

Karen Rile
English 112 Fiction Workshop
Spring 2011, Mondays 2-5
Fisher-Bennett Hall 139

COURSE DESCRIPTION, GROUND RULES, AND SYLLABUS

This class is a workshop, which means that most of what you produce this semester will be considered work-in-progress. Each week we will address a new topic: through readings, in-class and online discussion, and with a writing assignment designed to illuminate technical issues in fiction writing.

READINGS. Our reading list includes examples from 20th and 21st century contemporary short fiction. These readings will relate directly to your writing assignments, and will be discussed over the class email list and/or during class. (See listserv address and group url below.) For your convenience, I will upload all course readings to the class Google site. (See below for site url.) There is no textbook or bulk pack to purchase, but you will need to print out these documents to bring to class as necessary. I may supplement the reading list portion of the syllabus with additional readings during the semester.

PEER CRITIQUE. The most important reading assignments will be the work submitted by your fellow students. The thoughtfulness and thoroughness of your peer criticism is as crucial as the quality of the written work you produce. Much of our class time will be spent discussing your work and that of your fellow workshop members. Your active participation during class is essential for your success in this class.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS. It is important to follow directions carefully when preparing your writing assignments. If you miss the point of the assignment, or come to class partially prepared, you will not receive full credit for the assignment, regardless of the quality of your writing.

Writing will be evaluated for style, content, and technique. As stated above, your work is considered to be "in-progress," so perfection is not required. But drafts should be carefully self-edited before being presented to the workshop.

Be mindful that this is a class in literary fiction. We will not, as a general rule, consider genre fiction such as fantasy, science fiction, or romance. If you submit work from an inappropriate genre to class, your grade may be negatively affected.

You will need to xerox work (approximately 17 copies) for class workshops (see note on use of English Department copier below.) Occasionally you will upload material to the class Google site.

WORKSHOP DEMEANOR. Please print and bring work for discussion in class. This includes copies of readings to be discussed as well as your workshop material. As a member of this class, you may use the copier the English Department office in Room 127 FBH at no charge (but don't count on it being available 3 minutes before the start of class.) Laptops are not to be open during discussion (with the tentative exception of flat tablet-style reading devices), so print out what you need in advance. Cell phones need to be on the table (i.e., it's okay to use them to check the time, but no texting in class, or exiting the workshop to take a call.) You get the point. Our workshop spaced needs to be free from the temptations of wireless devices. Non-adherence to this policy will result in a reduction of your grade.

ATTENDANCE. Because we meet only one day a week, your attendance is crucial. Unexcused absences or habitual lateness will result in a reduction of your grade.

The Google group that will serve as our email discussion listserv and archive is: <http://groups.google.com/group/rile-112-2011>. You can email the group directly at this address: rile-112-2011@googlegroups.com.

The Google site that will host our class documents is: <https://sites.google.com/site/rile112spring11/>.

SYLLABUS

Unless otherwise noted, writing assignments are due in class on the week following the distribution of the handout.

JANUARY

- 17 No class; MLK Day. Handout #1: Stranger Than Truth. Plot Pilfering exercise. Readings: "A Visit" by Steven Millhauser" (1997); "Heart of A Champion" by T. Coraghessan Boyle (1975); "The Three Friends" by Jeanette Winterson (1998); "Nephilim" by L. Annette Binder (2010); "The Erkling" by Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum (2010)
- 24 Handout #2: A Point of View Primer, Part 1: First Person. Political memory exercise. Readings: "Where is the Voice Coming From" by Eudora Welty (1963); "The Naked Lady" by Madison Smartt Bell (1987); "Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot" by Robert Olen Butler (1996) "What Happened To Me On My Holiday" by Martin Amis (1997)
- 31 Handout #3: A Point of View Primer, Part 2: Third Person. Third person exercise. Readings: "The Amish Farmer" by Vance Bourjaily (1980); "Against The Odds" by William Trevor (1999); "Hopewood" by Steve Almond (2001); "What 100

People, Real and Fake, Believe About Delores" by Ben Greenman
<http://www.rocketcar.net/news/greenmandolores.htm> (2003)

FEBRUARY

- 7 Handout #4: A Point of View Primer, Part 3: Second Person, Misc. and Experimental POVs. A-woman-looks-at-a-screen exercise. Readings: "How to Give the Wrong Impression" by Katherine Heiny (1990); "Realism" by Jane Delury (2001); "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid (1984)
- 14 Handout # 5: Notes on Psychic Distance. Bad writing contest. Readings: "Separation" by Mary Gordon (1991); "China Pattern" by Nicholson Baker (1996); "The Stick Man" by Robert Coover (2001); "Life Should Be" by David Koch (2000); "Suit", by Ken Kalfus (1998), "Victory Lap" by George Saunders (2009)
- 21 Handout #6: Notes on Tension. Conflict/Secrets exercise. Readings: "Us or Me" by Ian McEwan (1997); "Harry Belten and the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto" by Barry Targan (1966)
- 28 Discussion of Conflict/Secrets stories.

MARCH

- 7 SPRING BREAK
- 14 CONFERENCE DAY /Handout #7: The Blank Page
- 21 Handout #8: Looking for Trouble. Supernatural exercise and contest. Readings: "The July Ghost" by A.S. Byatt; "Underwater" by Luis Arturo Ramos (1996); "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" by Denis Johnson (1993); "Day and Night You Are the One", by Ken Kalfus (1998). "Ancestor Money " by Maureen McHugh, 1997; "The First Several Hundred Years Following My Death," by Sean Vestal (2007)
- 28 Handout #9: A Few Plot Points. 200-word story exercise and contest. Readings: "The Hand", "All Right", and "Ma" by Leonard Michaels (1975); "Changing the Channel" by E. Ethelbert Miller (1996); "November" by Ursula Hegi (1996); "A

Gentleman's C" by Padgett Powell (1996); "Wallet" by Allen Woodman (1996);
"Music Appreciation" by Lynda Barry (1988)

APRIL

- 4 Handout #10 Notes on Dialogue. Fly-on-the-wall exercise. Readings: "Hills Like White Elephants" by Ernest Hemmingway (1927); "No One's A Mystery" by Elizabeth Tallent (1986); dialogue transcript and exercise by Audrey Beth Stein (1996)
- 11 Handout #11: Narrative Collage. Collage exercise. Readings: "How to Talk to Your Mother" and "How to Be a Writer" by Lorrie Moore (1985); "Landscape and Dream" by Nancy Krusoe (1994); "Invisible Malls" by Ken Kalfus (1998); Excerpts from *Enchanted Night* by Stephen Millhauser (1999)
- 18 Handout #12: The End. Finish-the-story exercise. Readings: TBA.
- 25 Final class.

ENGLISH 112 READING LIST
as of 1/17/2011

"A Visit" by Steven Millhauser" (1997)
"Heart of A Champion" by T. Coraghessan Boyle (1975)
"The Three Friends" by Jeanette Winterson (1998)
"Nephilim" by L. Annette Binder (2010)
"The Erkling" by Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum (2010)
"Where is the Voice Coming From" by Eudora Welty (1963)
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"Hopewood" by Steve Almond (2001)
"What 100 People, Real and Fake, Believe About Delores" by Ben Greenman (2003)
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"Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid (1984)
"Separation" by Mary Gordon (1991)
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