PREREQUISITES: ENGL 119

381A – 001 INSTRUCTOR: BLACKWOOD

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The essential characteristics of the fiction writer? A sharp eye for detail, a strong grasp of language, and a dogged persistence. Often, though, aspiring fiction writers underestimate the amount of close reading they’ll need to do to develop their craft. It’s not enough to read as a reader—you must read as a writer. In other words, instead of allowing yourself to be swept up in the “vivid and continuous dream” of the story, you will need to duck behind the curtain to explore how the “dream” is made. To this end, you’ll read and discuss in detail many short stories in this class—drawn from the works of Ron Carlson, Junot Diaz, Amy Hempel, Ray Carver, Andre Dubus, Denis Johnson, and Kelly Link—flash fiction as well as longer works from the likes of You will also develop a working vocabulary to discuss published stories and respond thoughtfully and generously to your peers’ work. You will keep a writer’s journal in which you’ll analyze stories from a writers point of view, complete exercises, keep notes on the elements of craft, transcribe dialogue you’ve overheard, and construct drafts of scenes (you will be asked to type and turn in some of these exercises as noted). Finally, you will draft and revise three “original” 5-7 page short stories that will demonstrate—along with your ACTIVE participation in class—your fundamental understanding of tension, character, image, point of view, and dialogue.

Here are some questions we’ll explore in the class in our own work and in the published stories we’ll read: which carefully chosen details impart to the reader a sense of the whole? What makes a character “real”? When should you use dialogue in place of narration? What are the limits of first person? What moves or amuses a reader and what makes her throw the story on the floor and stomp it? How does fiction work its particular magic? And most importantly, what makes a reader turn the page?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Students are required to write and revise 16-21 pages of fiction and to comment effectively on their peers’ work. Discussion will be central to the class and attendance mandatory.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Tobias Wolfe’s The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories ISBN-10: 0679745130