Section 10, Writing Short Fiction
Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat
June 13-17, 2016
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. each day
Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., Madison
UW-Madison Continuing Studies & UW-Madison Dept. of English

Instructor: Christopher Chambers

Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds and other minds and other dreams. They are journeys you can make to the far side of the universe and still be back in time for dinner. — Neil Gaiman

Learn how stories work from the inside out! We will examine the basic elements of short fiction through close readings and discussion of successful short stories (one each day). You will use guided writing exercises to explore the intensity, brevity, and word play of the short story toward the writing of a new, original story of your own.

You'll take part in an active week-long discussion, read and critique work by fellow participants, and receive responses from them on your work in progress. Throughout the week, we'll look at a wide range of short fiction with an eye toward identifying and appropriating successful techniques and structures. The focus will be on developing reading skills—learning to read as a writer—and on using those skills to improve our own writing. In-class exercises are designed to complement each day’s lessons and to inspire, motivate, and provoke you into creating work that you otherwise would not have created.

At the end of the week, you'll have a new appreciation for the range and possibilities in writing short fiction and you'll have a deeper understanding of the inner workings of storytelling and story structure, a new short story of your own, and new skills in reading, writing, and revising that you will be able apply to the writing of other short stories, novellas, or novels. Email 10 pages of a short story, either a complete draft or a beginning, by May 30th to christopher.chambers@wisc.edu with the subject line: WBTL class.

Christopher Chambers is the former Director of the Walker Percy Center for Writing & Publishing in New Orleans, and has taught creative writing for over 20 years. He received an MFA degree from the University of Alabama, where he was editor of the Black Warrior Review. He was editor of the New Orleans Review from 2000-2013. He has written for television, and published fiction, poetry, and nonfiction in The Southern Review, The Gettysburg Review, Ninth Letter, Quarterly West, Carolina Quarterly, Indiana Review, Exquisite Corpse, CopperNickel, Louisiana Literature, Denver Quarterly, Epoch, Georgetown
Review, Notre Dame Review, Washington Square, Hayden’s Ferry Review, Lit, BOMB Magazine, Fourteen Hills, and elsewhere. He has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship for creative writing, five Pushcart Prize nominations, and has been anthologized in *French Quarter Fiction*, *Knoxville Bound*, *Something in the Water*, and in the *Best American Mystery Stories* series.

Syllabus: Writing Short Fiction

Short stories are a good place for fiction writers to develop their craft. Short fiction is not necessarily easier to write than the novel—it takes a great deal of skill to write a successful short story. But they are shorter, which makes it easier to see the entire story, easier to revise them, and they are arguably easier to publish. And not all fiction writers need to be novelists. F. Scott Fitzgerald was quite comfortable as a short story writer and Raymond Carver never wrote a novel in his life. And of course, there are many writers who do both. We’ll begin by looking at the short story as a genre and at its place among the other forms of fiction. And we will proceed to read stories, analyze their construction in order to figure out how they were made, what they are doing, and what makes them work.

Monday: What is Short Fiction?
- A short history of the short story.
- The short story, novella, and novel defined.
- How does short fiction differ from long-form fiction?
- What do they have in common?
- Writing short stories versus writing novels.

Tuesday: Who’s Telling this Story?
- Narrative Voice
- Point-of-View
- Critical Distance
- The Unreliable Narrator

Wednesday: Something Happens to Someone
- Character
- Action
- Setting
- Time: Backstory, Present, and Duration

Thursday: The Hidden Machinery of Story
- Plot
- Foreshadowing
- Tension and Suspense
- Withholding and Revealing
Friday: Beginning, Middle, End, and Then What?

- Beginnings
- Endings
- Revision
- Marketing and Publication

A tentative list of readings for the week:

"Review of Twice-Told Tales" by Edgar Allan Poe
"Introduction" by Ben Marcus (from New American Short Stories)
“The Author” by Donald Barthelme
“Mother” by Grace Paley
“A Story About the Body” by Robert Haas
“Yours” by Mary Robison
“Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway
“The Management of Grief” by Bharati Mukherjee
“Communist” by Richard Ford

**Credit Option:** Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others’ work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.