

# FAITH AND BELIEF IN FICTION

English 104: Introduction to Literature  
CRN: 12069, Fall 2015, Lillis 185, Tues/Thurs 8:30-9:50AM  
Course website: <http://blogs.uoregon.edu/faithfiction/>

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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 10AM-12PM and by appointment

## Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the study of literature through the lens of faith and belief in fiction. In this course, we will examine ways that different texts grapple with some of the knottiest and deepest questions of life:

- How do the stories we tell affect what we believe?
- How do our beliefs shape the stories of our lives?
- To what extent are different faith stances compatible?
- Why do people change what they believe?
- How can we be ethical, promote justice, and live rightly?
- What happens when we die? Is there a higher power?
- What is the purpose to our lives? What can give us hope?

Throughout the term, we will be investigating how fictional texts can suggest ways for thinking about faith and belief. To pursue such an investigation, we will analyze the specific formal and stylistic conventions of fictional literary and cultural texts. Specifically, we will read a range of short stories and novels as well as examples of other forms such as graphic novel, film, podcast, and Biblical narrative. While learning about the interrelated skills of reading, writing, and interpretation, we will explore and reflect on the role of stories in belief and the role beliefs play in stories. You will be asked to read carefully, to share your interpretations in discussion, to write often, and consequently to formulate your own independent arguments in response to the fiction that we read together. Overall then, this course focuses on developing the necessary tools and skills for thinking, writing, and speaking critically *about* both literature *and* faith and belief as well as about the rest of life and the world *through* the lens of faith and belief in fiction.

**\*\*Note:** This course satisfies credits toward the Arts & Letters category general education requirement. However, these credits do not count toward the English major.

## Learning Outcomes

This course is designed to help you learn key concepts and skills in literary studies so that you can engage with concepts of faith and belief in fiction in meaningful, transformative ways. If you invest yourself fully, you should finish the course being able to:

- Read, summarize, and analyze complex fictional texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their literary features—both formal and stylistic;
- Identify how literary and cultural texts complement or challenge understandings of faith and belief;
- Reflect on, critically analyze, and develop your own understandings and feelings of faith and belief;
- Employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce persuasive and imaginative arguments about literature, culture, faith and belief;
- Enjoy reading, appreciate literature, and in doing so learn to love a little more generously and make the world a slightly lovelier place.

## Required Texts & Materials

The following texts and materials are required for this course. All other readings listed on the schedule will be posted on our course site.

-Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2001.

-Thompson, Craig. *Blankets*. Marietta: Top Shelf, 2003.

-A lined notebook dedicated to use as a reading journal

-Access to a good collegiate-level dictionary. I highly recommend getting a printed copy of a dictionary such as the *American Heritage*. I also recommend use of the *Oxford English Dictionary* <[www.oed.com.libproxxy.uoregon.edu](http://www.oed.com.libproxxy.uoregon.edu)>.

## Required Assignments & Grading Percentages

I will distribute more detailed assignment guidelines closer to the due dates. Please contact me at any time if you would like to know your current grade.

Engagement	10 %
Reading journal	12 %
Course blog	22 %
Reading quizzes	12 %
Formal writing assignments	
Story Kit	6 %
Close Reading	10 %
Final project	28 %

### Grading Scale (%)

93+	A
90-92.99	A-
87-89.99	B+
83-86.99	B
80-82.99	B-
77-79.99	C+
73-76.99	C
70-72.99	C-
67-69.99	D+
63-66.99	D
60-62.99	D
Below 60	F

*Engagement 10%*: Being engaged in this course is predicated on consistent attendance and timeliness, and coming to class having closely read and considered the assigned material. But more than this, “engagement” entails frequently contributing your ideas and your voice to class discussions, both in small and large groups. I recognize that it is often difficult to speak up in a classroom setting; we all sometimes get nervous, become unsure of ourselves, question if our ideas are valuable or worthy of being said. These feelings are understandable, and because of them, participation is something that takes a great deal of practice.

Grade guide: A=voluntarily asking questions, engaging with ideas of fellow classmates, and offering responses to the readings that show insight and appreciation; B=voluntarily contributing to class discussion and able to respond thoughtfully to questions about readings; C=contributing only when called upon in class discussion; D=present with books/readings and basically attentive; F=present but unprepared, without book/readings; subtracted points=distracting or disruptive behavior.

There are other ways to engage and participate. Be an active participant on the course blog by commenting or posting more than the required amount. Stop by office hours or set up additional appointments with me to ask questions or to share your ideas. All of these are forms of engagement; however, nothing can substitute for in-class participation.

*Reading journal 12%*: Keeping a reading journal will provide you an opportunity to write regularly and to practice the art of critical, close, and slow reading. You will use your journal as a space to keep track of your responses to the course readings as well as your evolving thoughts and feelings about faith and belief. In addition to occasional in-class entries, which I will assign on an as-needed basis, you will write at least one entry outside of class for every day we discuss specific readings in class, at

least 300 words (a full page) per entry. This means you should make two entries per week for most of the term, for a total of 16 entries. I will sometimes ask that you respond to specific prompts or questions in your journal entries. Throughout the term, I will collect your journals periodically and unannounced ahead of time. Thus, you need to bring your journal with you to every class session.

*Course blog 22%:* Throughout the term, you will contribute posts to our course blog website (five significant posts, about 500 words each, over the course of the term), as well as respond to your classmates' posts with comments. The course blog will be a place for us to test out ideas, make arguments, engage in discussion with each other outside of class, and share texts and materials not included on the course syllabus. Course blog site: <http://blogs.uoregon.edu/faithfiction/>

*Reading quizzes 12%:* Over the course of the term you will take a number of quizzes based on important ideas and details from the assigned readings and class discussions. Quizzes are a way for you to practice the skills of literary analysis (and prepare for the final exam and essay assignments) and a means for me to check your comprehension. Quizzes usually will be at the beginning of class and cannot be made up if you are absent. I will drop your lowest quiz grade at the end of the term.

*Formal writing assignments 44%:* Three primary formal writing assignments, two short (Story Kit, Close Reading) and one longer (Final Project) will be assigned throughout the term, as well as a few other small assignments, such as the Introductory Assignment. These assignments will involve close reading analysis, interpretation, and making arguments about course texts. All formal work must be completed to pass this class.

Final project: For this final formal writing assignment, you will produce or propose a work of fiction engaging issues of faith and belief that draws on some of the literary, narrative, and fictional strategies employed by the texts that we have studied throughout the term. You will then write a close-reading interpretation of your own creative work, analyzing its formal, stylistic, and thematic features and explaining how it relates to our course texts. Taken together, the two written parts of this assignment together will be a paper of approximately 8-10 pages.

## **Course Policies**

### **Classroom Environment**

In this class, we all serve as teachers to one another. If you aren't with us, our collective potential diminishes. Therefore, electronic distractions are not permitted in the classroom. Please keep yourself accountable. In a small, discussion-based class, cell phones and other handheld electronic devices are disruptive and must be turned off and put away before the start of class. You may use a laptop or tablet in order to view course readings in class, but for any other purposes, please ask me for permission beforehand. It's easy to tell when you're paying more attention to your device than the class. Using electronic devices inappropriately in class may result in your being counted absent for the day. You're paying for the class, so be here; take advantage of our time together to learn something. Please be respectful!

### **Communication**

An important goal of this course is learning to communicate more effectively, so it is essential that we strive to communicate well inside and outside of the classroom. Please be respectful at all times. I will try to answer emails within one or two days, but I do not check email much, if at all, on weekends, especially on Sunday. You are always welcome to come to my office hours or set up an appointment with me. If you have a question, please don't hesitate to contact me about it. I strongly encourage you to communicate with me so that I can be in a position to understand your goals, questions, frustrations,

and successes. If you are feeling particularly unsure of your work, if you ever find my comments on your assignments confusing or inconsistent, if you are having difficulties that affect your work, please come speak with me. If you think you may have trouble accessing the course blog throughout the term, please tell me as soon as possible. Also, I will be corresponding with the class frequently via email. Please be sure to check your UO email accounts regularly.

### **Attendance**

Your regular attendance is vital to succeeding in this course, so attendance is required. You are allowed *one* free absence during the term. If you have a good reason for being absent, let me know, and I may excuse that absence. (I may ask for documentation. If you have a doctor's note or documentation of why you are absent, it's a good idea to show me.) Each additional absence will lower your course letter grade by 1/3. For example, two unexcused absences will reduce a B to a B-. Six absences will constitute failure of the course. If you know you will miss a large amount of class, let me know as soon as possible. Exceptions may be made in extenuating circumstances, but only on the condition that you discuss such circumstances with me individually and well in advance. You are responsible for anything you miss if you are not in class. In-class work cannot be made up. Please notify me ahead of time if you must miss class, will be late, or leave class early. Excessive tardiness may be counted as absence.

Note: I have noticed that many students skip class when they have not had time to finish the reading or complete an assignment; this is not a good strategy. Although the course requires that you to do the reading for our class every day and come ready to turn in your assignments, you should not skip class when you are unprepared. Skipping because you are behind only sets you further behind.

### **Class Preparedness**

This is a literature class, which means we look closely at language and dissect its form and structure. Therefore, **you must bring assigned readings to class every day**. On days when the assigned reading is from a book, bring the book; on days when the reading is posted on our course blog site, print it out and bring the hardcopy to class or bring a laptop or tablet to read it on. Additionally, you should also always have your reading journal with you in class.

### **Late Work**

All assigned work is due at the beginning of class or at my office by the designated time. Late work will receive a 5% grade reduction for each calendar day it is late. If you will be away when an assignment is due, turn in your work beforehand to receive full credit. I only accept paper copies of assignments (unless otherwise indicated). If I'm not in my office, you may slip the assignment under my office door or, if you are unable, you may email it to me and give me a hard copy as soon as possible. In the event that you are unable to turn in an assignment on time, please contact me in a clear and timely way. I might be willing to consider offering extensions on some assignments if you approach me far enough in advance before the due date and propose a plan for how you will complete the work. It's always better to make me aware of your situation so we can develop a plan together than not to turn your assignment in!

### **Formatting**

All formal assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1 inch margins. Indent new paragraphs ½ inch and do not include extra space between paragraphs. Include page numbers at the top of each page (preferably starting with the second). **Please staple your papers**. You may print double-sided or single-sided. Please use .doc or .docx file formats when emailing.

Each formal assignment must begin with a single-spaced heading in the left corner. See below.

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Your surname 1

Your name  
Course Name (English 104)  
Instructor's name (Mr. Robert Zandstra)  
The name of the assignment (e.g. Close Reading)  
Date

Title of the Paper

This sentence would be the first sentence of the paper's first paragraph, indented half an inch or one tab. And so on...

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Each essay must have a title in the same font, appropriately capitalized, centered on the page, two spaces after the heading, and two spaces before the first paragraph. Cite sources properly.

### **Access**

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in week one if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers (physical, psychological, or learning) to your participation. We can then make arrangements, if necessary, for your full access to all classroom activities. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu). If you require additional help for this course in any way, please let me know at any time during the term so that we can work together to get you the help you need in the course. The Teaching and Learning Center, in 68 PLC, is a great resource for brushing up on grammar and getting help with essay-writing.

### **Academic Honesty**

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course, which means you may not submit papers or portions of papers you have written for any other course. Any use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Academic dishonesty will result in an automatic failing grade for this course. Definitions of cheating and plagiarism are available in the *Student Conduct Code* section on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website. Please familiarize yourself with these if you are not clear on what constitutes cheating or plagiarism and contact me if you have any questions about these definitions. If you are ever having trouble writing a paper or understanding what I am looking for, please come talk with me. I do not expect that you already know how to do what we are learning how to do in this class. Extra help is always available. There is nothing wrong with getting something wrong – often the best way to learn is to make mistakes, and this is not something to panic about. However, if you take ideas from elsewhere and pass them off as your own, you learn nothing—so the next paper will therefore be no easier—and risk extreme academic penalties.

## Tentative Schedule

<u>Week</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Reading Due</u>	<u>Written Work Due</u>
1	Tu 9-29		Join course blog
	Th 10-1	Silko, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds"; Achebe, "Dead Men's Path"; Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain"; Glossary of Literary Terms	Introductory Assignment
2	Tu 10-6	<i>Life of Pi</i> Author's Note - Chapter 6 (pages vii-25)	
	Th 10-8	<i>Life of Pi</i> Chapters 7-36 (25-93)	
3	F 10-9		Story Kit 4PM Group A blog post 8PM
	M 10-12		All comment on 1 blog post 8PM
	Tu 10-13	<i>Life of Pi</i> Chapters 37-62 (97-189)	
4	Th 10-15	<i>Life of Pi</i> Chapters 63-94 (189-286)	
	Tu 10-20	<i>Life of Pi</i> Chapters 95-100 (289-319)	Group B blog post 8PM
	W 10-21		All comment on 1 blog post 8PM
	Th 10-22	Writings TBA about <i>Life of Pi</i>	
5	F 10-23		All outside text blog post 8PM
	M 10-26		All comment on 2 blog posts 8PM
	Tu 10-27	Dostoevsky, <i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> Bk. 5, Ch. 3-5; Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"	
6	Th 10-29	Singer, "Gimpel the Fool"	
	M 11-2		All Podcast blog post 9AM All comment on 2 blog posts 8PM
	Tu 11-3	Podcasts TBA Optional: film screening <i>Contact</i> 7PM, Straub 145	
	Th 11-5	View <i>Contact</i> (Dir. Robert Zemeckis) before class	
7	F 11-6		Close Reading Assignment 4PM
	Tu 11-10	<i>Blankets</i> 8-224; McCloud, <i>Understanding Comics</i>	
	Th 11-12	<i>Blankets</i> 225-529	Final Project Proposal
	F 11-13		Group B blog post 8PM
8	M 11-16		All comment on 1 blog post 8PM
	Tu 11-17	<i>Blankets</i> 530-582	Group A blog post 8PM
	W 11-18		All comment on 1 blog post 8PM
9	Th 11-19	<i>Blankets</i>	
	Tu 11-24	Wallace, "This Is Water"	
	Th 11-26	Thanksgiving	
10	M 11-30		All review quiz blog post 9AM All comment on 2 blog posts 8PM
	Tu 12-1		Presentations
	Th 12-3		
11	Tu 12-8	8:00 AM	Presentations
	Th 12-10		Final Project 10AM

