

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”

-Joan Didion, “The White Album”

YEARLONG IN SHORT STORY

Fall 23-Spring 24 – Tuesdays, 7:10-9:10pm

Ramón Isao, Instructor

Sep 26 – Jun 4 [SKIP: 10/31, 12/19, 12/26, 1/2, 1/9, 4/2, 4/9]

I love stories. To me, they are the basic unit of measurement of a writer’s worth. They are the most natural, human way of conveying an experience; who we are, what we struggle against. They are, as Tobias Wolff has it, “an opportunity to write something perfect.” I love the way they open, build, and the ways in which they resolve themselves or steadfastly don’t. I love living the lives of the characters who inhabit them. I love the rise and fall of them, the economy, the compressed energy, and the fact that—by the time you’ve started reading—you’re already almost done with them and they are already almost done with you.

So, welcome!

In this class, we’ll read, write, experiment with, and critique a small mountain of short fiction. Most weeks we’ll workshop one or two stories, and either discussing a published story or writing some of our own. We will often conduct strange literary experiments; maybe we’ll write a collaborative story, or pretend to answer an old personal ad, make a literary time capsule, an antonymic, all to illustrate and test some theories on craft. It’s going to be a blast.

I don't want anyone here to write a particular way. That's not the point. If you've come for some grand unified theory as to How Stories Are Written, I may have to disappoint you. What I want you to learn here is how *you* write stories. The paths of your habits and passions when you sit down to write. Your voice, your strengths. And, yes, some of the things you do that may be getting in your own way, sure! Of course. No one gets in your way as steadfastly as you do. I want you to feel alternately challenged and comforted. I want you to walk out of here a writer, armed with a new set of tools and ways of thinking... without having to settle on just one. I want to take your authorial control panel and add a whole slew of new buttons, panels, things to consider. Let's get started.

SCHEDULE: The schedule below is **HIGHLY** subject to change. **NOTE:** Concurrently with this schedule you will have the opportunity to submit 3+ stories during the class, dates TBA.

Class	Date	Topic	Assignments
1 UNIT 1: PLAY	9/26/23	-Speak vs. Write: Tell me a story	"The Sno-Cone Cart" by Rebecca Curtis
2	10/3	-Beginnings - A Flashlight in a Dark Room -First Line Experiment	-“Windeye” [2-4] by Brian Evenson -HW: Bartheleme, Saunders, Barthelme
3	10/10	-Middles: The Fine Art of Rising Action	-“Windeye” section 5 by Brian Evenson -“Apollo” by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie
4	10/17	-Endings: How to Stop Without Sucking -Last Line Experiment	-“The Appropriation of Cultures” by Percival Everett -“No Speak English” by Sandra Cisneros
5	10/24	-Charging vs. Supercharging: How to Rescue Boring Sentences. -The Boring Experiment	
NO CLASS	10/31	NO CLASS	
6	11/7	-Scene vs. Summary – How to pass the time.	-“The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe

7 UNIT 2: LOOK	11/14	-Say Vs. Do – How looking works and how it doesn't. -The Say Experiment	-“The Dogs” by Yukiko Motoya
8	11/21	-Character: Regarding Ordinary People -The Hoarder Experiment	-“Treasure State by Smith Henderson
9	11/28	-Dialogue: What is spoken, what is said. -Eternal Curse Experiment	-“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson
10	12/5	Setting: How to Haunt The Haunting Experiment	-Conduct The Fabula Experiment
11	12/12	The Fabula Experiment	-“Brownies” by ZZ Packer
NO CLASS	12/20-1/9	WINTER BREAK: NO CLASS	
12	1/16/24	POV: How to Look, What to See.	-“The Bath” by Raymond Carver
13 UNIT 3: FIX	1/23	REVISION 1: The Basics; Seinfeld, Packer, Carver, Lish.	-“Inventory” by Carmen Maria Machado.
14	1/30	-REVISION 2: Pressure Points, Spotlighting, and Trimming -The Trimming Experiment	-“The Fix” by Percival Everett
15	2/6	-REVISION 3: Begin Again The Dog Experiment Pt. 1	-“Girl” and “Annie John [Excerpt] by Jamaica Kincaid.
16	2/13	-REVISION 4: End Better The Dog Experiment Pt. 2	-“Waugh” by Bryan Washington
17	2/20	Scenes, and how to set them.	-“Wait Till You See Me Dance” by Deb Olin Unferth.
18	2/27	-Breathing, Bleeding, Characters: How to Build a Person -Same Drugs Experiment -Craigslis Experiment	-“The Interview” by Nick Arvin
19	3/5	-Interiority: How to Build Minds	-“Lamb” by Amy Hempel
20	3/12	-Details: The Devil’s in ‘em -The Amnesia Experiment	-“Cat Man” by Heather Monley
21	3/19	-Believability: Beat Disbelief	-“Loser” by Aimee Bender
22	3/26	-AUTHOR VISIT	-“The Dungeon Master” by Sam Lipsyte
NO CLASS	4/2 4/9	*SPRING BREAK*	
23	4/16	-Sentences and Words: “Contrary to popular belief, fiction is composed, entirely, of words.”	-“Bettering Myself” by Ottessa Moshefegh
24 UNIT 4: PLAY AGAIN	4/23	-Adverbs and Adjectives as Crutches -The Adverb Experiment	-Cutting Horse” by Latoya Watkins
25	4/30	-Voice: How to hear	-“Shhhh” by NoViolet Bulawayo
26	5/7	-Bad Writing: What even is it? -Bad Writing Experiment	-“The Brother” by Robert Coover HW: - “Concerning the Bodyguard” by Donald Barthelme.

27	5/14	-Break Rules Well: -Bad Grammar Experiment	-“Two Men Arrive in a Village” by Zadie Smith
28	5/21	-Specificity: Why it Matters -Universal Experiment	-“Dedications” by Adrienne Rich
29	5/28	-Time Capsule Experiment	-“Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff
30	6/4	FINAL READING	