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EdPg 167 - Intro to Creative Writing: Prof. Peter Selgin

SYLLABUS / ENG 167: Introduction to Creative Writing (Subject to Change)

ENG 167.4 / Intro to Creative Writing (Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry)
DREAMING ON PAPER
Professor: **Peter Selgin** (with a soft 'g'; "Peter" will do fine; "Your Most Reverent Eminence" and "Grand Exalted Ruler" are also acceptable)
When: **Tues. & Thurs. 2:00 – 3:15;** Where: **Orlando 113**
e-mail: **pselgin@rollins.edu**
Office Location: **Carnegie 137 / Office Phone: 407-646-1931**
Consultation Hours: **3:30 – 4:30 Tues., 8:00 – 9:15 Wed.** (and anytime by appointment)

OFFICIAL COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Writing in a variety of genres including fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. Focus on peer evaluation (oral and written) as well as that of the professor. Models of these genres are studied not as literature, but as writing samples.

MY COURSE DESCRIPTION:

"Art is the lie that tells the truth."—Picasso

The class will introduce you to three major forms of creative writing, with an emphasis on writing fiction, specifically short stories (though those determined to try their hand at a novel are invited to do so, provided they produce a synopsis and first chapter or chapters). The class will be divided into two formats, with class sessions devoted to discussions of readings, writing exercises and lectures on different craft elements alternating with "workshops"—classes devoted to critiquing creative works by your fellow students

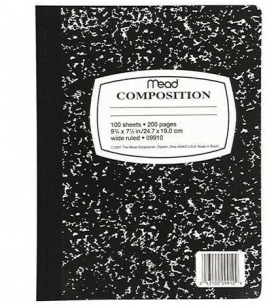
In addition to working at your own projects, you will also be expected to give feedback to others, and so you'll learn to read with an editor's helpful eye. Often it's easier for us to see problems in other people's work than in our own. In time and with luck you'll be able to apply the same objective eye to your own work.

You'll become familiar with the elements of narrative prose (fiction and nonfiction: basically any prose that tells a story): plot, character, setting, exposition, scene and summary.

READING REQUIREMENTS:
Close reading forms an essential part of a fiction writer's training. You'll read not as passive entertainment, but to study and absorb other authors' techniques.

Selgin, Peter, *By Cunning & Craft,* Writers Digest Books, 2006
Additional required texts to made available through Blackboard

Strongly recommended:
—*Ordinary Genius: a Guide for the Poet Within,* by Kim Addonzio
—*A Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry,* by Dorianne Laux
—A good dictionary (I recommend **Merriam-Webster)**
—Strunk & White, **The Elements of Style** (any edition)



WRITING REQUIREMENTS:

"I love being a writer. It's the paperwork I can't stand."
—Peter DeVries

I. ANNOTATIONS
For every assigned reading you are asked to write an annotation of 300 – 500 words. Examples of annotations can be found at the back of this syllabus. All annotations should be printed out and will form part of your **final portfolio.**

II. EXERCISES
Each week I'll try to assign you—in class and/or for homework—a creative exercise in one of the three genres. You may be asked, for instance, to take a scene from a movie and write it as prose: i.e. turn it into a scene in a novel or a story, or to write a poem based on the scene. The exercises should be performed in the spirit of serious play. They will form part of your final portfolio. **You'll be asked to share your exercise results in class.**

You should keep a dedicated notebook for just this class. Please *don't* use a notebook that's used for other classes also. Try to write at least **one page or 300 words a day** in your notebook**.** Though the notebook is strictly for *your* benefit and you need not share what you write in it with anyone, it will also form part of your final portfolio.

III. YOUR CREATIVE WRITING PROJECTS
In addition to exercise assignments, you'll be asked to produce pieces of fiction, poetry and creative nonfiction of your own choosing and on your own initiative. Fiction and nonfiction prose pieces should be between 3 – 6 double-spaced pages (1,000 to 2,500 words); for poems 2 or 3 single-spaced pages holding a single long or several short poems will do. Ideally, you will produce one complete prose work and one complete poem for the class. That said, I'd rather see a thoughtfully written but unfinished poem or story than a finished work that's sloppy or shallow.

ALL submitted work (at whatever stage) should be perfectly proofread and neatly presented, without typos, spelling, or grammatical errors, and submitted on time. If you are presenting work for a workshop discussion, you should bring as many copies as necessary and distribute them to the class one class session BEFORE the class in which the piece is to be discussed.

To this end I strongly urge you to schedule appointments with a **Writing Consultant** through their website, <r-net.rollins.edu/twc>. Questions: 407-646-2308.

IV. REVISION:
"Revise till your fingers bleed!" — Don Newlove

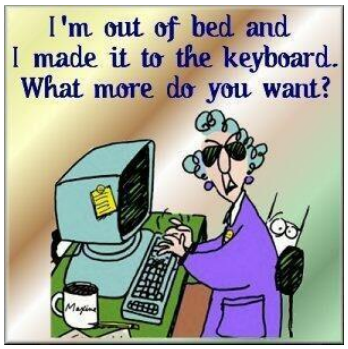
You will have opportunity to review and revise all of your pieces, using both my comments and the comments of your peers. The quality and extent of revisions will factory greatly into your grades. What makes or doesn't make for a good revision?

Good Revision:

1. Re-type FROM SCRATCH, questioning every sentence and word
2. Apply not just the specific suggestions from me or your peers, but extrapolate general principles and apply thoroughly throughout the work
3. Question not just paragraphs as they stand, but the whole structure of the work-in-progress. Pay attention not just to details, but to the big picture.

Poor Revision:

1. Making only specific changes recommended by your peers/teacher
2. Addressing only minor issues like typos and spelling mistakes
3. Reprinting the same document with the words "2nd draft" on the top



V. WORKSHOP CRITIQUES:

"If an ass looks into your work, do not expect a prophet to look out." —Georg Lichtenburg

Students will sign up for critique slots. Each student will have at least two (and hopefully three, depending on class size) workshop sessions spread out as far apart as possible through the term. **Workshop pieces must be copied and handed out to classmates AT THE END OF THE CLASS BEFORE they are to be discussed.**

VI. WRITTEN RESPONSES TO WORKSHOP MATERIAL:

Critique comments on your peers' works-in-progress should be prepared ahead of time, including notes on manuscript pages and **written responses**. These written critiques should be 250 – 500 words long (one single-spaced page). They should include at the top of the page the title and the author whose work is work under discussion, and also your name. At the end of the workshop session a printout of your comments should be given to the student along with his or her marked-up manuscript. You should also keep a copy of ALL of your written critiques either in a separate computer or file folder OR in a blog (see below).

The spirit of criticism should be positive. That doesn't mean we can't suggest improvements, but we should be able to point out things that are already working. Also keep in mind that a workshop is a place where feedback is given, so in taking this class you are going to subject your work to criticism, and sometimes feelings will be bruised. The only way to avoid this is to leave your ego parked outside the workshop door. I will provide you with more guidelines on how to give and take criticism.

FORMATTING MANUSCRIPTS:

Fiction and nonfiction submitted for workshops must be formatted as follows:

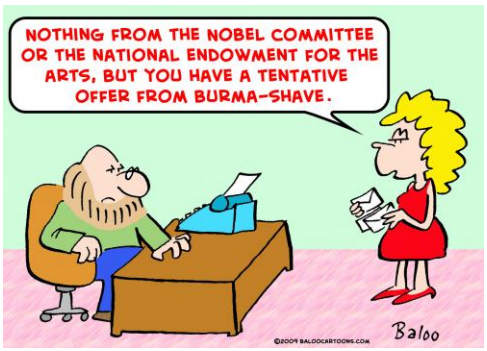
—double spaced
—12 pt. font (**serif** font: Times, Garamond, Baskerville. . .)
—1 – 1.5" margins on both sides
—Numbered pages **(please!)**

—paper-clipped or stapled
SEE ATTACHED SAMPLE AT END OF SYLLABUS

Poems, annotations, and exercises may be single-spaced.

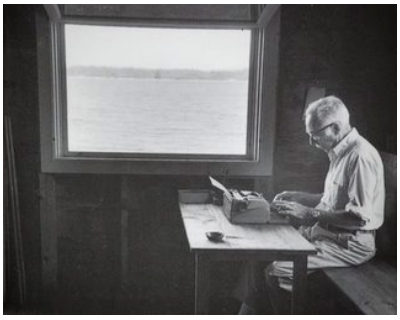
"All good writing is swimming underwater and holding your breath."—F. Scott Fitzgerald

OFFICE HOURS / PRIVATE CONFERENCES
I will be available to meet with you privately for any reason, or just to chat. Don't hesitate to speak with me about anything, especially serious issues. *Don't keep problems to yourself or let them fester*. But it's up to you to schedule a meeting. Each of you should make a point of meeting with me for two 15-30 minute sessions during the term. I will consider those meetings in evaluating your class participation.



"All first drafts are excrement[1]*."*—Hemingway

ATTENDANCE:
Since this is a workshop class your attendance is crucial. There will be no adequate way to make up for missed classes. You're allowed a total of three absences, excused or otherwise. More than that will adversely impact your grade. *Also you are asked to come to class on time; if you arrive late the door may be closed, in which case you will not be admitted and you will be marked absent.*



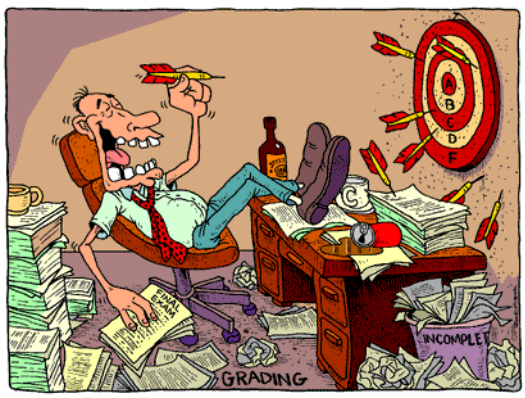
A missed workshop after the allotted three is a lost grade. If for some reason you discover that you won't be able to make a workshop date on which your work is to be *critiqued*, then try to switch with someone else. Otherwise you will lose your critique slot and get an F for that session.

Also, you'll be expected to attend readings offered by the English department's literary festival. See appendix at the end of this syllabus for dates & details.

GRADING POLICY:
First, understand that creative writing isn't easy, in fact it's hard—as hard as physics, so don't expect an "easy" grade. As of now, you are all "adequate" (C) students; that's the baseline we'll be working from. Grading standards will be as follows:

A-, A, A+ (3.6 – 4.0) = Excellent: Demonstrates superior ability in all areas (originality, skill, effort, energy, critical insight, participation in class discussions and activities).

B-, B, B+ (3.0 – 3.5) = Good: Meets all assignment, attendance, and participation re-



[1] He didn't say "excrement."

quirements, shows some originality and genuine enthusiasm.

C-, C, C+ (2.0 – 2.9) = Adequate: Demonstrates adequate grasp of materials, has met attendance requirements and turned in all assignments on time.

D (1.0 – 1.9) = Marginal: Shows some grasp of subject; work is weak, late, and/or incomplete; tepid participation.

F (< 1.5) = Inadequate: Poor attendance, assignments unfulfilled.

GRADE PERCENTAGES: A (Very) Rough Breakdown:

Exercise Assignments: **30%**
Workshop Submissions: **15%**
Annotations: **15%**
Critiques of Student Works: **15%**
Overall Participation: **25%**

These guidelines are rough and only meant to give you some orientation. The best way to be sure of getting the grade you want is to work hard and aim high. Don't expect a superior grade for an *adequate* performance.

THE ACADEMIC HONOR CODE / PLAGIARISM—HONESTY:

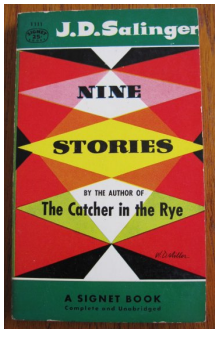
Plagiarism is taking other writers' words as your own without attribution or acknowledgement. Should you find someone else's words irresistible, by all means incorporate them into your own, but give credit where credit is due. Use footnotes and/or quotation marks to distinguish others' words from your own and make it clear that you know the difference. Always attribute other people's words. And be very careful about using quotation marks to make it clear that you are quoting a source. Remember: if you suspect that you may be plagiarizing, you probably are.

The following pledge is a binding commitment by students of Rollins College: "The development of the virtues of Honor and Integrity are integral to a Rollins College education and to membership in the Rollins College community. Therefore, I, a student of Rollins College, pledge to show my commitment to these virtues by abstaining from any lying, cheating, or plagiarism in my academic endeavors and by behaving responsibly, respectfully, and honorably in my social life and in my relationships with others."

In submitting any written work for this course, you are tacitly bound to this pledge Materials submitted electronically are likewise so bound.

ROLLINS DISABILITY POLICY:

Rollins College is committed to equal access and does not discriminate unlawfully against persons with disabilities in its policies, procedures, programs or employment processes. The College recognizes its obligations under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to provide an environment that does not discriminate against persons with disabilities. If you are a person with a disability who will need academic accommodation for this class, please make appropriate arrangements with the Rollins Disability Services Coordinator, located in the Thomas P. Johnson Student Resource Center, (407) 646-2354.



FINAL PORTFOLIOS

At the end of class in lieu of a final exam you will be asked to turn in final portfolios. These will include finished and working drafts of your stories/poems. exercises, annotations, and your notebooks. The portfolios will be collected during the last class. **See last page of schedule for a more detailed breakdown of portfolio requirements.**

In case you're interested, my blog can be found at: **http://dreamingonpaper.blogspot.com/**

<u>Class Schedule:</u> VERY SUBJECT TO CHANGE!! (In fact it will change: bet on it. I include this detailed outline only to give a sense of the sort of schedule we'll work with.)

Week 1—FICTION: CREATING AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

August 23: Video: "So You Want to Write a Novel?" Introductions: Who are you? What do you read? How do you write? What is your process? Discuss your strengths and weaknesses as a writer. Come up with three goals for this class. Review syllabus. Assignment: Thrilling/Boring exercise.

August 25: Some technical terms. Fiction = People. Thelma Dudley exercise.
Exercise: Character Profile/Bio Exercise ("Character A") (Handout)

Week 2—EVOKING CHARACTERS: SCENE vs. SUMMARY, DIALOGUE

August 30: Discuss ways of evoking character (handout). What are advantages of various ways. Scene vs. Summary. Elements of scene. Stereotypes.
Assignment: Read "People" BC&C. Also read and annotate Cheever's "Reunion." Exercise: Evoke a character from appearance alone. Describe in as many details as you can what he/she is wearing—the style, quality and condition of his or her clothes, the style and appearance of his or her hair, distinguishing marks (freckles, moles, tattoos, piercings, scars, etc.), makeup, jewelry, etc.

Sept. 1: Discuss "Reunion" and "My Father." Discuss dialogue (handout).
Exercise: Evoke character from gestures alone. The idea is to give your character a defining gesture that reveals something about his or her personality.

Week 3—MOTIVATION, CONFLICT, PLOT, THEME

Sept. 6: Where do plots come from? Discuss genesis of "El Malecon" (plotting). How themes grows out of plot.
Assignment: Read "Structure & Plot" (BC&C). Outline a plot for a story involving your characters. Read Joyce's "Araby"
Exercise: Evoke a character through setting alone. Describe in as many details as you can the place he or she lives—what kind of objects he or she would have in the bedroom, what kind of order the room would be in, how the room would be decorated, etc. Try to create a place that will give insight into his or her character.

Sept. 8: Discuss plot outlines. Conflict & Resolution. Dialogue exercise. Read and discuss "Hills Like White Elephants." Subtext.
Read Cheever's "Farewell, My Brother." Revise first two pages of stories-in-progress.
Exercise: Write one page of dialogue between two characters where you incorporate telling gestures into the dialogue tags that help build the tension in the scene or reveal the truth about one or more characters. (Handout).

Week 4—POINT-OF-VIEW: FILTERING THE WORLD

Sept. 13 What is point-of-view? Why is it important? Omniscience.
In-class exercise: re-write 2 pages of work-in-progress using different POV strategy. Discuss outcome. How does POV change everything?
Read "Point-of-View" chapter in BC&C.
Exercise: Write one-page from in the third person limited from the point of view of someone you know who is very different from you—with different gender, race, religion, ethnicity, personality, or interests. You must be inside this person's head. What is he or she thinking, feeling, experiencing? What are his or her interests or motivations? How does he or she view the world?

Sept. 15: POV questions. Workshop 2-3 stories-in-progress.

Read Wolff's "Bullet in the Brain"
Exercise: Create a scene where a character will face a life-altering moment. =

Week 5—FLASHBACKS & FRAMING DEVICES

Sept. 20: Discuss "Bullet in the Brain." Difference between flashback and frame. Flashback in Updike's "The Centaur" (handout).
Assignment: Introduce flashback scene into stories-in-progress.
Read Campbell's "The Inventor."
Exercise: Begin a story *in medias res*—in the middle of the action—using *Where were you last night?* as the first line. Try to get the reader hooked on what is happening as you work in backstory in the form of character evidence (bruises from a bar fight), flashback, or memory.

Sept. 22: Workshop 2 – 3 stories in progress.
Read chapter on "Flashback" in BC&C. 2 questions.

Week 6—DESCRIPTION, SETTING, ATMOSPHERE

Sept. 27: What makes for powerful descriptions. Description exercise (in-class). Figurative language in description. Abstract vs. concrete. (Shakespeare) How do metaphors and similes function? Adjectives & adverbs. Role of setting, atmosphere, seasons and weather. Clichés and forced writing.
Read Bowles' "A Distant Episode." Also "Description" chapter in BC&C.
Exercise: TBA

Sept. 29: Discuss Bowles' story. What role does setting play?
Workshop 2 – 3 stories-in-progress.
Assignment: read novel excerpt (TBA). Write a pitch paragraph.

Week 7—NOVELS, FLASH-FICTION, PROSE POETRY

Oct. 4 Discuss genres. How are novels different from stories? Discuss pitch paragraphs. Outlines: how and when to write them.
Assignment: read Miranda July and other flash fictions.
Exercise: Try your hand at a flash fiction / prose poetry piece.

Oct. 6: Read and discuss flash fictions. Workshop 2 – 3 stories-in-progress.
Assignment: Soto, "The Jacket."
Exercise: Close your eyes and picture your room back home. Visualize the room from every angle and dimension. Then make a list of every object in the room that you can think of—on the dresser, the desk, the nightstand, under the bed, in the closet, in the drawers, on the floor, etc. From this list, choose the object that has the most vivid story attached to it and use that to construct a narrative. Perhaps it's the trophy your high school baseball team won after your best friend made a diving catch for the final out. Or maybe it's the scratch on the wall where you got mad at your older brother for hitting on your girlfriend and threw your alarm clock at him.

Week 8—CREATIVE NONFICTION: THE PERSONAL ESSAY

Oct. 11: <u>NO CLASS</u>

Oct. 13: What is "Creative Nonfiction"? What are its origins? Discuss first assignment. In class: sketch of one of your parents in prose. Think of 3 active scenes that evoke his/her character.
Assignment: Read Leonard Michael's "My Father."
Exercise: Write one-page describing an important event from your childhood using the child's first person point of view. Use a child's language and try to see

and think from a child's perspective. Then write one-page describing the same event using an adult's first person point of view. Use an adult's language and try to think about what happened in retrospect—understanding how you felt as a child as well as how you feel now, as an adult. Try to really show the differences in point of view.

Week 9—THEME vs. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Oct. 18: Role of autobiography in creative nonfiction: how it is and isn't "personal."
In-class group exercise: make a list of major events and/or incidents in your life. Extrapolate larger themes and broader implications. Example: minor act of arson = human fascination with fire.
Assignment: Read D.B. Smith's "No Feeling of Falling."
Exercise: Describe in as many details as you can a place you spent a lot of time at in your youth—perhaps a park or a friend's back yard, a video arcade or a neighbor's living room. Try to include enough specific description to create a sense of the place for readers who have never been there.

Oct. 20: Workshop 2-3 essays.
Read Didion's "At the Dam." Also read D.B. Smith's "One Draft."
Exercise: describe a place that has touched you deeply as an adult. Incorporate some objective history/research/facts into your personal account. Try to understand what, exactly, touches you personally about the place, but also to grasp its broader, universal significance.

Week 10—CONFESSION: TURNING THE LENS ON THE SELF

Oct. 25: Vulnerability, fairness, accuracy, precision. How to use our own experiences to create deeper understanding for others.
In-class: list some of your most vulnerable or humiliating moments.
Read Cowser's "Writing From Inside," also Lopate's "Portrait of My Body."
Exercise: Draft or at least outline a short confessional essay. What is the situation? What actions build tension en route to a major or climactic scene? What *is* the climactic scene? What are broader implications?

Oct. 27: Discuss drafts/outlines of confessional essays; also Lopate's essay.
What keeps Lopate's essay from being self-indulgent?
Read Selgin's "Confessions of a Left-Handed Man."
Exercise: Revise essays-in-progress.

Week 11—RESEARCH & ERUDITION: IT'S NOT PERSONAL

Nov. 1: Research in creative nonfiction. Read Eula Biss's "Time & Distance."
Essay (TBA). Continue work on essays-in-progress.

Nov. 3: Workshop 2 – 3 essays-in-progress. Discuss hybrid forms.
Assignment: Read Lydia Davis' "The Fish" and "Three Dreams.
Write a short piece that blurs boundary between fiction & nonfiction.

Week 12—BLURRING BOUNDARIES: POSTMODERN LITERATURE

Nov. 8: Discuss "postmodernism." What is it? Subjectivity vs. objectivity. Genre-bending texts. Read some samples. David Shields. Handout (TBA).
Assignment: Sebald's "The Rings of Saturn." Selgin's "The Swimming Pool."
Exercise: TBA

Nov. 10: Workshop 2–3 nonfiction works-in-progress.

Assignment: Write a short "postmodern" piece in which memories and/or reflections are embedded in a present activity or journey (i.e. as you jog through a neighborhood or sweep a floor).

Week 13—POETRY & PROSE POETRY: VOICE & STYLE

Nov. 15: What is poetry? What qualities distinguish it from prose?
Exercise: Begin a piece with the phrase "In the [choose room: bathroom, kitchen, garage…]," and keep writing until you're stuck, then repeat the phrase "In that —" again and continue until you've drafted a prose poem.

Nov. 17: Share and discuss prose poems. Discuss standard poetic forms.
Exercise: choose a standard poetic form (sonnet, villanelle, sestina, etc.) and write a poem in that form.

Week 14—FREE VERSE

Nov. 22: Read and discuss standard form poems. Discuss free verse.
Exercise: Read the newspaper. Pick one story from the paper, and write a poem in which you take on the persona of someone involved in the story. Write a narrative poem in which you tell the story from that person's point of view.

Nov. 24: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving break)

Week 15—CREATIVE WRITING PORTFOLIOS DUE

Nov. 29: First Readings.
Discuss the business of writing / writing life.

Dec. 1: Last class. Collect portfolios. Final Readings.

PORTFOLIOS DUE THURS. DEC. 1, LAST DAY OF CLASS

FINAL PORTFOLIOS:
Should be neatly organized and presented. What to include:

1. Self-Assessment (40% of portfolio grade):

Assess your growth as a writer in TWO TO THREE pages (It can be longer if you need it to be). Use examples from your stories, my workshop comments, your peers' comments, the stories we have read, BC&C, class discussions and our story conferences to support your analysis. You'll want to cover the following:

a. Talk about your writing process. How did your work evolve? What were your strength and weaknesses during this semester? How did you address them

b. What risks did you take? Talk about specific moments where the risks you took brought your success and/or failure.

c. Talk about discoveries in your work, in yourself as a writer. How did you employ our readings into your writing? Use specific examples from at least three books to describe how you made links between the craft of fiction and your writing progress.

The importance of this section is to determine your growth as a writer, your efforts to grow as well as your actual success.

2. All drafts and revisions of stories, essays, poems.

3. Copies of written comments on other people's works (where assigned).

4. All annotations of reading assignments (stories, essays, poems)

5. Your dedicated notebook.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR CRITIQUING FICTION/CREATIVE NONFICTION:

Characters

- Are the characters interesting/dimensional?
- Are the characters evoked through action/dialogue/description?
- Does the protagonist have a strong desire?
- Does the protagonist grow or change?

Plot/Structure

- Is there enough conflict?
- Does something "happen"?
- Does the story move forward? Does the tension increase?
- Are any scenes missing or unnecessary?
- Information provided efficiently?

Point of View

- Is there a consistent POV strategy?
- Are we sufficiently embedded in the chosen POV?

Description

- Are descriptions concrete and specific?
- Is there too much/little description?
- Are adjectives and adverbs overused?
- Are figurative elements (metaphor, simile, etc.) well used?
- Does the author avoid clichés?

Dialogue

- Does dialogue entertain?
- Is it speakable?
- Are character voices distinguishable?
- Is there subtext?
- Are attributions (he said, she scolded, etc.) obtrusive?

Setting

- Is the story sufficiently grounded in time and place?
- Does the setting enhance the mood of the story?

Pacing

- Is there a good balance between scene and summary?
- Are flashbacks excessive or unnecessary?

Voice

- Is the narrator's voice strong and consistent?
- Is the voice honest and authentic, or mannered and pretentious?

Theme

- Does there seem to be an underlying theme to the story?
- Is the theme too heavy handed?

Sample Annotations:

 # 1: The Yellow Wallpaper (random note style annotation)

Title. Why "yellow" wallpaper? Associations of yellow:
Positive: sunshine, daylight, yellow flowers, buttercups, butter
Negative: fear, cowardice, sickness (jaundice, nausea), urine, vomit

Dualities: health vs. illness, madness vs. sanity, reason vs. superstition (John scoffs at notion of "haunted" house, yet is himself superstitious re: superstition, instinct vs. reason, intuition vs. logic (consider other dualities)

The Nursery: a room for helpless infants, narrator "infantilized" by her husband/society (note: husband and society are equivalent; the "doctor" is civilization; the "patient" is a woman's wild, intuitive, suppressed nature. It must be "cured". This is a feminist take. Hard not to view the story in a feminist light, though one could also equate "female" with artistic and creative, and argue that the female narrator here is not a symbol for her gender but a stand-in for all under-nourished and oppressed creative souls for the imagination, or for the creative or "visionary" soul that finds itself caught in the trappings (wallpaper) of society, bound by its rules which strangle.

Air & Sunshine as "cure." These are what nourish plant life, not of the human soul. The "nursery" can also be seen as a botanical nursery, with the narrator reduced to a sort of sick plant, chained to her bed of soil and told to flourish under the artificial sunlight of the "yellow" wallpaper--with its sickly, sulfurous glow.

Barred Windows: need no interpretation.

The Wallpaper: "One of those sprawling, flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin." A wonderful description. In Edwardian times, when van Gogh's canvasses were still unappreciated, abstract art was unheard of: the nonrepresentational and unpredictable patterns of the wallpaper are viewed as abhorrent, absurd, disturbing: in an ironic way, in tearing the wallpaper down she revolts against the very freedom she covets. The wallpaper is free; its patterns are undisciplined, wild, they "move." She wants the pattern to freeze into its proper, predictable place; in short she feels about the wallpaper more or less as John, her physician husband, feels about her. She finds the wallpaper "sick," and wants to "cure" it, even if it means destroying the wallpaper: killing it.

Later: she wants to release "the woman" trapped in the wallpaper. But the wallpaper is her own fiery imagination. It is animated by her psyche. She wants to free herself from her own psyche. Here, too, there is an internal conflict, a contradiction. Is she freeing the woman (herself) from the patterns of society, the tyranny of a male-dominated civilization, or from the tyranny of her own subjective thoughts? From the "prison bars" of depression, hysteria, runaway "fancy"?

#2: A Rose for Emily (essay style annotation)

She's ugly, old, fat, a spinster, she smells. Her house is an eyesore among eyesores. She doesn't pay taxes. No pillar of society. Noblesse oblige? More like the neighbor from hell. A benign, female Norman Bates.

And yet we are to admire her, and do, as only characters in literature can be admired. And this is only as it should be, for we read literature to understand those whom real life prevents us from understanding, whom we detest in real life. Nearly all the great characters in literature would make poor neighbors and even poorer lovers, spouses, parents. Of the three Brothers Karamazov, which would you like to have father your children? Imagine Scarlet O'Hara as your mother, or your sister. With the possible exception of *To Kill a Mockingbird's* Atticus Fink (especially as played by Gregory Peck in the movie), literature provides us with very few characters that we would like, so to speak, to take home to our mothers.

This is as it should be because literature exists to open our minds, to have us get to know Holden Caulfield or Ahab well enough so that we might still shutter at the thought of having them as kid brother or the captain of a ship we've stowed away on, but we may see deeper into their neurosis and madness to some everlasting humanity, and maybe even find it in our hearts to understand—if not sympathize; if not empathize.

Miss Emily is a monster. But so was Frankenstein, and we sympathize with Frankenstein. Theoretically, great fiction should be capable of making us sympathize with the devil, whether the devil's name is Mersault or Hitler. To read of strictly loveable characters may be comforting, but it's not edifying or challenging, and such characters always run the risk of sentiment, for real people are both more and less than loveable. Atticus Fink is the perfect father, and a fine lawyer, but let's be honest: he's also a bit of a bore.

With Miss Emily the situation is different. If while living she had any redeeming features, she hid them as well as she hid her dead husband, with his tell-tale stench. Death seems to be the one and only thing that redeems her, but only by satisfying the community's scavenger appetite for raw gossip and turning her eyesore of a house into a carrion feast. Now that the doors have been flung open to reveal the skeleton in her bedroom, the neighbors can relax and take pity. Accusations and demands for tax payments turn to expressions of remorse and pity. "Wasn't she a most peculiar woman?" Compared to those vultures that feed on it, the rotting corpse of even the lowliest creature has dignity. We prize the dead mule only as it is fed upon by the evil jackals.

And something in us identifies, doesn't it, with the misfit; her failure to live properly gets to us, doesn't it? We root for her to succeed somehow in spite of her failure, to get one over on the winner all around her, to have, if not the upper hand, the last word. For Emily, the final word is that skeleton in her bed, reaching out to her eternally: a poisoned embrace. In fiction, we admire murderers, too.