

## Fiction Unit

Spring/Summer

Date	Topic	Readings DUE	Assignments DUE
T Jul 07 Tuesday	Intro to Fiction Unit Energy Intro Objective Correlative WE	Sellers 172-185 Amy Hempel, "The Harvest"	<b>WE3: Narrative Voice</b> Student Selection 3: Student Selection 4:
Th Jul 09 Thursday	Manipulating Energy Ten Rules of Good Fiction	Sellers 185-195, 198-202 L. Annette Binder, "Lay My Head" Gish Jen, "Who's Irish?"	Notebook Check #1 Student Selection 5: Student Selection 6:
T Jul 14 Tuesday	Tension Ten Rules cont'd Intro Characters WE	Sellers 202-215 Alice Walker, "Nineteen Fifty-five" Anthony Doerr, "The Caretaker"	<b>WE4: Objective Correlative</b> Student Selection 7: Student Selection 8:
Th Jul 16 Thursday	Manipulating Tension Characters Endings	Sellers 215-228 Doug Thayer, "Opening Day" Kay Boyle, "Astronomer's Wife" Tobias Wolff, "Say Yes" Margaret Atwood, "Happy Endings"	Student Selection 9: Student Selection 10:
T Jul 21 Tuesday	Flash Fiction Intro Quotidian Essay WE FICTION WORKSHOP	Hollowell, Kolaya, Hansen, Wallace, Carlson stories	Read and respond to workshop stories <b>WE5: Characters</b> Student Selection 11: Joey Student Selection 12: Kennedy

### Fiction Weekly Exercises

Students work on one short story during this unit and apply the following weekly exercises to that story.

**WE3: Narrative Voice:** Twenty or so years ago, voice was the "rite of passage" into a successful writing career. Young writers were told that they should write until they developed their voice. The way to do this was to simply write (and read) as much as possible, having others read your work and comment on it, until your voice became distinct from others. The evidence to support this theory was generally drawn from the body of work of successful writers. Everyone agreed that you could read a Hemingway story, for instance, without factual evidence that the story was

written by Hemingway, and recognize it as his work because of his distinctive voice. Faulkner provided an even clearer example of this philosophy. In more recent years, the notion that one must discover a unique voice has become a secondary issue as any number of successful writers have demonstrated that they can write in more than one narrative voice.

Nevertheless, a narrative voice that sounds like it could be anyone's voice or is bland and boring, or riddled with pointless clichés will fail to capture and hold the reader's attention. And a voice that is inconsistent will tend to confuse the reader about the narrator's attitude towards his/her characters and the story that is being told.

NOTE: It is quite common for writers in the early stages of their careers to imitate the writers they are reading or admire most. Often we are not even aware that we are doing this when we write.

Locate a relatively long descriptive passage in a short story or novel that you enjoy, and write a blatant imitation. Follow the sentence structure and syntax word for word. Do this exercise for as many different writers as you can. You should write at least 250 words each time you do this exercise.

Use a text like *Best American Short Stories*, containing about 20 stories from as many writers, and write imitations of the first page of each short story in the text.

Write a complete short story in imitation of your favorite writer from each major historical period for the past three centuries. (Note: you can change the subject matter, sex of the main character, and other such details and still write an imitation.)

Locate a writer whose work you do NOT particularly care for and write a parody of the story.

\*For this assignment, turn in one imitation.

**WE4: Objective Correlative:** This exercise is quite possibly the most difficult, demanding and important exercise a writer can ever do. The poet and critic, T. S. Eliot, coined the phrase "objective correlative" to designate what he believed was the most important element in writing: Rendering the description of an object so that the emotional state of the character from whose point of view we receive the description is revealed WITHOUT ever telling the reader what that emotional state is or what has motivated it.

The late John Gardner, recognized in his lifetime as the leading creative writing teacher in the United States, developed the following exercise for students:

A middle-age man is waiting at a bus stop. He has just learned that his son has died violently. Describe the setting from the man's point of view WITHOUT telling your reader what has happened. How will the street look to this man? What are the sounds? Odors? Colors? That this man will notice? What will his clothes feel like? Write a 250 word description.

Turn in this description AND a 250-word description as applied to YOUR story.

**WE5: Characters:** Create character sketches. This is a good exercise to perform on a regular basis in your journal. Sometimes you can just create characters as they occur to you, at other times it is good to create characters of people you see or meet. Some of the best sketches are inspired by people you don't really know but get a brief view of, like someone sitting in a restaurant or standing by a car that has been in an accident. Ask yourself who they are, what they are about. The fact that you don't really know the person will free you up to make some calculated guesses that ultimately have more to say about your own vision of the world than they

do about the real person who inspired the description. That's okay, you are NOT a reporter, and ultimately the story you intend to tell is YOUR story.

1. Write a character sketch strictly as narrative description, telling your reader who the character is without having the character do or say anything.
2. Revise the above to deliver the character to the reader strictly through the character's actions.
3. Revise the above to deliver the character strictly through the character's speech to another character.
4. Revise the above to deliver the character strictly through the words/actions of another character (the conversation at the water fountain about the boss).