The African American Short Story

ASRC 1822; TR 1:25-2:40

First-year Writing Seminar

Africana Studies and Research Center

AFC 111

Spring 2014

Instructor: Dr. R. Richardson

Office Hours: T 11-12, Th 3-4 & by appointment

Office Location: ASRC 110

Contact Information: Electronic, rdr83@cornell.edu; telephone, (607) 254-5010

**Dedicated to John Henrik Clarke (1815-1998), Distinguished Visiting Professor of African History,**

**Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University**

**Commemorating 100 Year, January 1, 1915-January 1, 2015**

**Diversity statement: This course aims to provide a safe, welcoming, supportive and tolerant environment for all students and respects the various forms of diversity that they bring, including differences related to race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, geography, age, size, ability, etc.**

**Course Description:**

The short story is an ideal genre through which one might gain a basic introduction to African American literature and its major themes. As a form and genre, the short story’s specific origins within African American literature are traceable back to the antebellum era of the nineteenth century. The foundational contributions to the development of this genre were made by both black male and female authors during the fecund black literary renaissance of the 1850s, including “The Heroic Slave” (1853) by Frederick Douglass and “The Two Offers”(1859) by Frances E.W. Harper. The genre was significantly advanced in the post-bellum era by authors such as Charles Chesnutt, thrived throughout the twentieth century, and continues to develop in contemporary African America literature. In this course, we will consider short stories by *Chesnutt, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Arna Bontemps, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin Ann Petry, Rosa Guy, Paule Marshall, Ernest J. Gaines, and Toni Morrison*. The primary goal of this course as a First-Year Writing Seminar is to reinforce the skills of students in good and effective writing. Through weekly entries in a reading journal, the production of six papers, including several of which will be revised, and periodic in-class writing exercises, students will produce an extensive portfolio of written materials over the course of the semester. This body of work will allow students to refine and enrich their writing skills and it will receive careful reading by the instructor and feedback to promote growth and development in writing. In this course, students can expect a range of learning outcomes. Students will review the basic components of an essay from formulating a thesis statement and argument to strategies for organization; how to proofread and revise their own work and peer-edit or collaboratively enable the writing of others; and how to use and properly document primary and secondary resources, including internet resources. In addition, students will review issues of ethics in writing. Finally, students will learn how to identify and write in a formal way about the basic elements in the short story as a genre, which is in keeping with the goal of the course to develop critical reading skills in interpreting the short story. Good writing is a crucial skill to develop to be successful as a student and later as a professional. This course is designed to give students one of the strongest possible foundations upon which to build for success as writers in the years at Cornell and beyond.

**Texts:**

John Henrik Clarke, ed.Black American Short Stories

Richard Lanham, Revising Prose, Fifth Edition

**Readings:**

The Africana Center’s own John Henrik Clarke’s classic anthology on the African American short story includes the primary readings for the course. The phenomenal, world-renowned Professor Clarke, along with writers such as Gloria Naylor, Langston Hughes, and Clarence Major have also produced excellent anthologies on the short story. You are expected to do the readings by the time that we come to them on the schedule. In this course, we will overview basic devices, including the terminology, which will facilitate reading and writing about fiction as a genre with an emphasis on techniques for interpreting and analyzing the short story. Some of the writing assignments will be developed around an exploration of these fiction devices. All of our selections are concise by definition, which will allow for reading, study and discussion in more depth and detail, and also allow us to devote a substantial amount of time to writing. The concise nature of the readings offers an invitation to read them more than once, which will be important in some instances, for the short story is a genre unto itself, has a deceptive simplicity, and sometimes poses a number of interpretive challenges. In engaging this genre, it is important to read critically and carefully. In navigating from story to story as a reader, for example, it will be important to pay attention to devices such as character, setting, theme, tone and dialogue, all of which you will gain instruction for studying. As you read, one useful strategy will be to take notes on the content and structure of the short story selections, and to be mindful of how these major devices are developed in all of them. In some cases, your writing assignments will be structured around the analysis of some of these basic features in the short story, among other topics.

The volume by Lanham is the course’s second required text. It promotes mastery in the writing and revision of prose. We will draw on this resource in our course of study. It is one of the most valuable and indispensable writing guides available and would also be useful for reference in the future. In addition to this guide, you should also draw on the resources on writing that are available at the John S. Knight Institute at 101 McGraw and the Writing Workshop at 101 Rockefeller. For example, resources at the Knight Institute address specific disciplines. You might consult the Knight Institute for Discoveries, a volume of outstanding student essays. Issues are available at the website (http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight\_institute/publicationsprizes/discoveries/discoveries.htm) and McGraw.

**Course Requirements:**

This course will be structured in a workshop format. We will focus roughly one lesson per week on the study of an individual short story. The first day of the week will typically focus on my staging of a reading and model interpretation of the short story on the list, in depth class discussion, and student reports. The second day will continue general discussion and also provide a space for us to workshop and discuss writing assignments. Here, there will also be opportunities for peer editing, which will serve as a valuable complement to the ongoing feedback that students will receive on their writing from the course instructor. I will also work with the reference librarian and instruction coordinator to schedule a special class session at the university’s library to help acquaint you with its resources and materials for research and study.

**Leading Discussion:** Students will be required to lead discussion of a short story during one session by formulating at least four substantive and well-thought-out questions on the story. This assignment, another important component of class participation, will count for 10% of the final grade. In general, all students are expected to participate in class discussion consistently and with substantive and well-thought-out contributions from session to session and week to week.

**Portfolio:**

A one-inch three-ring binder is recommended for the body of materials that will be produced in the course during the semester. Students should keep copies of all of their essay drafts, including original versions (with comments), in-class writing assignments, reading journals, class notes, handouts, and any additional materials in this portfolio. It should be brought to conferences and will be reviewed comprehensively in a final conference at the end of the semester. This component counts for 10% of the final grade.

 **Paper Assignments:** Six short essays on a range of selected topics (you will receive prompts for them in separate handouts and Blackboard posts) are required throughout the semester and will be due at two-week intervals. You are also required to complete a longer final paper (7-10 pages) that focuses on in depth analysis of a short story of your choice. Papers will count for 50% of the final grade.

 **Reading journal-required**: Students are required to produce a neatly typed, well- thought-out, detailed, and substantive one-page entry in a writing journal that reflects on the assigned story for the week at least 250 words in length and no more than 300 words; assignments should be completed by the first day of the story’s discussion. This notebook will count for 20% of the final grade. No handwritten journal entries will be accepted.

**Course Policies:**

You are expected to have at least two conferences with the course professor to discuss your work in the course. I will set up the schedule for these conferences. Class attendance is monitored and I will maintain the listserve as well as update the course’s Blackboard that will include various handouts that will be useful. For instance, materials and tips will be shared here periodically that will help to improve your writing.

You are always welcome to visit office hours to discuss your work in the course and academic development. The **Writing Walk-In Service** (WWIS), 174 Rockefeller Hall 5-1392 for additional support in developing writing projects; this service on campus is free and available daily at five campus locations from Sunday through Thursday 3:30-5:30 and 7-10 pm. Both appointments and drop-ins are accepted.

All essays submitted in the class must be typed in a clear and readable print format. Please use 12-point font, double spacing, and one-inch margins. All papers should have titles. Please staple the pages. Please proofread all work carefully before submission.

You are expected to arrive to class on time and to be prepared for discussion. You should turn in your assignments at the beginning of class and on time; late work will be marked down.

Attendance counts for 10% of final grade.

Only students who are officially enrolled through the electronic roster will be allowed to attend sessions in the course. This is the only method through which drop/add can occur. Sorry, but there can be no exceptions because of the way in which FWSs are structured.

Students should familiarize themselves with The Essential Guide to Academic Integrity at Cornell, which sets the standard and outlines the protocol for academic ethics to which you are expected to adhere in this course and on the campus more broadly. In keeping with university policy at Cornell, I am willing to discuss accommodations any specific needs of students with disabilities.

**General Course Policies:**

●You are expected to attend class.

●You should arrive on time and prepared to engage fully in the class session.

●Please refrain from excessive talking in class.  It is distracting and will not be tolerated.  Moreover, there should be absolutely no cell phone use, texting, sleeping, or extraneous dialogues in the classroom during the lesson.  Please come to class ready to be engaged, focused, attentive and participatory.

•Please think and plan ahead, for I am not available to respond to emails sent at the last-minute, on weekends, late in the evenings and at night, and during vacations.

●Only hard copies of papers for the seminar will be accepted and graded, and must always back up any online submissions.

●RESPECT for all members of the class goes without saying.

●All behaviors in the course should be in accordance with Cornell University’s Code of Academic Integrity and Acknowledging the Work of Others, which may be found at www.policy.cornell.edu/CODE\_of\_Academic\_Integrity.cfm.  There will be absolutely no tolerance for disrespect toward anyone or for academic dishonesty, including cheating on exams and plagiarism (passing off another person's words and thoughts in your writing as your own and not naming the source).

●To ensure a final grade at the end of the semester, please be sure that you submit all assignments.

**Schedule of Readings**:

**Week 1**

Thursday, January 22: Course Introduction. Overview of syllabus and requirements; questionnaire completed

**Week 2**

Tuesday, January 27: Discussion includes critical perspectives on the African American short story and its development in African American literary history; diagnostic short writing assignment; Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine”

Thursday, January 29: Charles Chesnutt, “The Goophered Grapevine”; Essay 1 (preliminary essay, 2-3 pages due); workshop discussion and outline of Essay 2

**Week 3**

Tuesday, February 3: Zora Neale Hurston, “The Gilded Six Bits”

Thursday, February 5: Zora Neale Hurston, “The Gilded Six Bits”; Essay 2, final draft due (2-3 pages)

**Week 4**

Tuesday, February 10: John Henrik Clarke, “The Lynching of Jube Benson”

Thursday, February 12: John Henrik Clarke, “The Lynching of Jube Benson”; workshop discussion and outline of Essay 3

**Week 5**

Tuesday, February 17: No Classes, February Break

Thursday, February 19: Arna Bontemps, “A Summer Tragedy”; Essay 3 draft due

**Week 6**

Tuesday, February 24: Langston Hughes, “One Friday Morning”

Thursday, February 26: Langston Hughes, “One Friday Morning”; Essay 3, final draft due (4-5 pages)

**Week 7**

Tuesday: March 3: Richard Wright, “Bright and Morning Star”

Thursday, March 5: Richard Wright, “Bright and Morning Star”; workshop discussion and outline of Essay 4

**Week 8**

Tuesday, March 10: Mary Elizabeth Vroman, “See How They Run”

Thursday, March 12: Mary Elizabeth Vroman, “See How They Run”; in-class Workshops on Essay 4

**Week 9**

Tuesday, March 17: James Baldwin, “Exodus”

Thursday, March 19: James Baldwin, “Exodus”; Essay 4 due (4-5 pages)

**Week 10**

Tuesday, March 24: Ann Petry, “Solo on the Drums”

Thursday, March 26: Ann Petry, “Solo on the Drums”; workshop discussion and outline of Essay 5

**Week 11**

Tuesday, April 7: Rosa Guy, “Wade”

Thursday, April 9: Rosa Guy, “Wade”; Essay 5 draft

**Week 12**

Tuesday, April 14: Paule Marshall, “Reena”

Thursday, April 16: Paule Marshall, “Reena”; Essay 5 final draft due (5-6 pages); workshop discussion and outline of Essay 6

**Week 13**

Tuesday, April 21: Ernest J. Gaines, “The Sky Is Gray”

Thursday, April 23: Ernest J. Gaines, “The Sky Is Gray”; Essay 6, draft 1 due (7-10 pages)

**Week 14**

Tuesday, April 28: Alice Walker, “Everyday Use”; Essay 6, draft 2 due (7-10 pages)

Thursday, April 30

**Week 15**

Tuesday, May 5: Alice Walker, “Everyday Use”; course conclusion; Essay 6, final draft due (7-10 pages)

Conferences will be scheduled during the exam period to review the comprehensive portfolio