COURSE DESCRIPTION:
For the final group course in the Novel series, each student will work toward envisioning—if not getting to—the end of their novel. Goals for students will range from finishing at least 100 pages of their novel all the way to completing an entire draft. Students will have the opportunity to workshop two separate sections of 15-20 pages of their novel. The submissions will be evaluated not only as a piece of writing, but also as an appropriate launch pad for the rest of the draft. In workshop, students will deepen their understanding of novel structure and introduce and develop strategies for dynamic middles. We will approach issues of characterization, point of view, and imagery from new angles. Students also will write or rewrite a synopsis for their novel.

In this course, we will read one novel, National Book Award winner Salvage the Bones by Jesmyn Ward, and one craft book, Story Logic and the Craft of Fiction by Catherine Brady. We will use the novel to directly explore Brady’s advice and better apply it to our own books. Writing assignments will focus on helping students with page production while optional exercises will explore specific craft topics. We will close out the course with a discussion of revision as well as constructing plans for the final stage of drafting in preparation for the one-on-one tutorial.

REQUIRED READING:
1. Salvage the Bones, by Jesmyn Ward

http://www.amazon.com/Salvage-Bones-Novel-Jesmyn-Ward/dp/1608196267/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1342467945&sr=8-1&keywords=salvage+the+bones

2. Story Logic and the Craft of Fiction, by Catherine Brady

http://www.amazon.com/Story-Logic-Craft-Fiction-Catherine/dp/0230580556/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1342468080&sr=1-1&keywords=catherine+brady

GRADING:
Breakdown is as follows:
• 50% workshop excerpts (two)
• 50% participation (weekly responses to published and peer work)
WEEKLY SCHEDULE:
MONDAY: I will send out an email to the class introducing the week and directing you to the new Forum threads, including your Discussion Points about the week's readings and your writing assignments. (NOTE: Because many of you may have busy work schedules, the weekend might be your preferred time to work. Because of this, I will always post up the assignments on the prior Friday so you can get a head start.) The workshop stories for the week will also be posted by Monday morning.
THURSDAY-FRIDAY: Please post your workshop responses and answers to the weekly discussion questions by Thursday at noon. However, I encourage you to join in these "conversations" throughout the week. I find class energy is the best when responses are spread throughout the week and not just on Thursday and Friday.
THURSDAY: I will hold weekly office hours in the chatroom for our classroom on Thursdays (exact time to be determined). Here we can talk more informally, discussing any general questions as well as specific issues you might be having with your novels or with or reading assignments. You can get immediate feedback on your concerns from me and from your classmates. You're not required to come to office hours every week, and feel free to drop in for shorter periods of time within that hour. These chats will always be recorded; the transcripts will be available in case you are unable to attend.
WEEKEND: If you want, use the weekend to get a jumpstart on reading assigned chapters and drafting your writing exercise. I won't be in the classroom over the weekend, but you're welcome to start posting for the next week whenever you're ready. The classroom is always open!

You will have access to the reading and writing assignments for the upcoming two weeks in the "Schedule" section of Blackboard. This will give you the option of getting a head start if you desire it.

KEEPING YOUR WORKLOAD MANAGEABLE:
As a writer, you should not be online all the time. It’s not good for your creative process to treat this class as a 24/7 commitment. Turn your wireless card off when you’re writing, and work on your book first thing every day, before you do anything else, even class work. Don’t let internalized social pressure lead you to focus on class at the expense of your book. You will be a better student, have more fun participating in class, and give more incisive feedback to your fellow writers if you are writing every day. Plus, you’ll be happier!

SCHEDULE:
Week 1: Introductions and Story Logic

Week 2: Plot and Structure (Workshop)

Week 3: More Plot: What Lies Underneath (Workshop)

Week 4: Characterization (Workshop)

Week 5: Point of View (Workshop)
Week 6: Setting, Staging, and Dialogue (Workshop)

Week 7: Imagery (Workshop)

Week 8: Showing and Telling (Workshop)

Week 9: Sentences and Style (Workshop)

Week 10: Revision and Moving Forward (Workshop)

HOW ALL THIS WORKS:
Each week begins with an introductory craft talk that you’ll find in the Schedule section. I will also assign readings from the books that I’ve asked you to get for this class to illustrate and illuminate our craft discussions. You’ll find these listed under This Week’s Reading. Under Topics for Discussion I will pose a couple of questions based on the readings to help you think through how craft techniques are actually being used in published fiction, and how you can use them in your own writing. Under Writing Assignments, you’ll find different exercises designed to allow you to focus on an aspect of your fiction. Because this class is workshop based, you will not be required to post your writing production for the week. Our group conversation begins when you post your comments and exercises in the Discussion Forum. The Forum is a bulletin board where all the action happens. Here, we’ll have ongoing conversations about your work, the books we read together, and different fiction topics. This is where you’ll post your work, and where our discussions will take place.

WEEKLY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:
After the first week, we will move directly into workshopping. Any exercises will be optional, and your main writing focus will be on creating new pages of your draft. These will not be shared with the class, but we will work together to create reasonable word count goals and keep each other accountable.

YOUR WORKSHOP DRAFTS:
For the novel-excerpt drafts you will workshop in this course, shoot for a length that falls between 4000-6500 words. Also, please double-space your work, number your pages, and use an easy-to-read 12-point font (Times New Roman is a good standard font). Finally, please take care to keep your spelling or grammar errors to an minimum.

YOUR COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK:
Each week, we will have two novel excerpts to workshop. Time permitting, it is always best to read your classmates’ submissions twice. The first time through, read for pleasure, get a sense of how the piece works and track your reactions—when you’re riveted, when you’re less engaged. The second time, be more systematic and try to figure out why the writing had its effects upon you. As a general rule, in providing your written feedback you should identify: (1) strengths, (2) areas for improvement, and (3) any areas of confusion. It is also very helpful to pose questions directly to the writer. Your feedback responses should be at least 250 words.
Becoming a good reader is an important part in your development as a writer. Learning how to identify the strengths and weaknesses in others’ fiction will help you recognize the strengths and weaknesses in your own.

MY COMMENTARY:
I will comment with a short paragraph on each of your Week One exercises. My commentary on your workshop drafts will take the shape of a letter. I post these responses in the forum where anyone can read them. This is because, in a live course, I’d be making many of the comments during class discussions so that everyone benefited from them. Although we aren’t sharing the same physical space, you should think of the discussion threads as a place to interact with each other. After posting your critique, you may read someone else’s and find yourself wanting to elaborate on his or her comments or offering a different perspective. I will also read your comments to one another and pipe in when I have something to add. These discussions will be as lively as you make them.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURE:
As noted above, we will begin workshopping in Week Two. So that you can pace yourselves accordingly, we’ll need to set up a schedule for workshopping your novel-excerpt drafts. I will set up a thread in Week One’s Forum with workshop slots on it. Slots will be assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis—so log on and claim the spot that works best for you (and remember that there are both advantages and disadvantages that come with being workshopped sooner versus later—and vice versa.)

I will provide more information about workshop logistics after class begins, but for now please note that our general workshop procedure will be as follows:

1. Those to be workshoped will email me their drafts before noon on Sunday. I will post them to the forums by Sunday evening.

2. Feedback letters in response to those drafts must be posted as separate threads on the forum before noon (Pacific) on Thursday. Details regarding the expected format/content of those letters will be provided before Week Two.

MY ONLINE PRESENCE:
I’ll be online and actively responding to new posts most weekday afternoons. I also check my email at least once a day and respond as promptly as I can. The beauty of an online class is that we can all do our work when our schedules permit; we don't have to be working simultaneously. So log on when it's convenient for you, morning or night, daily or every few days. I will hold a one hour chat session, a kind of live office hour, once a week. Participation is encouraged by not mandatory.

A FINAL IMPORTANT NOTE:
Although many students take online courses with the absolute best intentions of doing every last assignment, "real life"—family, illness, professional deadlines—often has a
way of making that impossible. Sometimes, the frustration this causes prompts students to drop completely out of the class. Hold on! Even you have to skip a couple assignments, this doesn’t mean you should drop out of the course. As long as you're getting most of the work done and commenting on your classmates' submissions, you'll be fine. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch if you have any concerns about your standing. If you foresee some bumps in the road, let me know. We’ll work together to find the best possible solution for you.

This is your class. I’m the guide, yes, but the quality of our discussions will depend upon your engagement, insightfulness, and good humor. This course will be as good as you (and you and you and you and you and you….) give. So, please participate fully and generously in discussions. Read your classmates’ work with a keen eye and a sense of possibility. And please, let me know if there’s anything I can do to make this a better experience for you. I welcome suggestions, detours, and even shortcuts on gravel roads. If there’s something you want to discuss, let me know. If there’s an assignment that you think would work in this class, tell me. This is your class.