

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

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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.

** To apply for sick leave or special leave, 1) email your instructor *and* tutor **before class**, and 2) fill out the Google form for **leave application** (on Blackboard). **

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. Expand and polish them.

Be prepared to allocate time for these exercises as some might involve some research into family history. The suggested word count for each piece is 800 – 1,200.

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. The suggested length of the life-story is 8 - 12 pages.

Sick leave, attendance and late submissions:

The Department has issued a set of guidelines on sick leave, attendance and late submissions, including acceptable reasons for application of leave and extensions, the documents required, and the maximum period of extension to be granted. Please refer to this document (available on Blackboard) for details.

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

Academic honesty:

All the works submitted for assessment should be your own work written for this course. Do not recycle old pieces of writing.

You should not submit an assignment that has been partly or wholly produced by generative AI.

Course schedule

Week	Topic & readings	Writing exercises assigned/due
Week 1 Sept 5	Introduction to the course; <i>Storying Our Lives</i>	- Life chapters - Childhood memory
Week 2 Sept 12	<i>Alice Munro – Writing Her Lives</i> “Boys and Girls”	- Photo Story
Week 3 Sept 19	I. The Mother “The Peace of Utrecht” “The Ottawa Valley”	- Peak/nadir experience
Week 4 Sept 26	I. The Mother (continued) “The Progress of Love” “Friend of My Youth” “Dear Life”	
Week 5 Oct 3	II. Sisters and Aunts “Chaddeleys and Flemings I & II”	- Flaw that got you in trouble Hand in hard copies of Tasks 1-4
Week 6 Oct 10	III. The Father “The Moons of Jupiter” “Night”	- Symbolic message
Week 7 Oct 17	<i>Alice Munro – The Story-teller</i> “Nettles” “Dimensions”	- Puzzle/enigma/mystery
Week 8 Oct 24	IV. Sex, love, and marriage “How I Met My Husband” “Voices”	- A turning point in life
Week 9 Oct 31	V. Faith and fate “Age of Faith” “Tricks”	- A script for the future Hand in hard copies of Tasks 5-8
Week 10 Nov 7	VI. Self and self-writing “The Eye”	Life-story due (40%)
Week 11 Nov 14	Workshop	Hand in Task 9
Week 12 Nov 21	Workshop	Hand in 3 self-selected pieces
Week 13 Nov 28	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.