ENGLISH 104: INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE: FICTION
Liars, Fools, and Con Artists
Spring 2021
MWF 8-9am (Zoom link on Canvas)

Professor Susan Weeber (she/her)
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Office hours (Zoom): Wednesdays 9am-11am; Tuesdays 12:30pm-1:30pm; and by appointment*

Course description
In this class, we will read misleading, deceptive stories and untrustworthy narrators. When you can’t trust the narrator, what should you focus on? What do untrustworthy narrators and deceptive stories reveal about the nature of reading, writing, and interpretation? The course title itself is, perhaps, a little misleading, a little flashy. While some of our narrators are wildly misleading, some are merely not very perceptive, or a little selfish, or somewhat self-deceptive. Or perhaps they are “misleading” because they are the kinds of people society tends not to believe. While we untangle these stories, we will learn to analyze and write about prose narrative, studying elements like structure, narrative technique, point of view, and character development. And we will ask questions about the relationship between literature, politics, history, and ethics. What is a story, and what role do stories play in our cultural and political lives?

A note on learning during crisis
This academic year has posed several ongoing and overlapping challenges, including Covid, state-sanctioned anti-Black violence and rising anti-Asian violence, wildfires, economic distress, and a uniquely divisive election. This means that we will be working and learning under unstable conditions. During this term, some or all of us might be affected by financial uncertainty and hardship, mental or physical health problems, increased family and childcare responsibilities, changing university policies and housing conditions, etc. I ask that we all extend each other compassion, grace, and flexibility. Please know that I want you to succeed in this class, but I also want you to stay as safe, healthy, and secure as you possibly can. I am working to make our (virtual) class space accommodating, flexible, and generous while maintaining the rigor and content coverage that you need and deserve, and/but I will modify and adjust as needed. If you find that you need additional support, please know that that is not a personal failing of yours, but a function of being a person in the world in 2021 – in that case, please reach out to me. I will never ask you to divulge more information than you are comfortable sharing, but I will do whatever I can to lead with generosity and flexibility.

A note on content and language
Some of the material in this class describes racial and sexual violence. Occasionally, the language and material may be graphic or difficult to read, and our conversations in class will cover difficult topics. If this is something you think might interfere with your learning, please talk to me.

As we start this class together, we are essentially co-signing a contract to practice care in our language. This is particularly important given the harm and violence language can enact. We should be generous with everyone—we might slip up or make mistakes, of course—while also agreeing to be held accountable for our language. While some sensitive topics and terms shift over time, there are a few basic rules we are all agreeing to abide by: First, respect is mandatory; hate speech is prohibited. Second, absolutely no one in this course will use the N-word, even if it appears in a text
we are reading. You need not pretend like you don’t see it; instead, merely say “N” or express it in writing as “N*****” or “N----.” For a more thorough discussion of why I have adopted this policy in all of my classrooms, please refer to Dr. Koritha Mitchell’s excellent podcast on the subject: (https://soundcloud.com/c19podcast/nword). As a class, we will discuss how to handle other terminology that is not quite as violent but still has complicated history.

**Assignments:**
Weekly Canvas response posts (10 total) 20%
Short essay 20%
Teaching video or podcast 25%
Final project 20%
Participation 15%

**Participation**
Participation includes consistent attendance as well as attentive, active engagement in class. Please come to class each day having done the assigned reading. I recommend you arrive with at least one comment, one question, and one passage from the assigned text you would like us to discuss. If you know you are going to miss a class, please reach out to me. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to get notes for that day and otherwise catch up on any material you have missed. During our Zoom conversations, feel free to make full use of the “raise hand” function in Zoom, and please also feel free to contribute in the chat.

*If participation drops, I reserve the right to implement reading quizzes.*

**Canvas response posts**
You will submit weekly response posts to Canvas. The responses should be 200 words minimum. Avoid plot summary or description in your posts. You’re writing to the rest of the class, so don’t feel the need to recap the plot. These posts should make arguments or claims about the assigned material. You can focus on a scene, moment, or image that struck (or surprised, intrigued, or perplexed) you or you can try out an argument about a topic, thread, or theme you see emerging throughout the piece. If the former, practice your close reading skills by paying attention to specific details in a section of the text. What does this moment show us? What effects does it produce? Why might it matter? If the latter, point us toward a few moments/scenes/images as evidence for your argument. Try to raise key questions and make a claim (even if the claim is speculative or half-formed at this stage). You can also use the response posts to ask questions you think the assigned material raises—questions we can take up in class discussion.

**Extra credit**
I will post a list of films that also make use of unreliability, and you can watch and respond to these for extra credit. After watching them, you can write a one-page response that connects the film to our class. There will also be opportunities to attend and reflect on lectures or other events for extra credit.

**UO remote learning resources**
Free online tutoring—both synchronous and asynchronous—is available through UO's Online Writing Lab (OWL). Log in at https://owl.uoregon.edu/.
UO loaner laptop program: go to https://is.uoregon.edu/remote and click on loaner laptop request form.
UO's coronavirus webpage: https://www.uoregon.edu/coronavirus?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=CTAbutton&utm_campaign=immersive&utm_content=CTAbutton
UO's FAQ page for remote learning and coronavirus information: https://www.uoregon.edu/coronavirus-faq

Accessibility
I am committed to making this class an inclusive learning environment. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC) in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Academic honesty
All of your work in this class should be your own, and all sources you use in your work should be properly acknowledged and documented. If you have questions about plagiarism, please see https://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism., and feel free to talk to me, too.

COURSE SCHEDULE
**This schedule is subject to change. I will give you advanced notice of any changes to assignments or dates.**

Week 1
M 3/29  Introductions and overview; close reading: James Weldon Johnson, Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (excerpt)
F 4/2   Herman Melville, Benito Cereno

Week 2
M 4/5   Melville, Benito Cereno
W 4/7   Henry James, Turn of the Screw
W 4/9   James, Turn of the Screw

Week 3
M 4/12  James, Turn of the Screw
W 4/14  Nella Larsen, Passing
F 4/16  Larsen, Passing

Week 4
M 4/19  Larsen, Passing
W 4/21  James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”
F 4/23  Rough draft due; workshop short essays in class

Week 5
W 4/28  Toni Morrison, “Recitatif”
F 4/30  Nam Le, “Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice”; Thompson-Spires, “Heads of the Colored People: Four Fancy Sketches, Two Chalk Outlines, and No Apology”
Week 6
M 5/3  Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
W 5/5  PKD, *Androids*
F 5/7  PKD, *Androids*

Week 7
M 5/10 PKD, *Androids*
W 5/12 Workshop teaching videos/podcasts in class
F 5/14 PKD, *Androids*

Week 8
M 5/17 John Keene, *Counternarratives* (excerpt); **teaching video/podcast due by 11:59pm**
W 5/19 Keene, *Counternarratives* (excerpt)
F 5/21 John Keene class visit!

Week 9
M 5/24 Watch *Blade Runner*
W 5/26 Carmen Maria Machado, “The Husband Stitch”
F 5/28 Danielle Evans, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self* (excerpt)

Week 10
M 5/31 Workshop final projects in class
W 6/2 Workshop final projects in class
F 6/4 Class wrap-up

**Final creative project due June 8 by 11:59pm**