

English 5331  
Graduate Creative Writing Workshop: Fiction  
The Art of . . .

Sam Houston State University  
Spring 2018M 6:00–8:50 p.m. Location: Wynne Home, 1428 11th St.  
Dr. Scott Kaukonen  
Office: Evans 412 Office Phone: 936-294-1407  
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., by  
appointment, and by chance  
E-mail: kaukonen@shsu.edu

## COURSE OVERVIEW

The writing of fiction is a lonely endeavor. In this course, we will seek to make it less lonely. We will write, alone, of course, and then gather here each week to provide constructive criticism to each other regarding what we have written. (This is a workshop after all.) We will read, alone, as well, the work of more experienced, perhaps wiser (but also perhaps equally lonely in the act of writing) writers discuss this art and this craft that we love. We will engage in conversations around those books they have written, and around our own experiences, too, and perhaps the rumored experiences of others (writers, friends, ghosts), so that we might not only be better writers (and readers) but less lonely. If this is too existential for you, ignore all the parts of this course description about loneliness.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

James Wood, *How Fiction Works*  
Benjamin Percy, *Thrill Me*  
Charles Baxter, *Burning Down the House* and *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot*  
Christopher Castellani, *The Art of Perspective: Who Tells the Story*  
Joan Silber, *The Art of Time in Fiction: As Long as It Takes*  
Christopher Bram, *The Art of History: Unlocking the Past in Fiction and Nonfiction*  
Edwidge Danticat, *The Art of Death: Writing the Final Story*

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Over the course of the semester, you will write, edit, and revise a significant body of fiction; provide written and oral critiques of each other's work; sharpen your critical skills, both as a writer and a reader; engage in advanced discussions of craft and theory; and seek to move from creation to publication.

## GRADES

**Reading Responses** (25 percent): In discussion board posts, you will be asked to respond to each week's assigned readings. For each book, I expect a substantial (1500 to 2000 words, single-spaced), written reading response. I would encourage students to think about and write about the craft discussions in the context of their own and each other's work as well as in the context of your experience of reading fiction. Students should make an initial post by Friday at 5 p.m., and then respond to one or more peers' posts before class on Monday evening. Posts should demonstrate significant critical engagement and intellectual rigor. Remember, we are not reading these works as literary scholars but as writers.

**Stories/Novel Excerpts** (35 percent): by the end, a minimum of 45 pages (three stories or three novel excerpts). Each student will have three opportunities to workshop material over the course of the semester. The material should be new to this particular workshop. (I'll allow an exemption for those who are working on novels and wish to continue forward with material begun in other workshops.) Each workshop could consist of entirely new material (in other words, your second and third workshops should not involve revisions of your first and/or second workshop stories or novel excerpts). All of this material should be revised and submitted for a final grade (see the class schedule for due date). Substantial revision is expected.

**Peer Critiques** (25 percent): The responsibility here belongs to the class as a whole. In joining this class, you accept a contract with each other—to present your best possible work, both as a writer and as a critic, in exchange for an equal commitment from your peers. I don't expect brilliance. I do expect effort. You will be responsible for posting peer reviews to Blackboard for all stories submitted to the class. In order to receive credit, these reviews must be posted before the class in which we workshop the story. [Each author and story will have its own forum for the reviews of his or her story. The author will be unable to read the reviews until after the workshop of his or her story.] Please pay close attention to the schedule. We'll discuss this in greater detail in the days to come.

**Participation** (15 percent): I expect all students to be in attendance each day and to participate significantly each day. This means not only being present, but talking.

**Extra credit** (up to 50 points total, up to 10 points apiece): by attending local readings (fiction, poetry, or creative nonfiction) and writing a brief 2 to 3 paragraph review.

## PAPER FORMAT

All stories should be typed double-spaced in a 12-point font with one-inch borders AND STAPLED. No wacky fonts, please. Any assignments longer than two pages must have page numbers. Correct grammar, usage, punctuation and spelling are expected. Work flawed by pervasive mechanical errors will be penalized accordingly. Always be certain to keep a hard copy and a digital copy in at least two locations. Title all stories. In the upper right-hand corner, type your name, e-mail address, and the story's word count.

## TIMELY SUBMISSIONS

All work is due when scheduled. Any late work will be penalized one full grade for each day it is late. For example, if the assignment is due on Friday and it is submitted to me the following morning, the grade will

be reduced one full letter grade. Note: Because of the demands of distribution, stories for workshop will not be accepted late. Failure to submit the story in class on the date it is due will result in a zero for the story. Extensions will be granted only in advance and only in cases of emergency.

## **ATTENDANCE**

If you miss more than three classes for the semester (or two workshops), regardless of the reason, I may fail you in the class. If you know you will be absent in advance, be sure to let me know in advance. You are still responsible for work that you may miss. If circumstances arise during the course of the semester that interfere with your ability to attend class or to complete assignments, see me as soon as possible.

## **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM**

Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that range from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, or collaboration, consult the course instructor. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

## **DISABILITIES POLICY**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

## **RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines* (<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>).

## **VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

## **INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS**

Near the end of the semester, students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form.

## CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Be kind. Be courteous. Be helpful. Take joy in the privilege.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

January 22—Introduction to the Class. Distribution of Syllabus. James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (1–94).

January 29—James Wood, *How Fiction Works* (95–248)

February 5—Benjamin Percy, Selections from *Thrill Me*.

February 12—Selections from Charles Baxter, *Burning Down the House*.

February 19—Workshop 1.1.

February 26—Workshop 1.2.

March 5—Workshop 1.3. Charles Baxter, *The Art of Subtext*.

March 12—No class. Spring Break.

March 19—Workshop 2.1. Christopher Castellini, *The Art of Perspective*.

March 26—Workshop 2.2.

April 2—Workshop 2.3. Joan Silber, *The Art of Time in Fiction*.

April 9—Workshop 3.1.

April 16—No class. National Book Awards Festival.

April 23—Workshop 3.2. Christopher Bram, *The Art of History*.

April 30—Workshop 3.3. Edwidge Danticat, *The Art of Death*.

May 7 & 8—Wynne Home Readings