Course Title: Fiction Writing: Inhabiting Character  
Course Code: FICT 56  
Instructor: Rachel Smith

Course Summary:

Weeks 1-4 of this course will focus on short story and craft readings (a tentative schedule is listed below), as well as short in-class and out-of-class writing assignments. In weeks 5-10 we will workshop student manuscripts and supplementary readings may be assigned.

Please see course page for full description and additional details.

Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Score will be determined by student attendance and participation. Credit is given at 70% completion of requirements.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Written work, as assigned by the instructor, will determine a student’s grade.
  - If you choose to receive a grade for this course, it will be calculated as follows. More than two absences will affect your grade.
    - 30% Completion of a short story or novel excerpt for workshop (8-18 pages)
    - 20% Response letters to your peers’ workshop manuscripts
    - 20% Completion of out-of-class writing exercises
    - 30% Participation in class

Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.

Required Texts and Materials:

- *How Fiction Works*, James Wood
- A notebook and pen that you bring to class each week (not a laptop, if possible)
- Enough copies of your workshop manuscript to distribute to each of your classmates one week before your scheduled workshop (more below)
- Each week’s assigned reading, which will generally be distributed in hard copy the week before but may also be posted to Canvas or sent by email

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
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continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
Recommended Texts:
- Recommended craft texts:
  - *The Half-Known World*, Robert Boswell
  - *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard (this one is—quite brilliantly—more narrative and lyrical)
- Recommended further reading in the short story:
  - A good anthology such as *The New Granta Book of the American Short Story*, ed. Richard Ford or *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction*, eds: Lex Williford and Michael Martone
  - Annual anthologies, particularly *The Best American Short Stories* and *The PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories*
  - Story collections of any writer you especially connect with while taking this course

Participation & Workshop:
This is a discussion-based class, so the quality of our collective experience depends on your engagement. This is true for our discussion of published work as well as the writing workshop. You’ll get the most out of this class if you read all the stories/excerpts carefully and read them twice—especially the workshop manuscripts. Workshop happens like this: Early in the quarter, probably at our second class meeting, you will sign up for a workshop date (this will be sometime during weeks 5-10). Your workshop story will be due exactly one week before that date. Each student will compose a short letter to you, giving shape and language to his or her reactions to your manuscript. You, in turn, will write short responses to your peers’ manuscripts, offering both encouragement and an honest accounting of your experience reading the work. Students often find that in writing these letters they deepen their own instincts and develop their critical vocabulary in ways that are invaluable to their own writing practice. In the workshop, we’ll offer specific praise for aspects of the manuscript that we admire, and through discussion, we’ll try to identify the story’s gaps, its confusions, and dead spots, and its highest potential.

Office Hours and Email:
Continuing Studies instructors do not hold office hours. Most weeks, I will be available to talk before and after class. Email is a fine way to contact me, and I will respond within 48 hours.

Tentative Weekly Outline:

**Week One**
“*How to push out?”*
“*Hitting Budapest,*” NoViolet Bulawayo
Excerpts from Stephen Koch & James Wood
**Week Two**
“to fasten in the memory of the reader, like a living presence, some bright human image”
William Gass Excerpt
“Emergency,” Denis Johnson
“Getting Your Characters In” Exercise Due

**Week Three**
“I will never desert Mr. Micawber”
“Dance of the Happy Shades,” Alice Munro
Excerpts from E.M. Forster & James Wood
“Details” Exercise Due

**Week Four**
“the unknowing of the character”
“The Toughest Indian in the World,” Sherman Alexie
Robert Boswell Excerpt
“Flat/Round” Exercise Due

**Week Five**
Workshop 1

**Week Six**
Workshop 2

**Week Seven**
Workshop 3

**Week Eight**
Workshop 4

**Week Nine**
Workshop 5

**Week Ten**
Workshop 6