



Course Title: Novel II: Plot and Structure

Course Code: OWC 304 C

Instructor: Thomas H. McNeely

Thomas McNeely is the author of *Pictures of the Shark: Stories* and the novel *Ghost Horse*, winner of the Gival Press Novel Award. He has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Prose, and his stories have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Ploughshares*, and other magazines and anthologies and have been shortlisted for *The Best American Short Stories*, *The O. Henry Prize Stories*, and the Pushcart Prize. McNeely received an MFA from Emerson College.

Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: Sundays, 3-4 pm PT / 6-7 pm ET; longer sessions for workshops

Meeting location: Zoom

The class sessions will be recorded. We understand that people have busy lives and live in a variety of different time zones. At the same time, students consistently report that the live sessions are their favorite part of the class. To get the full benefit of the course, please try to attend as many meetings as possible.

Course Features:

- Live session
 - Lecture, discussions, and Q&A
 - Requires interaction and active participation
- Assignments & Coursework
 - Assignments and course materials posted in Canvas
 - Required discussions in Canvas
 - Students will submit two workshop pieces
 - Instructor will provide feedback on assignments
- Instructor will hold office hours
- Individual conferences available by request

Course Summary: Novel II is designed to allow you to build on your hard work in Novel I. You're at an exciting point in the process of writing, a place where you may begin to feel the book take its shape. We'll talk about issues that many writers encounter mid-draft and

we'll discuss techniques for how best to work with the information you have about where you're headed. We'll also work hard to keep the sense of discovery alive. Surprising yourself, and letting what you've done so far speak to you in unexpected ways, is key to dynamic work.

Like *Novel I*, this class will focus on workshop. Everyone will produce between 30 and 40 (max) new pages of their book for one full-group workshop and one small-group workshop. Weekly "lectures," (the introductions in our schedule) readings and writing assignments will center around issues such as raising the stakes of your novel, finding the right fictional form, managing scenes and sections, handling subplots and minor characters, thinking forward to the end, and much more.

Required Textbooks:

The Modern Library Writer's Workshop, Stephen Koch http://www.amazon.com/The-Modern-Library-Writers-Workshop/dp/0375755586/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1353012569&sr=8-1&keywords=modern+library+writer%27s+workshop

Old School, Tobias Wolff
http://www.amazon.com/Old-School-Tobias-Wolff/dp/0375701494/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1353012619&sr=1-1&keywords=old+school+tobias+wolff

The Namesake, Jhumpa Lahiri
http://www.amazon.com/Namesake-Novel-Jhumpa-Lahiri/dp/0618485228/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1452803448&sr=1-1&keywords=the+namesake+by+jhumpa+lahiri

HOW IT WORKS—IN BRIEF

In the first two weeks of the course, you will turn in required short writing exercises. Starting in Week Three, our class priority will be workshop, and your carefully crafted responses to your classmates' fiction. However, each week of the course, I'll also include optional short writing assignments and discussion questions of our reading that complement the week's topic. If you have a chance to complete these optional assignments, you'll post them to each week's "writing assignment" or "discussion" threads, depending on whether they are responses to Wolff's or Lahiri's novels ("discussion") or short writing assignments, as you will have done in Weeks One and Two. You may expect my feedback on these short assignments within three days. You may also receive feedback from the rest of the class on these short assignments, if they would like to give it.

Each of you will have a chance to submit a total of forty (40) pages of your novel-in-progress in TWO workshop submissions. Feel free to divide the 40 pages (max) any way you'd like—20/20, 30/10, etc.

ZOOM SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

Workshop will begin during Week Three and will continue until the final class. If you are planning to submit work you have begun prior to this class, please sign up for an early slot so that people submitting brand new work have a chance to prepare. Everyone must submit TWICE during the term: The FIRST submission should be during Weeks Three through Six and the SECOND submission should be during weeks Seven through Ten. Between two to four students will be workshopped each week, depending on final enrollment. As mentioned, letters of response on each submission are mandatory!

I will post Doodle polls for students to vote to schedule each workshop, with the votes of the authors' being determinative of when workshops will be held. In the first two weeks of class, these will be general discussions of the class, readings, and introductions. Each week from Week Three onward, we will hold workshop sessions to discuss each student submission, 30 minutes per submission.

Grade Options and Requirements:

I would like you to prioritize accordingly over the course of the quarter:

Completion of 30 to 40 (max) new pages of your novel
Thoughtful feedback on your classmates' submissions (Weeks 3 through 10)
Meaningful and frequent participation in our discussions of assigned reading, as well as feedback on your classmates weekly assignments as time permits
The grade breakdown will be as follows:

- 50% 30 to 40 (max) pages of new fiction
- 50% Comments on your classmates' work and participation on discussion threads

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week One: Getting to Know Your Novel-In-Progress

Reading: Introduction to Modern Library Writer's Workshop (Koch) and as much of Old School and The Namesake as you can finish.

Writing: Post a short summary and elevator pitch for your novel; what have you done in Novel I and what is your work plan for Novel II?

Zoom: Getting to know each other and answer questions you might have about the course.

Week Two: Intensity and Stakes

Reading: Find passages that help you identify stakes and how Lahiri and Woolf increase them. Pay particular attention to how these stakes develop from the characters' particular ages, backgrounds, and physical circumstances.

Writing: Brainstorm ways to increase the stakes in your novel. List five ways, within the world of your novel, that the main conflict could matter more to your protagonist. Keep in mind, as Lahiri and Wolff do, that desires and opposition to those desires arise out of particular characters at a particular time in history, in their lives, and in their relationships with others.

Zoom: We will discuss the importance of knowing each of your characters' desires and fears, both in the moment of the story and in their lives, and how these desires and fears structure inner and outer stories.

Week Three: Narrative Structure

Reading: Classmates' workshop submissions; Koch, Chapter 3.

Writing: Comments on classmates' submissions. Optional: Write a short reflection on what kind of a book you are writing and consider whether your narrative structure best suits your plot and genre.

Zoom: Student workshops, with discussion of narrative structure.

Week Four: Interiority / Exteriority

Reading: Classmates' workshop submissions; Koch 106-110.

Writing: Comments on submissions. Optional, but strongly encouraged: rewrite 250-500 words of your novel using resources of interiority / exteriority in Koch and lecture.

Zoom: Student workshops, with discussion of developing interiority.

Week Five: Scenes and Sections

Reading: Classmates' submissions; sections in Lahiri and Wolff.

Writing: Comments on submissions. Optional: Write a new section, or continue working on the current section you're writing, with a keen eye to how sections can operate.

Zoom: Student workshops, with emphasis on scene development.

Week Six: Writing Discomfort

Reading: Classmates' submissions; sections in Lahiri and Wolff.

Writing: Comments on submissions. Optional: make a list of the uncomfortable moments in your novel so far, choose one and try to intensify its discomfort as well as the reader's engagement with it.

Zoom: Student workshops, with emphasis on discomfort.

Week Seven: Subplots and Minor Characters

Reading: Classmates' submissions; Koch, Making Characters Live.

Writing: Comments on submissions. Optional: list the minor characters in your novel and write a line or two on each of them; give the reader a quick snapshot of their appearance, or manner, or one of their habits.

Zoom: Student workshops, with discussion of subplots and minor characters.

Week Eight: Discovering Meaning

Reading: Classmates' submissions; Koch: Beginnings, section on "You and Your Notebooks."

Writing: Comments on submissions. Optional: write notebook entries from your characters' points of view, discovering their points of view and your novels' meaning.

Zoom: Student workshops, with discussion of discovery of meaning.

Week Nine: Outlining and Other Graphic Approaches

Reading: Classmates' submissions.

Writing: Comments on submissions. Optional, but strongly encouraged: outline your novel using notecards. Bonus: outline Old School and / or The Namesake on notecards to see how they work.

Zoom: Student workshops, with discussion of outlines.

Week Ten: Casting Forward

Reading: Classmates' submissions; Koch: Finishing, section on "The End and the Final Drafts;" re-reading endings in Wolff and Lahiri.

Writing: Comments on submissions; optional: Briefly describe the ending you have in mind for your novel, plus five other possible endings.

Zoom: Students workshops, with discussion of effective endings.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Thanks for taking part in this course. So much of writing is done in solitude that I always welcome the opportunity to encourage a community of writers. I'm really looking forward to getting to know you and your work, if you're new to me, and to catching up with what's been happening with your projects if we've worked together before!