SYLLABUS (revised 1/29/2016)

The Path of the Storyteller: Writing Children’s Fiction
Spring 2016
Course: WRTNG-UG 1360
Fridays, 12:30 PM – 3:15 PM
Location: Room C-14, 25 West 4th St.
Credits: 4.0

Instructor: Maryrose Wood
Maryrose.Wood@nyu.edu
Office hours: Fridays, 11:00 – 12:00, Room 431, 1 Washington Place

COURSE DESCRIPTION
From Charlotte’s Web to the Harry Potter series, enduring works of children’s fiction embody the twin virtues that all great novels share: a great story, beautifully told. Through craft exercises, reading and discussion, writing prompts and workshopping and revision of the students’ own work in progress, this class offers writers of fiction for young readers (ages 8 through early adolescence) a foundation in the principles of storytelling and the tools of the writer’s craft.

We’ll explore models of narrative structure and the concept of the “hero’s journey” as developed by mythologist Joseph Campbell and reframed as tools for writers by Christopher Vogler and others, and learn what gives a story shape, meaning and timeless relevance. Through writing exercises and close reading of our assigned texts, we’ll examine character, conflict, point of view, and other elements of fiction. We’ll improve the quality of our prose by learning to recognize and fix common errors and revise our drafts into polished, finished works.

GOALS
• Learn how to recognize the “architecture” of story, as both readers and writers, and explore how to put these principles to use in our own work.
• Improve the quality of our writing through craft exercises, critique and revision.
• Explore notable works of children’s fiction in a range of genres, and gain an understanding of the depth, breadth and history of children’s literature.

CLASS FORMAT & EXPECTATIONS
We meet once a week for 2 hrs, 45 minutes. We’ll take a short break midway through each class.

“Outside of a dog, a book is a man’s best friend. Inside of a dog, it’s too dark to read.” —Groucho Marx

Outside of class: You will be reading, writing responses to the reading and to assigned prompts, and collaborating on a small group presentation to share with the class. You will also be drafting and revising your own original fiction targeted to the young independent reader (roughly aged 8 – 12).

Inside of class: You will be sharing your ideas and your work, listening (to me and to each
other), reading, watching occasional bits of relevant media, writing, and critiquing the work of your classmates constructively and respectfully. Be ready to participate fully in every class.

There’s no crying in baseball. Writing is a deeply personal endeavor, and sharing your work can feel uncomfortable at first. This will be a supportive room, but it’s important to be open to critique and take your peers’ comments as valuable information, even when you might not agree. The ability to hear comments with an open mind and the courage to revise your drafts fearlessly are both essential to your growth as a writer.

About the presentations...
You’ll work in small groups to create an interdisciplinary presentation for the class. The topic will be relevant to our work together and will also engage your own intellectual and creative interests. All presentation topics must be approved by me. I will conference with each team to talk through your ideas.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Titles are listed in the order we’ll read them.
- Christopher Vogler, *The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers, 3rd Edition*
- J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*
- E. B. White, *Charlotte’s Web*
- Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*
- Louis Sachar, *Holes*
- Christopher Paul Curtis, *Bud, Not Buddy*
- Kate DiCamillo, *The Tale of Desperaux*
- Thanhha Lai, *Inside Out and Back Again*
- R. J. Palacio, *Wonder*

All books are available at the NYU Bookstore (note that the store returns unpurchased textbooks in early March). You can also try Books of Wonder, a great independent children’s bookstore, at 18 W. 18th Street.

You’ll also need: Internet access and your frequently checked NYU email address for class emails, the ability to type your assignments in correct manuscript format (see below), print hard copies of documents when needed, and submit assignments to me via email. We will use NYU Classes as a site for sharing essential information.

Correct manuscript format means: Typed, double-spaced, 1 inch margins all around, 12 pt courier font or equivalent, your last name/TITLE/page number in the header of every page, upper right corner. Submit to me via email as .doc or .docx files only, please! I will be using Microsoft Word’s comment feature to offer my response to your work, so you need to be able to read those comments.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in
accordance with the Student Discipline Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin bulletin or Gallatin website for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

**Academic integrity policy:**
http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html

**Student discipline rules:**
http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/studentdisciplinerules0.html

One more very important thing about academic integrity...
I expect that your work not only be original, but written for this class, during this semester. The portfolio you turn in at the end of the semester can only include work that has been written, workshopped and revised based on the feedback you have received in class. Some of you may have works in progress or finished pieces you would like to hear workshopped. This class is not the place for that. Nor can I give you a critique on work not written specifically for the class.

**ATTENDANCE & GRADING**
In-class discussions and exercises, shared writing and peer critique are central to our work together. Your engaged, punctual presence in every class is essential. One absence may be excused at my discretion for medical or other urgent reason. Second and subsequent absences will each deduct 10 pts off your total grade. Excessive absences or lateness will significantly lower your grade for the course, and may result in a failing grade.

If a serious illness or emergency comes up that means you must be absent, please contact me before the class you have to miss. All assignments (including weekly response papers) are due even if you are absent.

I will determine your grade as follows:
• 20 pts: Class participation. Your engaged participation in class is expected & required.
• 20 pts: Midterm project: a draft of roughly 2000 words (about 8 manuscript pages) of original fiction, **plus the same work revised** based on workshop comments and resubmitted. This can be a complete short story or a portion of a longer work.
• 10 pts: Your group presentation.
• 25 pts: Assigned writing prompts & exercises (this includes in-class writing) & response papers
• 25 pts: Your final portfolio, which will include your revised and polished 4000 words (about 16 manuscript pages) of original fiction and a query letter for this work. This can be a continuation of the midterm project, or a different work.

**OFFICE HOURS & CONTACT INFORMATION**
Fridays from 11:00 – 12:00, Room 431, 1 Washington Place
If you have questions or would like to discuss a class or writing-related issue, please see me during office hours. It’s best to contact me ahead of time to let me know that you’re coming, and
what your topic of concern is.

My mailbox is on the 4th floor of 1 Washington Place. Items or messages left in the mailbox will not get to me promptly, as I’m only on campus on Fridays. To contact me, email is best: Maryrose.Wood@nyu.edu

CLASS OUTLINE

A class-by-class outline of the semester follows on pages 5 through 9 of this syllabus (the file called SYLLABUS, Part 2). This will be subject to change based on the needs of the class. In general terms, the semester will proceed as follows:

During weeks 1 – 4, we will dig deeply into the question of story, using the concept of the hero’s journey as our structural map. We will work through Christopher Vogler’s book to learn about the stages of this journey and the character archetypes that appear in the realm of myth, and which continue to offer a foundation for enduring stories. We’ll read Rudyard Kipling’s *Rikki Tikki Tavi* and Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* as our “mentor texts,” since they are both classic examples of the hero’s journey in children’s literature.

In-class writing prompts will allow us to begin our exploration of writing craft topics, as well as help generate ideas for your own midterm and portfolio projects.

Written responses to your assigned reading will be collected weekly throughout the semester. Sometimes I’ll give you a prompt to guide your response.

During weeks 5 – 7, we’ll broaden our focus from the story to the telling: exactly how is a story “beautifully told?” We’ll develop high standards for good writing and begin to put craft skills into practice by drafting an original work of fiction as a midterm project.

During weeks 8 – 14, the focus is on your original writing. We’ll continue to read and respond to one notable work of children’s fiction each week and use it as a springboard to explore writing craft topics. However, most of each class session will be devoted to workshopping your works in progress. We will learn to give and receive useful critique, and learn principles of revision. (A final draft of your workshopped & revised midterm project must be turned in to get a grade for that project.)

During weeks 9 – 13, we will also hear your group presentations: one presentation per class.

During the 14th week (our last class), your final portfolios will be due. We’ll discuss our last assigned book, reflect on our growth as writers and share strategies on how to keep writing and improving. We’ll also enjoy a visit from an industry professional (an editor, agent or author, TBD). A yummy lunch will be served! ☺
• PROPOSED WEEKLY SCHEDULE (as of 1/29/2016)

Just like writing: we start the semester with an outline, but we may veer off in unexpected directions depending on the needs of the class. If you have any questions about what’s coming up next, or which reading or writing assignments are due next, check the NYU Classes site or send me an email at Maryrose.Wood@nyu.edu.

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<tr>
<th>Week 1 (1/29): A great story, beautifully told.</th>
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| • Mindful writing: self-care for the creative spirit  
  • Writing prompt: who are we? Interviews & introductions.  
  • Introduction to the themes of this class: What is a great story?  
  • Review syllabus.  
    -- break--  
  • Introduction to the hero’s journey as a model for storytellers.  

For next week:
- Read the entire syllabus carefully and bring in any questions you have.
- Purchase your books according to book list.
- Read pp xiii – 38 in The Writer’s Journey, (preface, chapter 1, and Heroes section)
- Read “Rikki-tikki-tavi” (the story is posted on our class site, in the Resources folder).
- Bring a printed copy to class next week.
- Write one-page response in response to this prompt:
  Think of some time in your own life prior to the age of 15 as a hero’s journey. What was your call to adventure? Did you accept or refuse the call? Did you have a mentor who helped you decide to cross the threshold to adventure? If not, how did you decide? Email me your response before 11 AM next Friday, and bring a copy with you to share.

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<th>Week 2 (2/5): The hero’s journey in action (AKA mongoose vs. snake smackdown)</th>
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| • Discussion: what’s your reaction to the Vogler readings on stages of the journey? What are the strengths and limitations of the hero’s journey as a model for story?  
  • Sharing our call to adventure stories.  
    -- break--  
  • Introduction to Rudyard Kipling  
  • In-class discussion and structural analysis: “Rikki-tikki-tavi” by Rudyard Kipling (bring a copy that you can write on.) |

For next week:
- Read pp 39 – 80 in “The Writer’s Journey” (character archetypes)
- The “Hero Plus One” transformation story: Write a short-short story (600 words max, strictly enforced!) in which your hero encounters one or more of the archetypes. The last line of the story must be: “And nothing was ever the same again after that.” Your target reader is a smart ten year old (i.e., a young person able to read The Hobbit). Email me your response before 11 AM next Friday, and bring a copy with you to share in class.
Week 3 (2/12) Character archetypes

- Conclude analysis of “Rikki-tikki-tavi.”
- Discussion of character archetypes: What archetypes do you recognize in life? In fiction? What makes a great fictional character great? The importance of “cutting the cord” between author & characters.
- Sharing our “Hero Plus One” stories.
  -- break --
- Craft exploration/in class writing: voice

For next week:
- Read Vogler pp 83-141 (the first six stages of the journey)
- Read: The Hobbit, chapters I – VII. (Pace yourselves: next week you will be asked to finish the book, so you might want to read ahead)
- Write: The Quick First Act Story: Using Vogler’s First Act stages (1-5) as a guide, write the opening to a story suitable for the 8 – 12 year old reader. Keep your first act to 600 words for now, but hit all the stages. (Strictly enforced! You might expand this material later. And YES you may use it as the foundation for your midterm project!)
Bring FIVE COPIES to class next week, so we can workshop in three groups.

Week 4 (2/19) A trip to Middle Earth...

- Introduction to The Hobbit, by J. R. R. Tolkien
- Discussion: The Hobbit as an example of the hero’s journey and character archetypes in action.
- Craft exploration: scene vs. summary/passage of time
  -- break --
- Introduction to the workshop process.
- Workshop Quick First Act Stories (in groups).

For next week:
- Read Vogler, pp 143 – 228 (the final six stages of the journey)
- Finish reading The Hobbit. Write a two-page response to this prompt: choose one scene from the third act of The Hobbit and discuss how it functions as a stage of the hero’s journey. Note what character archetypes appear in the scene and what role they play in furthering the tale.
- Brainstorming exercise: The 12 stage journey.

Week 5 (2/26) And back again....

- Discussion & craft exploration (focus on 2nd and 3rd acts): The Hobbit
- Reflecting on the hero’s journey as a tool for story design.
  -- break --
- Craft exploration/in class writing: filtering/point of view
• How to pitch (AKA “The 3 minute Hobbit”)

**For next week:**
- Read *Charlotte’s Web*. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Begin writing your midterm project. Be prepared to “pitch” your story to the class next week.

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<th>Week 6 (3/4) The Campfire Test</th>
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<td>• The Campfire Test: be ready to “pitch” your midterm project idea to the class for feedback. You’ll have three minutes to regale your fellow campers with the thrilling main throughline of your story: the goal is to keep them on the edge of their seats!</td>
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<tr>
<td>- break –</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion: <em>Charlotte’s Web</em></td>
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**For our next class:**
- Read *A Wrinkle in Time*. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Continue working on your midterm project; 1st draft is due next week.
- Think about presentation topics. Next week we will form groups.

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<th>Week 7 (3/11) Genre: Speculative fiction</th>
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<td>• MIDTERM PROJECT DUE TODAY. This is a first draft of a piece of original fiction (a short story or portion of a longer work). Aim for 2000 words. It will be read as an early draft, not as a finished piece. You’ll get comments but not a grade. After spring break these drafts will be workshopped and revised. That means you must substantially revise and resubmit this draft after it’s been workshopped in order to get any credit for the midterm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discussion: <em>A Wrinkle in Time</em></td>
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<td>-- break –</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Craft exploration/in class writing: narrative distance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have brainstorming session for presentation topics, form presentation groups.</td>
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**For Wednesday, March 23:**
- Working with your group, come up with a topic and preliminary outline for your presentation. Email it to me for approval by **Wednesday, March 23rd** so I can approve it in time for you to get to work. One email per group, please. Include the names of everyone in your group, a brief summary of your topic (one paragraph is fine), possible research sources, any special tech needs for your presentation. If appropriate, specify what kind interactive component or activity you can include to engage the class. The entire presentation should be no more than 20 minutes. Be ready for a 10 minute Q&A afterward.

**For next class (March 25th):**
- Read *Holes*. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class).
- Bring a copy of your midterm piece to class next week. We’ll use them for an in-class revision exercise.
Week 8 (3/25) Speculative/realistic fiction, past/present narratives (flashback)

- Discussion & craft exploration: *Holes*
- Craft exploration/in class writing: fictional dream/showing vs. telling/use of storytelling detail
- Introduction to the properties of good writing: concision, vigor, avoidance of cliché. John Gardner’s common errors.
- Approaches to revision.
  -- break --
- In-class craft exercise: fixing common errors
- In preparation for next week: we’ll explore how to give & receive constructive critique, and how to distribute drafts for workshop.

For next week:
- Read *Bud, Not Buddy*. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Based on my comments, begin to revise your midterm project for workshop.
- Read, comment on & be ready to discuss workshop pieces.

Week 9 (4/1) Historical fiction, first person narration

- **Presentation #1**
- Discussion & craft exploration: *Bud, Not Buddy*
  -- break --
- Writer’s workshop: presentation & critique of your midterm projects. (You have one week from your workshop to revise and turn in for a grade.)

For next week:
- Read *The Tale of Desperaux*. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Begin drafting your portfolio piece. Revise your midterm piece, if already workshopped. Continue work on your presentation (groups 2, 3, 4 & 5).
- Read, comment on & be ready to discuss workshop pieces.

Week 10 (4/8) The modern fairytale, interwoven narratives

- Discussion & craft exploration: *The Tale of Desperaux*
- **Presentation #2**
-- break --
- Writer’s workshop: presentation & critique of your midterm projects. (You have one week from your workshop to revise and turn in for a grade.)

For next class (April 24th):
- Read The Graveyard Book. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Continue work on your portfolio piece and presentation (groups 3, 4 & 5). Revise and submit your midterm project based on workshop comments.
- Read, comment on & be ready to discuss workshop pieces.

*** CANCELLED CLASS: No class April 15th. (This class will be made up on May 13th) ***

Week 11 (4/22) Fantasy and reinvention

  • Presentation #3
    -- break --
  • Writer’s workshop: presentation & critique of student’s work (portfolio pieces)

For next week:
- read Inside Out and Back Again. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Continue work on your portfolio piece & presentation (groups 4 & 5).
- Read, comment on & be ready to discuss workshop pieces.

Week 12 (4/29) Historical fictionalized memoir / novel in verse

• Discussion and craft exploration: Inside Out and Back Again, by Thanhha Lai
  • Presentation #4
    -- break --
  - Writer’s workshop: presentation & critique of student work (portfolio pieces)

For next week:
- read Wonder, by R. J. Palacio. Write a one-page response. (A prompt may be given in class.)
- Continue work on your portfolio piece & presentation (group 5).
- Read, comment on & be ready to discuss workshop pieces.

Week 13 (5/6) Contemporary realism, multiple narrators

• Discussion and craft exploration: Wonder, by R. J. Palacio
  • Presentation #5
    • How to write a query letter.
    -- break --
• Writer’s workshop: presentation & critique of student’s work

For next week:
- Finish work on your final portfolios. I will accept them anytime this week, but no later than 11 AM on the day of our final class (5/13).
- Research and prepare questions for our special guest! (Note that I may assign a bit of final reading to familiarize you with the work of our SG)
- Do reading as assigned (TBD)

(Note that our next & final class is during finals week! It will be a welcome respite, I promise.)

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<th>Week 14 (5/13) Luncheon and special publishing industry guest</th>
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<td>• Lunch and final reflections: How do we continue to grow as writers?</td>
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<td>• Special Guest: An author, agent, or editor TBD</td>
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FINAL PORTFOLIOS ARE DUE TODAY BY 11 AM.
No late portfolios will be accepted.
Please submit to me via email:
• The revised and polished work of fiction (approximately 2000 words) that you have been working on in class. This can be either a complete story or an excerpt from a longer work in progress.
• a query letter for this project.

Your grades will be posted online by May 20th. I’ll return your final work with my comments to your drop boxes on the class site. Have a great summer!

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