Required Texts


Course Goals / Objectives

To develop a working theory of “story” based on observation, experience, critical consideration of various perspectives, and reason. This theory will operate from both “inside” and “out”: as a theory of how stories are and/or “should be” constructed, as well as of what stories are, why they are, and what purpose they continue to serve for the human species.

To analyze fictional and nonfictional stories for more than theme – to question how these stories are constructed, and what the purpose(s) of structural choices might be – to think of story from a scientific (evolutionary and brain science) perspective – and to examine the theories of authors and scientists who have considered the form and function of story.

To gain knowledge of and insight into the selected stories read for this course. This knowledge and insight will be gained using an individual, reasoned approach, often through collaboration, and at least sometimes working consciously against the interpretations of others.

Students will gain practice thinking critically about individual stories and about “story” as a concept and as part of human nature. Students will develop a virtuous habit of testing others’ theories and interpretations of fictional and nonfictional stories.
What does your brain do when you’re hearing a story? What catches audiences’ attention in a story, and why? Can stories be organized into taxonomies, and understood to have lineages, evolutionary family trees? What makes one character come alive in readers’ imaginations while another is forgotten? Why did fictional storytelling evolve in the first place?

In this course we will read, watch, and listen to STORIES presented across media and genres, from the ancient world to the present-day. We will analyze these stories as both works of art and as living specimens, coming to both appreciate and understand their construction, as well as our own and others’ reactions to them, with the ultimate goal of better understanding how stories “work.”

We will read essays by authors who self-analyze, offering philosophies of composition and “rules” of the craft; essays by scientists who have studied the human brain and behavior in response to story; essays by scholars of folklore who have tracked down the evolutionary history of individual stories; and theorists struggling with the very existence of fiction in human culture.

Finally we will respond to what we’ve learned with essays and stories of our own. The stories we create may take one of several forms — eg: essays, videos, songs, poems, plays, comics, fairy tales — but in any case what we write will be stories carefully crafted using the vital information and principles that we’ve learned.

Course readings may include essays by Richard Dawkins, Jack Zipes, Zadie Smith, Scott McCloud, David Foster Wallace and others; as well as stories by Willa Cather, Enid Shomer, Alison Bechdel, Margaret Atwood, Kate Chopin and others.

Example assignment: students will read guidelines from Robert McKee's Hollywood screenwriting seminar, and will use this text as a lens through which to analyze a recent major film release, identifying where the film adhered to, and departed from, these widely accepted principles of screenwriting. Students will then be challenged to write a synopsis of a film which departs from every principle listed.
On Multi-Tasking (Don’t Do It)

*We live in a world that encourages us to multi-task (to do many things at the same time). But recent studies reveal that multi-tasking:*

- lowers our productivity
- lowers the quality of the work we do
- impairs comprehension
- impairs recall
- impairs our ability to distinguish important from unimportant information
- increases the stress hormone cortisol (which causes weight gain, etc.)

Multi-tasking is functionally impossible for the human brain if the two (or more) tasks require the same area of the brain to function. For example, if two tasks require the use of language, they will compete for the same brain space, leading to rapid task-switching, which intensifies the above bulleted effects.

In short:

1. Establish and **enforce** a quiet, distraction-free zone for your reading time.
2. Take **hand-written** notes while you read; studies have shown that we all remember our notes better when they are written by hand. (Doodling little pictures has a similar effect – so doodle away!)
3. Use a bookmark to **block out** the rest of the page while you read.
4. Use white noise or a focus-inducing sound file to block out distractions. (Music that contains words will compete with whatever you are reading.)
Use of Technology in the Classroom (Don’t Do It)

I am a new media artist & professor and, personally, a huge fan of technology. However, my classroom policies are designed to create the most beneficial, efficient, and productive learning environment – they are written with the results of experience and several controlled scientific studies in mind.

1. Turn off your phone before entering class.
   Let your regular contacts know you will be unavailable during your classes – you’ll get back to them later.

2. Use of a laptop during class discussion is not permitted.
   Laptop computers form a little “wall” that creates a psychological barrier for both the person using the computer and people on the other side; it impedes conversation and connection, which is a hindrance to our work in this class.

3. Exception: I might ask you to use a device under certain circumstances.
   For example, I might ask you to write a blog post before class ends, while information is still fresh in your mind. You could write it on paper and transcribe it later, but you could also type it onto the blog directly. If you do access an electronic device during class you are giving permission to all persons in the class, including the professor, to look at it.

4. Violation of these rules results in penalty.
   Devices used during class in violation of these rules will result in a grade penalty.

5. These rules are designed to minimize class disruption.
   I may or may not ask the offender to put the device away; it depends upon which I judge to be the greater class disruption. The penalty remains whether I say something or not. However, if an offender is told to put a device away and further disrupts the class at that point, this will result in forfeit of entire class participation grade. (You can always meet with me later to discuss the situation.)

6. Handle your rare & occasional serious situations like a serious adult.
   If, for example, your friend (or even a beloved pet) is in the hospital, obviously you need to stay connected, but you cannot disrupt the entire class. You are permitted the occasional bathroom break, after all.

7. Prioritize your in-person experiences.
   Connection takes many forms, but the most valuable form of all is real-world in-person connection with its nuance of gesture and heightened creative possibilities. Try to live in the moment; be with the people who are with you. Doing this well will bring you happiness and success.
Final Grade

25% - Blogging (timely)
25% - Midterm Essay
25% - Refined Final Essay
25% - Creative Story Projects (individual)
15% - In-class activities/projects
10% - Attendance/participation

Frequent writing will be assigned (blogging); some of this writing will be narrative, some reflective, some argumentative, etc. Long term, you will refine your weekly writing into a cohesive essay-exploration that represents your intellectual journey in this course. Blogging will be checked weekly, and the essay refinements graded at midterm and at finals.

You will write two individual, creative story projects with different goals and parameters. These stories will be shared with and discussed by the class.

We will also have frequent in-class discussions, activities, and projects designed to help you develop a deeper understanding of story as a concept and practice.

Grade Scale For Assignments:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>82</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>75</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>NG</td>
<td>0 unless revised; revision meeting required</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Grade Scale For Calculating Final Grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-90</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>89-80</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>79-70</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>69-60</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>≤ 59</td>
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Attendance and participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Absences</th>
<th>Attendance Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 or 1</td>
<td>100 or 95</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>82</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>et cetera</td>
<td>In 10 point increments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Two late arrivals or early departures equals one absence.

Answering a phone or texting in class equals one absence. (Tell your regular contacts that you are unavailable while you are in class.)

Students will be marked absent or late for non-participation, half-participation, or doing work/play activities unrelated to our projects in class. **When you're in class, be in class. It's that simple.**

"Participation" is a subjective measure of the **frequency** and **quality** of the student’s **contributions** to class **discussion**, adherence to classroom **policies**, and, as a practical matter, bringing required materials to class, working on class projects when asked to, etc.

Classroom Policies: Students are expected and required to **respect** others and **actively help create a productive learning environment**. Any type of class disruption will result in a lowered final grade. The use of disruptive electronic devices during group discussion is prohibited. Phones must be silenced. **Disrespectful** behaviors, like texting or moving one’s belongs around loudly or even continuing to work when other students (or the professor) are presenting, will result in a significantly lowered grade. On-time, prepared attendance is required at all class meetings. Any student asked to leave the classroom for any reason must comply; failure to comply will result in forfeiture of **entire** participation grade.

 الإسلاميّة  Plagiarism :

All work submitted for a grade must be the original creative and intellectual work of the student who claims ownership; if the work includes the ideas or words of others, that fact must be clearly indicated within the work, and the work must provide ample information to allow readers to find the sources from which the ideas or words were taken.

Plagiarism means presenting the **ideas or words** of others as though they were your own: because students are made aware of this, all cases of plagiarism are considered intentional. Plagiarism is **always** grounds for **failure of the course**.
Other Important Information:

Students who require accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must contact Disability Services in Old Main 107 and arrange the necessary accommodations.

The Coordinator for Sexual Violence Response and Healthy Relationship acts as a resource for students who have been subjected to interpersonal violence including sexual assault/harassment, dating/domestic violence, gender-based discrimination, and stalking and will advocate on behalf of the student victim’s requests if services are voluntarily initiated. Contact the coordinator, Alysa Mozak, at 515-271-4141 or email alysa.mozak@drake.edu. The Violence Intervention Partner (V.I.P.) program provides peer-based 24/7 confidential advocacy services. To access a V.I.P. advocate call or text 515-512-2972. For more information visit www.drake.edu/sexual-assault/

Assignments are not accepted late without prior approval. Whatever your situation is, contact me and let me know what’s going on; if we can make arrangements, we will. If we can’t, you’ll at least know exactly what the situation is.

Writing may be revised for a higher grade; however, non-assigned revisions require the student arrange a meeting w/ me to discuss their intentions.

Contacting your college instructors is an adult professional activity. Always write emails formally, using correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation; be clear and detailed about who you are and what you need; make your purpose apparent in the subject line; most importantly, be polite.

Responsibility: the student is responsible for all information and material discussed in class, including class rules, department or university policies, and changes to the schedule or assignments. If forced to miss a class, it is the student’s responsibility to obtain accurate information regarding what was missed.
Our schedule will adapt itself in response to our needs. “+stories” means I will assign a stories from Ann Charters’ *The Story and its Writer* in response to our conversations. Write the story titles onto this page as they are announced. Regular class attendance insures you won’t miss any announcements/changes. If any changes are unclear, please ask for clarification without delay.

Schedule

I – Introduction: narrative, fiction and nonfiction
9.1 – Atwood “Reading Blind”; Chopin “The Story of an Hour”
9.3 – Atwood “Happy Endings”; Wolff “A Bullet in the Brain”

II –
9.8 – Pinker “Art and Adaptation”
9.10 +stories: Orozco “Orientation”; Kafka “A Hunger Artist”

III –
9.15 – Le Guin “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”; first creative project assigned
9.17 +stories: “Paul’s Case”(238); Radiolab: “Are you my brain double?”

IV –
9.22 – EO Wilson
9.24 +stories: Old Father, Old Artificer (from Fun Home); “At the Tolstoy Museum”

V –
9.29 – CLASS CANCELED
10.1 +stories: Tan; sharing our stories-in-progress

VI – CLASS CANCELED ILLNESS
10.6 – McCloud (PDF); first creative project due
10.8 +stories: CLASS CANCELED ILLNESS

VII –
10.13 – METACOGNITION and COOKIES :) 
10.15 First story due; MIDTERM essay assigned; Workshop theory and practice

VIII –
10.20 FALL BREAK (midpoint of semester)
10.22 OFFICE HOURS; class will not meet

IX –
10.27 Small groups in-class workshop session; final creative project assigned
10.29 Midterm Q&A discussion
X –
11.3 – Tooby & Cosmides; Midterm essay due*
11.5 +stories: A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

XI –
11.10 – Dawkins (PDF)
11.12 Final Short Story Q&A discussion; final creative project due for 6-7 people; final workshop sign-up

XII – LESLIE JAMISON campus visit the 19th
11.17 – Comprehensive Story Workshop I
11.19 – Comprehensive Story Workshop II

XIII –
11.24 CLASS WILL NOT MEET
11.26 THANKSGIVING

XIV –
12.1 Comprehensive Story Workshop III – final essay assigned
12.2 Comprehensive Story Workshop IV

XV –
12.8 Comprehensive Story Workshop V
12.10 Comprehensive Story Workshop VI

XVI – FINALS WEEK
Final Essay Due on the blog Thursday December 17th at 4pm