

English 2305: Introduction to Fiction
Instructor: Michelle Oakes
Description:

The goal of this course is to gain an understanding of the forms, structures, and aims of fiction using both close reading and literary criticism. To do this, we will read contemporary fiction, largely American, though our class discussions will take in a larger swath of literary and critical context and history. This decision has been made not to discount the importance of other eras and cultures, but to give our discussions focus so that we might more deeply explore how fiction writers react to our present moment, why we find ourselves studying fiction in college, and the role fiction plays in our contemporary culture.

To experience as much of the diversity and breadth of contemporary fiction as possible, we will read and respond to a wide variety of forms from flash fiction to short stories to novels. We will also, as a counterpoint, have occasional readings of poetry, nonfiction, and criticism while actively seeking work that blurs the lines between and within these genres.

This hybridity—or the conscious rejection of it—will, hopefully, offer us greater insight into the possibilities, styles, objectives, and philosophy of contemporary fiction while also demonstrating its continued evolution in an increasingly hybrid, fractured world. What we'll be seeking is an understanding of how our relationship to narratives changes even as our desire for narrative does not. Fiction here will serve as the focal point of a larger discussion about stories, culture, and our construction of meaning.

Reading list includes:

The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories, edited by Ben Marcus
The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides
The Weather Stations by Ryan Call
The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers
handouts from me