

ENGE3360 Special Topics in Creative Writing – *Reading Alice Munro and Writing Life-Stories*

Lecturer: Dr. Suzanne Wong

Email: suzanne@cuhk.edu.hk

Office: FKH324 / Phone: 3943-7011

Tutor: Ms. Charlotte Cai

Email: 1155149742@link.cuhk.edu.hk

Office: FKH 311 / Phone: 3943-5715

Course description

In this course, we will read Alice Munro's short stories and analyze them as the author's retrospection, reconfiguration and reimagining of places, people and events in her own life. From the recasting of her mother, father and other family members in her works to the reconstruction of tales of tragedy, love and faith, Munro writes in order to open up the past, take a good look at it, feel the life, and discover the story. This idea of life as story and the power of storying lives in the construction self and identity is drawn from narrative psychology and will be used as a springboard for students to experiment with life-writing in the course. Students will be given opportunities to re-tell the stories of their own lives and/or the lives of their family and friends in ways that allow a re-interpretation of the past as well as a re-orientation of the future.

Learning outcomes:

After completing this course, students should:

- Become familiar with the works of Alice Munro and appreciate her artistry
- Understand the storied nature of human lives and the power of life-writing
- Have assembled a portfolio of life-writing works
- Have produced a complete life-story for workshopping

Assessment:

Lecture attendance & participation	10%
Tutorial attendance & participation	10%
Writing booklet	10%
Three self-selected life-writing tasks	30%
Life story (8-12 pages)	40%

Details of assessments:

Attendance/participation (20%): Complete the assigned readings before class, and come to class (both lecture and tutorial) ready to contribute to the discussion. Attendance and participation in **workshops** (Weeks 11-13) is particularly important.

Writing booklet (10%): Write down your **answers** to the pre-reading or pre-lecture questions about the stories, and complete **all** the life-writing exercises.

Three self-selected life-writing tasks (30%): Select for assessment **three** life-writing exercises out of those assigned throughout the semester. Be prepared to allocate time for these exercises as some might involve some research into family history.

Life Story (40%): You can expand one of the life-writing exercises into a complete original story or start a new piece. The life story should center on a key event, explore a character and illuminate a life. The story must be submitted for workshopping. You are expected to do revisions on the story before submitting the final draft.

Late submission of assignments will be penalized half a grade for each day late.

Academic honesty:

The University has implemented a zero tolerance policy against plagiarism and has required all written work to be submitted via VeriGuide at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/veriguide> .

To comply with University regulations, you are therefore asked to:

- 1) submit your written work via VeriGuide before due date and print the receipt issued by VeriGuide
- 2) submit a hard copy of the work, along with the receipt from VeriGuide and the declaration of honesty (which comes with the VeriGuide receipt but is also attached here for your use).

Assignments without the receipt from VeriGuide and the signed declaration of honesty will not be graded.

Course schedule

Week	Topic & readings	Writing exercises due
Week 1 Sept 7	Introduction to the course; <i>Storying Our Lives</i>	- Life chapters - Childhood memory
Week 2 Sept 14	<i>Alice Munro – Writing Her Lives</i> “Boys and Girls”	- Photo Story
Week 3 Sept 21	I. The Mother “The Peace of Utrecht” “The Ottawa Valley”	- Peak/nadir experience
Week 4 Sept 28	I. The Mother (continued) “The Progress of Love” “Friend of My Youth” “Dear Life”	
Week 5 Oct 5	II. Sisters and Aunts “Chaddeleys and Flemings I & II”	- Flaw that got you in trouble
Week 6 Oct 12	III. The Father “The Moons of Jupiter” “Night”	- Symbolic message
Week 7 Oct 19	<i>Alice Munro – The Story-teller</i> “Nettles” “Dimensions”	- Puzzle/enigma/mystery
Week 8 Oct 26	IV. Sex, love, and marriage “How I Met My Husband” “Voices”	- A turning point in life
Week 9 Nov 2	V. Faith and fate “Age of Faith” “Tricks”	- A script for the future
Week 10 Nov 9	VI. Self and self-writing “The Eye”	Life-story (40%)
Week 11 Nov 16	Workshop	
Week 12 Nov 23	Workshop	
Week 13 Nov 30	Workshop	Final Draft of Life Story due December 10 (Friday)

References:

Narrative psychology:

Bruner, Jerome. "Life as narrative." *Social research: An international quarterly* 71.3 (2004): 691-710.

McAdams, Dan P. *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self*. Guilford Press, 1993.

McAdams, Dan P. "The psychology of life stories." *Review of general psychology* 5.2 (2001): 100-122.

Pillemer, David B. *Momentous events, vivid memories*. Harvard University Press, 1998.

Alice Munro:

Fiamengo, Janice, and Gerald Lynch, eds. *Alice Munro's miraculous art: Critical essays*. University of Ottawa Press, 2017.

Staines, David, ed. *The Cambridge companion to Alice Munro*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Thacker, Robert. *Alice Munro: Writing her lives: A biography*. Emblem Editions, 2011.

Thacker, Robert. *Reading Alice Munro, 1973-2013*. University of Calgary Press, 2016.

Feedback for evaluation:

Students will be asked to complete Course Evaluations for both the lectures and tutorials of ENGE3360 at the end of the semester. Comments and suggestions about the course content, teaching method and learning tasks are most welcome at any time during the semester.

Grade A / Excellent: Outstanding performance on ALL learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would surpass the normal expectations at this level and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study. The 'A' grade should be reserved for truly excellent work that exceeds the level expected for the majority of students and are expected to be achieved only by a small minority

Grade A- / Very Good: Generally outstanding performance on ALMOST ALL learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would fully fulfill the normal expectations at this level and occasionally reaches standards that may be common at higher levels of study.

Grade B+ / Good (Plus): HIGH performance on all learning outcomes, OR HIGH performance on some learning outcomes which compensates WELL for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply WELL the principles or skills learned in the course in a comprehensive manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level WELL.

Grade B / Good: SUBSTANTIAL performance on all learning outcomes, OR SUBSTANTIAL performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a MORE COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade B- / Good (Minus): GOOD performance on all learning outcomes, OR GOOD performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for slightly less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a COMPREHENSIVE manner that would sufficiently fulfill the normal expectations at this level.

Grade C+ / Fair (Plus): VERY SATISFACTORY performance on the majority of learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a SOMEWHAT SUSTAINED manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade C / Fair: SATISFACTORY performance on the majority of learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to partially apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the basic requirement at this level.

Grade C- / Fair (Minus): SOMEWHAT SATISFACTORY performance on A NUMBER OF learning outcomes.

Demonstrates the ability to SOMEWHAT apply the principles or skills learned in the course in a manner that would meet the BARE basic requirement at this level.

Grade D+ / Pass (Plus): BARELY SATISFACTORY performance on A FEW learning outcomes.

Addresses the course inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in some areas while responding minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade D / Pass: ALMOST BARELY satisfactory performance on VERY FEW learning outcomes.

Addresses the course inadequately by meeting the basic requirement at this level only in very few areas while responding very minimally with possibly tangential content in others.

Grade F / Failure: Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Fails to address the course and likely does not understand what the course requires. In other words, the work completely misses the point.