, memory, or journal entry that develops a character in your own work, either fiction or creative nonfiction. To earn graduate credit, a second 6-12 page piece in any of the above forms must be turned in by the final day of class.
3. Selection of a story or essay of your choosing, which you will send to me and to the class at a specified date. You will present the story to the class and lead discussion of it. You will write a final paper of 6-12 pages based on your presentation of the story, due the last day of class.

Grades:

I'll provide you with plenty of written and verbal comments on your work, but no letter grade until the end of the semester. I'll let you know how you're doing at the midterm conference and at any other time you need to know. Final grades will be based on the quality of your writing and criticism, on your participation in class discussion, and on your adherence to deadlines.

Attendance:

Please come to class on time. If you miss more than two classes without consulting me, your final grade will drop by a letter.

Course Withdrawal:

See the Office of the Registrar site at umt.edu to see deadlines and procedures for adding and dropping courses.

Student Conduct Code:

Please familiarize yourself with the U of M [student conduct code](https://www.umt.edu/safety/policies/default.php) at this site:

<https://www.umt.edu/safety/policies/default.php>

Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. In this course it will result in a failing grade.

Disability Modifications:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration among students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you think you may have a disability that could adversely affect your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or call 406-243-2243.

CALENDAR

October 10	First papers due. Sign-up for conferences and stories to present to class. Visitor.
October 17	Conferences. No class.
November 21	No class. Thanksgiving travel day.
December 5	Portfolios due, with all assigned papers and comments. Visitor.
December 12	Final meeting. Portfolios returned.

READINGS

(Sent the previous Thursday and discussed on dates listed)

September 12	“A Refugee Crisis” by Callan Wink “The Moraine” by Leni Zumas “Under the Wave” by Lauren Groff
September 19	“Symbols and Signs” by Vladimir Nabokov “Referential” by Lorrie Moore “Silver Water” by Amy Bloom
September 26	“Dancing in the Moonlight” by Ottessa Moshfegh “Likes” by Sarah Shun-lien Bynum “The State of Nature” by Camille Bordas
October 3	“How Can I Help?” By Rivka Galchen “God’s Work” by Kevin Canty “The Lazy River” by Zadie Smith “My Dead” by Peter Orner

When I send you these stories, I may also send related readings and questions for discussion.