Writing the Compelling Character: 
Mind, Heart, and Guts  
(Preliminary Syllabus)

Course Code: WSP 308

Quarter: Spring 2017

Instructor: Marisa Handler

Course Schedule: Saturdays, May 6 and May 20, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Required Text: Great Short Stories of the Masters, ed. Charles Neider

Recommended Texts: The Art of Character, David Corbett  
Bird by Bird, Anne LaMott

Course Credit: This is a one-unit class, and credit will be based on attendance (50%) and participation (50%). Participation includes both class discussion and writing exercises.

Class Expectations: 
This will be a collaborative environment in which you will share your own experience as well as contribute to the development of your peers’ process. Over the course of our two days together, you will explore how to discover your characters, how to come to understand them (which includes letting them surprise you), and how to do them justice on the page (without writing an encyclopedia).

Class Outline: 
Each class will have a one-hour lunch break from 12:30 - 1:30 pm. The following topics will be covered on each day:

Saturday, May 6: Working your way in  
• Going fishing: freewriting  
• Surface-deep: At first glance  
• Chart it: filling in the blanks  
• The benefits of hindsight: Personal history  
• Scene and setting  
• Empathy and the Inner Life  
• After the ecstasy: at the laundromat

Saturday, May 20: Working your way out  
• Mining the Depths: You feel, he feels, we feel
• Seeding Tension: Desire
• Discovery and surprise
• From all angles: Relationships
• Got Conflict?
• In her own words: Dialogue
• Transformation and Story Arc

“If you’re deep enough in character, you don’t need to think about plot”
—Marilynne Robinson