

**ENGLISH 219
VISITING WRITERS SERIES
RICHARD ROBBINS**

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course operates as an independent study of those writers visiting campus for the Good Thunder Reading Series. **Enrolled students will not meet as a class.** Instead, they will work on their own by (1) reading selected works by some of the writers, (2) attending events at which the writers speak or read from their work, and (3) keeping a journal of directed responses. At the end of the course, students will have the choice of an oral or take-home essay final which will deal with all the writers covered.

TEXTS

Seven writers and one vocalist will be featured during four fall term residencies, but you need read only one book per residency (for a total of FOUR books).

- **Dinty W. Moore**—Read **one** book by Moore before the 9.17 visit and attend one of the public sessions.
- **Philip Bryant and Carolyn Wilkins**—Read **one** book by Bryant before the 10.8 residency and attend one of the public sessions.
- **Amanda Schumacher and David McGlynn**—Read **one** book by McGlynn before the 10.29 visit and attend one of the public sessions.
- **Edward Micus, Connie Colwell Miller, and Christina Olson**—Read **one** book by **one** of the writers before the 11.19 visit and attend one of the public sessions.

Selected books by these authors are available for sale in the textbook section of the bookstore, but other titles by the same writers—which you are free to read instead—can be found in the library or elsewhere. Biographies of all authors, which may help you in your book selection, can be found at the reading series website at www.english2.mnsu.edu/gt/

COURSE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Several talks and readings are scheduled during the term, all on Thursdays. See the schedule at the end of this syllabus. The following routine applies to **each** visiting writer residency:

1. IN THE DAYS BEFORE A WRITER'S VISIT—

Read one book **in advance of the writer's visit** and do an extended (60-90 minute) journal entry. If you need to break up your journal writing into smaller segments, that's fine, as long as the overall entry for each writer demonstrates the depth of attention and consideration required. Follow the guidelines below in organizing each response:

- Date and identify the subject of your entry.
- Allow yourself extended consideration of the work by fully answering the following questions. (If the reading is a collection of stories or poems, it may help to focus on selected pieces, although you will still be expected to have read the whole book.):
 - What is my initial reaction to the work?
 - What expectations or experiences have I brought to the reading that affects my response?
 - What set of human problems or themes does the work seem to focus on?
 - Is it like, or does it resonate, with other literary works I'm familiar with?
 - What does the work say to me?
 - How does it go about saying what it says?
 - Which elements of the work are most responsible for my response?
 - In what way has my thinking been influenced by the work?

Note that some of these questions ask you to consider the **content** of the work, while others ask you to notice the method or **style**. Feel free to write about additional questions or other ideas that occur to you, but be sure to remain focused on the content and style of the work.

None of the journal entries needs to be revised. The best ones, though, go beyond mere summary, and they go beyond merely saying whether you liked or disliked a writer's work. Instead, intellectually engaging journal entries try to tackle, in thoughtful and imaginative ways, some of the issues of content or style that the work raises. As I look at your work during the semester, I will let you know if you are going deep enough in your writing.

Save your journal entries since they will become the basis for your more polished oral or written final at the end of the course.

2. ON THE DAY OF A WRITER'S VISIT—

Attend **one** of the scheduled events in the afternoon or evening. Be on time and stay for the whole event, which will *generally* run under an hour. Note that the afternoon sessions are generally discussions of the craft or process of creative writing, and the evening sessions are generally readings from the writer's published work or work in progress. It's entirely up to you which of these two sessions you attend.

3. AFTER ATTENDING AN EVENT—

Do a shorter (30-45 minute) follow-up journal entry. Follow these guidelines below in organizing this response.

- Date and identify the subject of your entry.
- Concentrate on one or more of the following questions in developing your response:
 - What is my reaction to the issues discussed or work performed at the writer's session?
 - How does seeing and hearing the writer affect the way I view his or her work?
 - What new light, if any, does he or she throw on my broader understanding of the writing process, my sense of what contemporary writers are trying to accomplish, or the role of the writer in society?

By the middle of the following week—i.e. by 9.23, 10.15, 11.5, and 11.26—send me your “before” and “after” journal entries by e-mail, or drop the entry by my office by the same deadline.

4. AT THE END OF THE TERM—

Decide what kind of final you'd like to take: either a 20-minute (maximum) oral exam in my office, or a 2-3 page take-home essay exam. The pertinent questions to think about will be available at my office or on the D2L web site the week after the last visiting writer's residency. Regardless of the form you choose, the final will ask you to synthesize and revise some of your observations and reflections as they were recorded in your journal, discussed online, and as they have developed since. You'll be asked to make connections and comparisons among sometimes very different writers and works, and you'll be asked to evaluate the experience of seeing a writer in person discuss or read from his or her material.

GRADING CRITERIA

- **“A” work**, as described in the **Undergraduate Bulletin**, is of “definitely superior quality.” For this course, that means journal entries and final responses that have depth and insight, that demonstrate the time and intellectual commitment to produce honest, thoughtful analyses. For written or oral finals, it also means responses that have organization and polish.
- **“B” work** represents “better-than-average” performance. Journal entries and final responses are thought-out, and written and oral finals are organized and polished, but they don't achieve the level of performance described above.
- **“C” work** represents “average” performance. All the work is there, but it represents no extraordinary effort, given what the class requires.
- **“D” and “F” work** represent below-average or unacceptable levels of performance.

Attendance: In this sort of class, I don't take attendance per se. But if you miss a talk or reading, or the deadline for submitting a journal entry, it will affect your grade.

VISITING WRITER SCHEDULES

Attend **one** event on each of the following days:

9.17.2009

creative nonfiction writer

Dinty W. Moore

3:00 p.m., Talk on craft, CSU Room 284

7:30 p.m., Reading, CSU Room 253

10.8.2009

THE ROBERT C. WRIGHT MINNESOTA WRITERS RESIDENCY

poet

Philip Bryant

composer and vocalist

Carolyn Wilkins

3:00 p.m., Talk on craft, CSU Ostrander Auditorium

7:30 p.m., Reading, Performing Arts Center Recital Hall

evening event only: \$9 students/\$12 general public (if you must go to the evening event, see me about a pass)

10.29.2009

fiction/creative nonfiction writer and 2009 Robert Wright Award winner

Amanda Schumacher

fiction writer

David McGlynn

3:00 p.m., Talk on craft, CSU Ostrander Auditorium

7:30 p.m., Reading, CSU Room 284

11.19.2009

MSU ALUMNI READING

poet

Edward Micus

poet

Connie Miller

poet

Christina Olson

3:00 p.m., Talk on craft, CSU Ostrander Auditorium

7:30 p.m., Reading, CSU Room 253