INTRODUCTION TO FICTION

ENG 237 (3 credits)

Wednesday 6:00PM-10:30PM

Instructor: Lee Tasey
Office Hours: TBA
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“A book should serve as the axe for the frozen sea within us.”

— Franz Kafka

Course Description: A study of American and Continental fiction with attention to each author’s major life concerns as a writer (faith vs. doubt, self-identity, alienation, etc). Students will also study the building blocks of fiction in order to learn how a story “works.”

Required Books:


Course Goals:

- to read and appreciate great literature
- to learn the building blocks of fiction (e.g., character, plot, symbol, theme, foreshadowing, epiphany, setting and pacing, etc.)
- to learn the religious, philosophical and historical background out of which the authors wrote
- to better understand G-d, the world, others, and ourselves through the reading of stories
- to sympathize with worldviews and life journeys different than our own

Course requirements:

1) attendance, participation and attentiveness (APA)
2) a literature journal

Attendance, Participation & Attentiveness (APA): Attendance is mandatory. The material we’ll cover in class may not be found in the readings. Participation is expected. Learning to express your ideas in class is a huge part of a college education; it also makes discussion more interesting. Attentiveness is also expected. Students may use laptop computers for class notes only. Those who use a laptop for the Internet, email, or video games will lose the privilege of using a laptop for the rest of the semester. Finally, students who are disruptive in class (e.g., talking while the instructor is talking, text messaging, sleeping, flirting, and so on) will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class.

The Literature Journal: Every week students will write one page in a journal for each book/short story we read. The goal of keeping a journal is to identify the building blocks of fiction. Students may explore one or several building blocks in each journal entry. You are responsible for ten journal entries. Each journal entry should be one typed double-spaced page and will be submitted as a whole at the end of the semester. In summa, you will submit ten pages or so of writing at the end of the semester.
Method of Evaluation:

1) APA (20%)
2) The Literature Journal (80%)

What to Expect:

Expect to be challenged. This class will challenge your most deeply held convictions. Get used to it. You won’t grow as a human being unless you wrestle with points of view—religious, political, and ethical—in opposition to your own.

Expect to read and write. This isn’t a “coasting” course. You must do the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. This will be a boring class if I’m the only one up here talking.

Expect to pay attention in class. Don’t talk while the instructor is talking. Don’t talk while a colleague is talking. Raise your hand if you have a question and wait until you’re called on to speak.

Expect to be in class and stay until at least 9:00PM.

If you arrive to class late, don’t ask the person next to you what you missed. Wait until the break to ask this and other related questions.

Expect to keep all books, notebooks and pencils on your desk until class is over. Don’t put them away early. Don’t do anything that suggests class is over when it isn’t; doing so will trigger the “off” switch and students will stop paying attention.

Expect the instructor to teach the class. Don’t think you can teach the class. Many students enroll in the courses offered at Doane College. Expect to hear from all of those students.

Expect to turn your cell phone off at the beginning of class—and keep it off.
Grading Scale:

A+ = 97-100
A  = 93-96
A- = 90-92
B+ = 87-89
B  = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C+ = 77-79
C  = 73-76
C- = 70-72
D+ = 67-69
D  = 63-66
D- = 60-62
F  = 59 and below

A Note on Plagiarism

Stealing a writer’s intellectual property, such as words, sentences and paragraphs, is a crime. You may borrow these items, but you must carefully show where you got them. In other words, you must cite your sources. If you are suspected of plagiarism, not only will you receive a grade of ‘F’ for that assignment, you could also fail the course.

A Note on Courtesy

This is the twenty-first century, not the Stone Age. Everybody should act civilized. When the instructor is talking, you don’t talk. When you’re talking, your colleagues don’t talk (nor does the instructor). Also, if you disagree with somebody, always attack the person’s argument, not the person.
Tentative Class Schedule

Session 1
Introduction to Literature: The Building Blocks of Fiction

Session 2
The Pearl

Session 3
Andre Dubus: “The Fat Girl”
Ann Beattie: “Weekend”

Session 4
Post Office

Session 5
Joyce Carol Oates: “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”
Flannery O’Connor: “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

Session 6
A Lesson Before Dying

Session 7
The House on Mango Street

Session 8
Bernard Malmud: “The Magic Barrel”
Barry Hannah: “The Water Liars”
Literature Journal Due