

ENGL 439: Fiction and Mental Health

Hamilton 232

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Tues/Thursday  
11.40 - 12.55  
No calls or texts after 9pm

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Course Description:** Attending school can be stressful for all of us, but according to a 2019 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, America's colleges are currently witnessing a "student mental health-crisis." In the last decade, the number of students visiting campus counseling services for depression and anxiety has grown by forty percent. Our lives have only become more stressful with the advent of Covid. What can fiction possibly teach us about mental health, and how might fiction, and stories more generally, help us achieve and maintain it? In this course, we'll find out. We'll read a variety of contemporary novels and short stories, and a few historical ones, about anxiety, depression, dissociation, and isolation but also consider fictions about healing, happiness, and wellness. We'll probe the boundaries of what counts as fiction by reading clinical case histories and memoirs, and we'll investigate how fiction has operated in therapeutic practices such as Bibliotherapy, Existential, Narrative, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapies. We'll also investigate the value of traditional wellness practices including mindfulness and yoga. We'll cover a wide range of approaches to interpreting and analyzing fiction and along the way learn about some basic concepts in mental health and wellness. Assessment will be by a variety of take home assignments. This class is not a substitute for attending counseling, but our emphasis will be on reading fiction in ways that are not only perceptive but also helpful and hopeful.

**Learning Outcomes:** Upon successful completion of this class, you will have a broad familiarity with narrative theory and theories of fiction, as well as some of the basic concepts and modalities of mental health theory and practice. You will have extensive experience in close reading and in thinking about fiction and wellness. [UofSC requires professors to include learning outcomes; you may learn other and different things too. In fact, I hope you do!]

**Required Texts:** In order to make things as convenient and as affordable for you as possible, all of the readings for this course will be made available in digital format through Blackboard. You are welcome to purchase hard copies of the longer texts we'll be reading through the online vendor of your choice, if you prefer that format. The longer texts are: Rick Hanson, *Just One Thing: Developing a Buddha Brain One Simple Practice at a Time*; Alex Korb, *The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time*; Ellen Forney, *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, & Me*; Kevin Wilson, *Nothing to See Here*; Matthew Quick, *The Good Luck of Right Now*; and Lori Gottlieb, *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*.

**Assessment**

Five Short Exercises, each worth 20%

There are no exams, quizzes, or tests for this class.

Final Grade Cutoffs: A=90-100; B+=86-89; B=80-85; C+=76-79; C=70-75; D+=65-69; D=60-64; F=>60

**Attendance:** Prompt and regular attendance in class is required. I do take attendance. USC's attendance policy is that "Absence from more than five percent of the scheduled class sessions, whether excused or unexcused, is excessive and the instructor may choose to exact a grade penalty for such absences." If you miss class, please reach out first to another class member to find out what you have missed. You may also contact your accountability partner and classmates via Blackboard. If you still have questions, I'll always be happy to try and answer them. If you are concerned about your attendance record, please contact me as soon as possible!

**Paper Policies:** All exercises should be sent to me as e-mail attachments (word or pdf). If you have not completed your paper, submit your incomplete draft; I will read and comment upon this, but I reserve the right to fail or withhold the grade from any incomplete paper. If you do not upload or mail *some version* of your paper on the day it is due you will receive a zero.

In planning and outlining a paper, you may be as informal as you like; the version that you submit should be neat and tidy in all respects. The font should be 12 point Times New Roman (like this syllabus); it should be double spaced (like this paragraph); it should be paginated (like this syllabus); and it should have a non-justified right margin (like this syllabus). Just put your name and the title of your essay at the top of the first page; no other prefatory material is necessary. Papers are due on the days and times specified on in each assignment rubric and must be uploaded or mailed. If you have read this syllabus carefully, please e-mail me a short poem or story about a cat.

**Grades:** Grades can be an emotional subject. In fact, I'm not sure that they ever aren't. (We'll learn all about emotionality in class!) If you are unhappy with, or confused about, your grade, or even thrilled and overjoyed, I will always be happy to discuss the matter with you. However, I require a 24 hour reflection period. (Reflection is good; it's the basis of knowledge in general and of education in particular). For that reason, I will not communicate with you about your graded work on the day I return any given paper.

Instead, I'll invite you to wait 24 hours before contacting me,. That 24 hours is to give you time to think about your feelings and think about your thinking also. In thinking about grades, I encourage you not to ask 'Why did I receive a bad (or good!) grade ?' but rather 'What can I do to improve the grade I have ?' Reread your work; read my comments carefully; honestly assess your paper; take a little time out. Then we will be in a position to make the most of our discussion.

If you wish to withdraw from the class, please consult the following site:

[https://sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/advising/withdrawal/index.php](https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/advising/withdrawal/index.php)

**Communication:** We live in a world of instant messages and casual communication. Hey! and Hi! are fine, but it makes things a little easier for all of us if you address me as Professor Jackson or Dr. Jackson. Please use the subject line "ENGL 439" so that I know this is a school-related message Please state your question or request clearly and formally. Please sign your full name, so I know who you are (Too many people share first names). And please be polite! School can be stressful for all of us, especially now, and everything works best when we are courteous and kind.

Also, I will often communicate important information to you via Blackboard. It is your responsibility to check your USC e-mail daily, or to go to Self-Service Carolina and have your mail forwarded to the e-mail account you use daily. Please consult the Division of Information Technology, or a tech-savvy friend, if you are having trouble with e-mail forwarding.

**Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism is the act of taking another's words or original ideas and presenting them as one's own; it is academic theft. A paper is plagiarized when it consists partly or wholly of another person's material, used without the appropriate, academically-recognized means of acknowledgement. These means include, but are not limited to, quotation marks around *any* words that are not one's own (the rule is: two or more words, and you must use quotation marks; in some cases they are used even for one word); in-text parenthetical citation of author's name and page number; and complete bibliography for all works consulted, even if they have not been quoted from.

A paper is plagiarized if it fails to indicate quoted material; if it paraphrases too closely or too extensively from a source without explicit indication and full parenthetical citation in the text; if it is written either partially or wholly by a person other than the named author, including AI generated text; if it is revised or rewritten by a person other than the author; if it substantially resembles a paper written by another author; if it has been purchased from the web, or been recycled from another class, or used at another school. The most common form of plagiarism I see takes the form of papers with parenthetical citations, but no quotation marks around words that are not the student's own. It's *still* plagiarism!

The concept of plagiarism is based on the notion that ideas are private property; it is a specifically Western belief. In many cultures, it is deemed acceptable to imitate or copy the ideas of others; repetition is a token of veneration. While it is important to respect cultural difference, all work undertaken at the University of South Carolina must

abide by the rules of academic honesty as detailed in this syllabus *and* in the University's Honor Code. The Honor Code also penalizes cheating, falsification of submitted material, and other infractions of academic integrity. **Plagiarism and other violations of the integrity standards of the Honor Code will result in an automatic F in the class and the submission of your work to the Dean of your college.** You may read the Honor Code at:

[https://sc.edu/about/offices\\_and\\_divisions/student\\_conduct\\_and\\_academic\\_integrity/documents/honor\\_code.pdf](https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/student_conduct_and_academic_integrity/documents/honor_code.pdf)

**tldr?:** don't cheat, don't help others cheat; and make sure you haven't cheated accidentally (which is actually a thing that has consequences also).

**Accommodations:** Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this (or any other!) class, contact the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) as soon as possible: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email [sadrc@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:sadrc@mailbox.sc.edu), or stop by Close-Hipp 102. All accommodations must be approved through SDRC. You will also need to inform me of the accommodations you need promptly so that I am able to make them for you.

**Responsibility:** As college students, you are adults, and I will always treat you as such. That means you can expect courtesy, honesty, kindness, and dedication from me at all times; it also means that I will expect the same from you. ***Please!*** if you have concerns about the class in any way, shape, or form, come and speak to me. If I don't know what's bothering you, I won't be able to help . . .

**Finally, Smiling:** Although they are not a graded elements of the class, smiling, good humor, kindness, and enthusiasm will all be greatly welcomed (and encouraged) in class. In fact, they're sort of the point of this class. Learning can – and should – be fun; let's do our best to keep it that way!

#### **The Bottom Line**

- (1) Do all the reading
- (2) Come to every class
- (3) Take notes
- (4) Participate in Class!
- (5) Be kind

All readings should be completed for the date indicated.

JAN	<b>(Week 1) Introduction / Feeling Anxious</b>
Tue. 10	Introductions and class goals
Thu. 12	Edgar Allan Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843)
	<b>(Week 2) Feeling Regulated &amp; Feeling Seen</b>
Tue. 17	Daniel J. Siegel, <i>Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation</i> , 3-37.
Thu. 19	Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) and "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" (1913)
	<b>(Week 3) Feeling Attuned &amp; Feeling Compassionate</b>
Tue. 24	Daniel J. Siegel, <i>Mindsight</i> , 59-63. Hanson, <i>Just One Thing</i> , 1-10, and skim Part Four.
Thu. 26	Jamil Zaki: <i>The War for Kindness</i> , Chapters 1-2
	<b>(Week 4) Feeling Depressed</b>
Tue. 31	Andrew Solomon, <i>The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression</i> , 15-38.
FEB Thu. 2	David Foster Wallace, "The Depressed Person" (1999)
	<b>(Week 5) Downward Spirals</b>
Tue. 7	Alex Korb, <i>The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time</i> , Part 1.
Thu. 9	Review Class
	<b>(Week 6) Listening to Stories That Hurt &amp; Stories That Heal</b>
Tue. 14	Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903) -- audiobook (running time: two hours and twenty minutes)
Thu. 16	Jeffrey A. Kottler, "On Being a Therapeutic Storyteller -- and Listener"

	<b>(Week 7) Bibliotherapy &amp; Cognitive Behavior Therapy</b>
Tue. 22	Mark Nepo, <i>As Far as the Heart Can See: Stories to Illuminate the Soul</i> (extracts)
Thu. 24	David Burns, <i>Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy</i> , 9-80.
	<b>(Week 8) Mindfulness &amp; the Stream of Consciousness</b>
Tue. 28	Nafissa Thompson-Spires, "Not Today, Marjorie" (2018)
MAR Thu. 2	Dan Harris, <i>10% Happier</i> (2014), 97-150
	SPRING BREAK
	<b>(Week 9) The Art of Bipolar Depression</b>
Tue. 14	Ellen Forney, <i>Marbles</i> (2012)
Thu. 16	Ellen Forney, <i>Marbles</i> (2012)
	<b>(Week 10) Anger and Shame</b>
Tue. 21	Kevin Wilson, <i>Nothing to See Here</i> (2019)
Thu. 23	Kevin Wilson, <i>Nothing to See Here</i> (2019)
	<b>(Week 11) Recovery as Journey</b>
Tue. 28	Matthew Quick, <i>The Good Luck of Right Now</i> (2014)
Thu. 30	Matthew Quick, <i>The Good Luck of Right Now</i> (2014)
APRIL	<b>(Week 12) The Therapy Case Study as Art</b>
Tue. 4	Irvin D. Yalom, <i>Love's Executioner</i> (1989), 3-67.
Thu. 6	Kendra Cherry, "Twenty Common Defense Mechanisms Used for Anxiety"
	<b>(Week 13) The Wounded Healer</b>
Tue. 11	Lori Gottlieb, <i>Maybe You Should Talk to Someone</i> (2019), Part 1

Thu. 13	Lori Gottlieb, <i>Maybe You Should Talk to Someone</i> (2019), Part 2
	(Week 14) <b>The Wounded Healer</b>
Tue. 18	Lori Gottlieb, <i>Maybe You Should Talk to Someone</i> (2019), Part 3
Thu. 20	Lori Gottlieb, <i>Maybe You Should Talk to Someone</i> (2019), Part 4

**There is no final exam for ENGL 439**