

**San José State University**  
**Department of English and Comparative Literature**  
**ENGL 241, MFA Fiction Workshop, Spring 2018**

**Course and Contact Information**

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|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Instructor:</b>      | Nick Taylor                                   |
| <b>Office Location:</b> | Center for Steinbeck Studies, MLK Library 590 |
| <b>Telephone:</b>       | (408) 808-2067                                |
| <b>Email:</b>           | nicholas.taylor@sjsu.edu                      |
| <b>Office Hours:</b>    | Thurs 2:00pm – 3:45pm and by appointment      |
| <b>Class Days/Time:</b> | Thurs 4:00pm – 6:45pm                         |
| <b>Classroom:</b>       | BBC 221                                       |

**Course Description**

This is the most advanced fiction workshop offered at SJSU. It is designed for students pursuing writing as a vocation. Students enrolled in the MFA Program in Creative Writing have registration priority. If there is extra space, graduate students in other disciplines and Open University students may enroll with instructor permission. The majority of our class time will be spent discussing student work. We will also read from a fiction anthology and a photocopied anthology of published stories selected by members of the workshop. Additionally, we will discuss aspects of the writing profession. Topics include finding time to write, managing time, revision, genre, using material, finding an agent or publisher, and networking.

**Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)**

This course addresses the following Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) approved for the MFA in Creative Writing:

- SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
- SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
- SLO 5: Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to: a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion; b) formulate and defend original arguments; c) employ effectively the language of their discipline; d) write under time constraints.

**Required Texts/Readings**

**Textbooks**

- Wolitzer, Meg, and Heidi Pitlor, eds. *The Best American Short Stories 2017*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. ISBN: 9780544582903
- Photocopy packet of published short stories selected by your classmates (available at the third class meeting)

## Course Requirements and Assignments

- Two new pieces of fiction. There may be time to turn in additional pieces if you choose. [SLO #5]
- In place of a final exam, you will turn in a significant revision of one of the pieces you workshopped. [SLO #5]
- Your comments on your classmates' work. [SLO #4]
- Participation in class discussions. [SLO #4]
- Leading class discussion on a published story of your choice. [SLO #3]
- Attendance at least two literary readings and written responses. [SLO #3, #4, #5]

## Final Examination or Evaluation

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a substantial revision of one of your workshop submissions. Examples of changes that might be included in a substantial revision include adding or deleting a character, changing the point of view, inserting a new scene, and altering the ending of the story. It is not enough simply to correct the spelling and grammatical errors of the first draft. To earn a high grade on the revision, you must alter the story in some significant way. The revision is due the last day of class.

## Grading Information

Creative writing can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective use of grammar, syntax, and rhythm. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

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|---|-----|
| • Your fiction (2 stories and a revision)     | 60% |
| • Class participation and peer commentaries   | 20% |
| • Leading the discussion on a published story | 10% |
| • Responses to two literary readings          | 10% |

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more literary readings. Responses must be turned in by the last day of class.

## Determination of Grades

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

## Attendance at Literary Readings

You are required to attend **two readings** by poets or prose writers presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. The Bay Area is one of the world's great literary regions, where seven days a week one can attend a reading by a renowned writer at a bookstore, college, community center, or library. Readings are listed in the Sunday

editions of the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro*. After attending each reading, you will write a brief response (2-4pp). You may respond to any aspect of the reading, for example the speaker, the venue, the material performed, or the Q&A with the audience.

Here are some of the readings being offered on campus this semester:

**Thursday, February 8: Natalie Baszile**

Author of *Queen Sugar* (now a TV show on Oprah's network). Reading and conversation with SJSU Professor Selena Anderson

7:00 PM, King Library 225/229

**Tuesday, March 20: Don George**

Reading and Q&A by SJSU's 2018 Lurie Author-in-Residence, travel writer and editor Don George.

7:00 PM, King Library 225/229

**Thursday, April 12: Peter Balakian**

Reading & conversation between Pulitzer Prize winning poet Peter Balakian and SJSU President Mary Papazian

7:00pm, Hammer Theatre, Paseo San Antonio (next to light rail stop)

**Thursday, May 3: Steinbeck Fellows**

Featuring fiction writers Dinika Amaral, Caitlin Kindervatter-Clark, and Shruti Swamy

7:00 PM, Steinbeck Center, MLK 590

**Sunday, February 11: The 38th Annual Valentine's Revel**

Poetry reading featuring Prof. Emeritus Nils Peterson and Prof. Sally Ashton

5:30 PM - 6:30 PM, Cafe Stritch, 374 S 1st St, San Jose, California 95113

**Workshop Procedure**

At the first class meeting, I will pass around a sign-up sheet for workshops. Each of you will choose at least two dates when you want to hand in your stories. On those dates, you will pass out photocopies of your story to everyone in the class. Your story must be **double-spaced, single-sided**, and it must include **page numbers**. Your classmates will read your story, make comments in the margins, and type a one-page commentary. At the next class meeting, we will discuss your story. We will discuss up to three stories per class. At the end of the discussion, everyone will hand the author their marked-up manuscripts and commentaries.

**Peer Commentaries**

Your typed commentary on each student story will address (a) your interpretation of the story (what the story is about, what the author is trying to accomplish) and (b) suggestions for improvement. Please print two copies of your commentary – one for the author and one for the instructor. A portion of your final grade will be determined by the quality of your peer commentaries.

**Classroom Protocol**

In a workshop, writers must feel safe sharing their work with the group. Please keep your critiques confined to the work, not the author. Hostile, threatening, or personal criticism will not be tolerated. If you feel threatened by a classmate, please bring the issue to my attention so I can address it promptly.

## Procedure for Discussing Published Fiction

One of the most useful skills you can learn in graduate school is how to lead a discussion. I will ask each of you to lead a class discussion this semester on a published story of your choice. Please bring a clean photocopy of your chosen story to the second class meeting. I will take the stories to the print shop. Copies will be available for sale in class. Expect the book to cost around \$15.00.

When it is your turn to lead discussion, please come prepared with enough questions to keep the class talking for approximately fifteen minutes. I would like to approach these stories from a writer's perspective, so questions should lean more toward craft issues than thematic ones. I will talk more about what I have in mind during the first couple of weeks of class.

## Late Assignment Policy

It is important that you turn in your stories when you say you're going to. This is your most important responsibility. **Late or emailed stories will not be accepted.** If you need to change your workshop date, it is your responsibility to find someone willing to trade dates with you, and to tell me that you've switched.

## University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

## Course Schedule

This class meets every Thursday, starting on Thursday, January 25. The last class is Thursday, May 10. Class will not be held on Thursday, March 29 (Spring Recess). In lieu of a final exam, you will submit your final revision on the last day of class.

Reading assignments meet SLO #1, writing assignments SLO #3.

*Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class.*

| Week | Date                 | Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines  |
|------|----------------------|---|
| 1    | 1/25/2018            | Introduction  |
| 2    | 2/1/2018             | Due: Clean photocopy of published short story.<br>Readings: <i>Best American Short Stories 2017</i> , "Maidencane" through "Ugly" |
| 3    | 2/8/2018             | Readings: <i>Best American Short Stories 2017</i> , "The Midnight Zone" through "Famous Actor"                                    |
| 4-16 | 2/15/2018 - 5/3/2018 | Student Workshops   |
| 16   | 5/10/2018            | Final Revision Due  |