

Writing About Science Fiction (WR4D) CTY Course Outline

Day One

- Introduction to course and to each other
- Decide on class rules and evaluation rubric
- Invention: Definition (*genus* and *differentiae*)
- Consensus exercise on defining science fiction – each group draws a concept map
- Read and discuss various critical definitions of science fiction
- Individual writing: paragraph-long definition
- Discussion of rhetoric: every aspect of any act of communication is chosen for a purpose

Day Two

- Read Hoffmann, “The Sand-Man” / Poe, “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” / London, “A Curious Fragment”
- Introduce concepts of point of view and the distinction between story (*fabula*) and plot (*syuzhet*)
- Invention: Comparison and relationship
- Consensus exercise: Compare/contrast modes of narration in Hoffmann, Poe, and London
- Individual writing: What are the effects of the chosen point of view/mode of narration in one of the stories? How might the story be different if a different POV were chosen?
- Peer review: descriptive outlines

Day Three

- Read Wells, “The Star” / Clarke, “The Star” / Niven, “Inconstant Moon”
- Continue with concepts of point of view, emphasizing third-person omniscient
- Invention: Cause and effect
- Consensus exercise: Discuss the chains of cause and effect in one of the stories. What major effects does the author argue will result from an apocalyptic event?
- Individual writing: Which story seems more “realistic” or “probable” in its discussion of the effects of a catastrophe? Discuss why.
- Peer review: descriptive outlines

Day Four

- Read Bradbury, “The City” / Bradbury, “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed” / Ellison, “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream”
- View *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*
- Concept of setting
- Invention: Analysis and synthesis
- Consensus exercise: Do the stories break down into different sections or parts? How does setting help to distinguish among these parts? How does it hold them together?

- Individual writing: Analyze one particular section of a story in which the setting deeply affects the characters and/or action. Arrange your writing in the three-part process of analysis: state your point; quote a passage; relate passage to your point, develop and explore
- Peer review: descriptive outlines

Day Five

- Read Heinlein, “All You Zombies—“ / Pohl, “The Tunnel Under the World” / Fowler, “Face Value”
- Concepts of character and identity
- Invention: Thesis, or What it means to have an idea (*Writing Analytically* 17) / tracing impressions back to specific causes
- Arrangement: the two reasons essay
- Consensus exercise: As a group, collect your reactions and responses to one of the stories. Then, try to connect your reactions to specific textual causes. See if you can summarize the major causes and effects in a single statement (thesis).
- Individual writing: the two reasons essay – What do you think the author is trying to say about identity and our sense of selfhood? What formal devices does the author use to *show* this idea at work in the story?
- Individual writing conferences

Day Six

- Read Sturgeon, “A Saucer of Loneliness” / Hamilton, “Devolution” / Tiptree, “The Women Men Don’t See” / Gibson, “The Gernsback Continuum”
- View *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*
- Concept of character and identity (continued)
- Invention: “The Method” – locate repetitions, patterns, binary oppositions
- Arrangement: Evolving thesis statement
- Consensus exercise: Apply “the Method” to one of the stories. Try to summarize your results in a working hypothesis
- Individual writing: Using the three-stage process of analysis, develop your hypothesis by connecting to data (repetitions, patterns, oppositions), and allow your examples to develop or adjust your hypothesis.
- Peer review: Elbow responses

Day Seven

- Read Asimov, “Robot Dreams” / Crowley, “Snow”
- Concept of allusion
- Invention: (Elbow freewriting) “Imagine that everyone on the globe owned this work of art or all infants were repeatedly exposed to it. What would be the effects?”
- Arrangement: Regents Exam critical lens essay
- Consensus exercise: What is the story saying about the relationship between humans and robots/machines/technology? How does the structure of the story connect to this theme?

- Individual writing: Read one of the stories through the “lens” of a quotation.
- Peer review: Elbow responses

Day Eight

- Ellison, “ ‘Repent, Harlequin!’ Said the Ticktockman” / Le Guin, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”
- Concept of ideology
- Invention: (Elbow freewriting) “This work is the only human artifact transported to Mars, the only evidence they have about humans. What guesses or conclusions would they reach about humans on the basis of this work?”
- Arrangement: Paragraphing and transitions / straw-man essay
- Consensus exercise: Choose the story that you think is most unlike the world as you know it and describe in what aspects it fails to describe “the real world.”
- Individual writing: Take one of your peer-group’s consensus exercise results and use it as the straw-man in your own argument. Thus, you will be arguing that their story in fact represents our world more accurately than they think.
- Peer review: Elbow responses

Day Nine

- Read Delaney, “Aye, and Gomorrah” and “About 5,750 Words” / Mieville, “Reports of Certain Events in London”
- View *Solaris*
- Concept of character: hubris
- Invention: (Elbow freewriting) “Imagine this work of art as medicine. What is the disease? What are the symptoms? How does this medicine cure it?”
- Arrangement: Concession essay
- Consensus exercise: Which story do you think shows the bad effects of hubris the most?
- Individual writing: Take one of your peer-group’s consensus exercise results and use it as the counter-argument in your concession essay.
- Peer review: Elbow responses

Day Ten

- Read Ballard, “Terminal Beach” / Russ, “When It Changed”
- Concept of genre, redux: Are these science fiction stories?
- Invention: Thinking problems (*Critical Passages*, 19): Make a list of twenty questions. A classmate will then decide which can be answered with factual responses and which require thinking. Students will then pool their “thinking questions” and use them for the consensus exercise.
- Arrangement: Chiasmus and declarative sentences / cumulative and periodic sentences (*Critical Passages*, 22-31)
- Consensus exercise: (see above)
- Individual writing: based on thinking questions generated by students
- Individual writing conferences

Day Eleven

- Read Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- Five paragraph organization versus “thinking through writing”
- The evolving thesis
- Consensus exercise: As a group, construct a tentative hypothesis that solves some problem presented by the text. Then, test it against supporting and complicating examples. Revise the thesis to account for this evidence. (Rinse and repeat)

Day Twelve

- In class writing: Use the “all purpose organizational scheme” (*Writing Analytically*) to begin to think through writing about Russ, Ballard, Delany, Mieville, or Tarkovsky
- Discuss sample student essay in *Writing Analytically* – how to revise the first draft of a “thinking through writing” essay
- View *Metropolis*, compare with scenes from Giorgio Moroder’s disco version
- Read *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Day Thirteen

- Revision and peer review in the computer room
- Discussion of Peter Elbow’s metaphorical prompts for rhetorical invention
- Discussion of metaphors, truth, and lies in *The Left Hand of Darkness*
- Connecting the essay writer’s use of metaphor with the science fiction novelist’s

Day Fourteen

- Revision, peer review, and final conferences in the computer room
- Symposium for writing classes