

## **Excerpted Historical Course Descriptions**

### **Caren Gussoff Sumption**

#### **International Academy of Design and Technology, 2007 - 2009**

##### *Advanced Rhetoric and Style* (standard curricula)

This course explores writing and composition skills through the exploration of persuasive writing, literary analysis, and term paper research. Students will learn to develop their own literary style through analysis and comparison and with noted authors and schools of writing, past and present. Each student will then culminate their explorations and analyses of literary style and comprehensive writing with a multifaceted, 10-15 page term paper.

##### *Introduction to Composition* (standard curricula)

This course explores writing and composition skills through the exploration of persuasive writing, literary analysis, and term paper research. Students will learn to develop their own literary style through analysis and comparison and with noted authors and schools of writing, past and present. Each student will then culminate their explorations and analyses of literary style and comprehensive writing with a multifaceted, 10-15 page term paper.

##### *Information Literacy* (standard curricula)

Information literacy is the ability to research and apply information. Students will develop the skills to access, evaluate and apply appropriate print and electronic information sources to research projects. Students will use digital technology to communicate information.

#### **Hugo House, 2002 - 2010**

##### *Ten Second Fiction: How Low Can You Go?*

How low can you go...word count-wise? Phones are the new internet, life gets Twittered in >140 character increments, and the news are headlines on an RSS feed. If "minute" fiction reached 1,000 words, is there a place for ten second fiction? Hemingway, ahead of his time, once wrote a story in 6 words ("For sale: baby shoes, never worn." ). This class will read masters of the short-short-short (such as Amy Hempel, Augusto Monterroso, Charles Stross, Margaret Atwood, among others), explore the story vs. vignette debate,

examine the newer publishing opportunities, and, of course, write and revise our own shorts.

### *Finding Other Forms*

Epistolary fiction is nothing new, but these variations on traditional structure only hint at the unconventional forms that can be used in a story. While form alone is only a part of a work, this class will play with how unexpected story shapes strengthens a narrative and the possibilities of writing fiction disguised as lists, emails, recipes, questionnaires, reference books, resumes (ad infinitum!). We'll write our own pieces using unexpected shapes, and read work that pushes the boundaries of form from (among others) McSweeney's, Samuel R. Delany, Angela Carter, and Rebecca Brown.

### *She Blinded Me With Science: Women in Science Fiction*

Aliens, cyborgs, utopias, and machines: science fiction in the 21st century has come a long way, baby. It's evolved beyond its pulpy ancestors, with a growing canon of speculative fiction which qualifies as good literature by any standard...and has women writers at the helm. Let's trade legs for wings, shed gender and identity, and play with futures, pasts, and myths reading some of the most innovative and imaginative works by women. Writers covered include Ursula LeGuin, Octavia E. Butler, Margaret Atwood, Nicola Griffith, James Tiptree Jr., and Nancy Kress.

### *Conquering the Blank Page*

Veteran or novice, all writers confront the same faceless enemy—the blank page. Something about making that first mark can be intimidating or wrought with anxiety—even the prolific and celebrated Margaret Atwood has stated "Blank pages inspire me with terror." In this class, we'll become "warriors" or a sort, training in play over combat, and placing expectation back where it belongs—later in the writing process. We'll strategize new ways to vanquish fear of beginning: some great, some terrible, all the more fun than expected. Bringing that beautiful writing notebook you've been afraid to use is encouraged.

### *'Ploiting Poetics*

Prose is prose, verse is verse, and never the twain shall meet? Hogwash. Worrying about form and genre and correctness is not only a buzzkill, but a lost opportunity for interestingness. In this class, we'll build bridges and kick in some walls, filch and manipulate traditional and modern poetic structures

and build stories (imagine this: using the repetitive schematics of, say, a villanelle, as a possible organizational tool to frame fiction). We'd read writers who have unabashedly used and abused poetry to write their fiction (Brautigan, Edson, Woolf, among others).

## **Cornish College of the Arts, 2001 - 2009**

### *Literature of the South*

Historically, the American South held to its heart a basic kind of aristocracy: a class-minded society based on the ownership of land, of slaves, and of knowing ones' place in a complicated hierarchy of social mores and customs. The idea of the Southern lady and gentleman contrasted sharply with the reality of poverty in the area, which continued after long after the abolishment of slavery. The specter of the Civil War, the power of religion, the importance of the family (often over the importance of the individual), and the celebration of the eccentric are also themes that dominate Southern literature, particularly the "Southern Renaissance" of the early and mid-Twentieth Century.

Texts:

Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Flannery O'Connor, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*

Eudora Welty, *Collected Stories*

James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History Of Southern Identity*

### *Punks Not Dead: The Rise and Fall of Subculture*

Subcultures have been defined as..."a magical or symbolic solution to the structural problems of class." This solution is an attempt to form a collective identity that exists in relationship to the dominant mainstream culture.

Strangers, not in a strange land, but in their own, people who participate in some sort of subculture do so by defining themselves against the greater society, by deliberately placing themselves outside the norm. Subcultures organize themselves around extremely different interests: music, drugs, sex, art, but all begin by embracing some component of the dangerous, the weird, the crackpot..."the other."

The United States is no different than any place else in the world with its presence of an "underground" set of subcultures, but here in America, the

dangerous, the weird, the crackpot..."the other" have a habit of becoming exactly its opposite. Given time and the free market system, many, if not all, of these collective identities become appropriated and embraced by the dominant mainstream culture. We live in a world in which 'image' and 'lifestyle' are central to experience and in which cultural industries are expanding. As artists, we must be able to critically the meanings people derive from culture. This class will examine what makes a subculture, beginning a critical look at American cultural norms and reading quite a bit about cultural theories.

Texts:

Mark Dery, *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium: American Culture on the Brink*

Jesus Son, Denis Johnson

Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting*

Gogol, *Diary of a Madman*

Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic*

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture and the Meaning of Style*

### *Deep Thoughts: Philosophy and Popular Culture*

We often see philosophy as a distant, abstract notion, nothing that touches us daily—only mattering to philosophers, those strange, bearded intellectuals locked someplace in an ivory tower. However, we really are bombarded by the riddles of existence—why and how we exist, for example—and as artists, whether or not you realize it, you wrestle with these ideas daily...and see them explored and embedded in all aspects of popular culture. Beginning with philosophical themes in popular movies and TV shows, we will explore some of these big ideas as put forth by thinkers such as Plato, Socrates, Descartes, Nietzsche, Kant, Frankl, and Baudrillard—as well as examine schools of philosophical thought (like Existentialism, Marxism, and Postmodernism, for example)—and how these ideas are played out on the screen and in our lives.

Texts:

Christopher Falzon, *Philosophy Goes To The Movies*

William Irwin, *The D'oh of Homer*

Thomas Morris, *Superheroes And Philosophy: Truth, Justice, And The Socratic Way*

The class reader (excerpts from Plato, Socrates, Descartes, Nietzsche, Kant, Frankl, and Baudrillard), available at bookstore

### *Mirror on the Wall: Fairy Tales and Culture*

Fairy tales, also known as wonder tales, have, throughout history, been an effective and efficient way to reflect, like a magic mirror, a society's current values and ethics.

Usually set in vague times (once upon a time), in unspecified locations (the woods), with one-dimensional characters who follow emblematic patterns (a quest, often resolved by magic), fairy tales have functioned as symbolic, societal communication, instructing children in the "rules of life."

And, as values change, so fairy tales have evolved to reflect the contemporaneous social and moral codes of conduct.

In this course, we will begin by surveying early fairy and folk tales from across the globe, and then move into contemporary "re-told" and "fractured" fairy tales—in novels, short stories, poems, and film. We will attempt, through the critical analysis, as well as the history of the genre, to contextualize these texts in terms of aesthetic, critical, and socio-political history and theory...trying to determine what exactly lies within the "mirror on the wall."

Texts:

The Bloody Chamber, Angela Carter

Wicked, Gregory Maguire

Dangerous Angels (The Weetzie Bat Books), F. Lia Block

The class reader, available at bookstore