The Lantern English Co.
The Creative Writer

The Novel – Syllabus

Course Description: Aspiring novelists, welcome! In *The Novel*, we will discover what makes a strong novel, develop striking characters, learn how to structure a whole book, and discuss important topics like beating burnout and editing successfully. Whether you have written a dozen novels or want to begin your first, this is the class for you. *Prerequisite: Intro to Creative Writing or equivalent writing experience.*

Course Outline:

> **Week One:** Form—What is a novel?
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> **Week Two:** Style—What makes a novel great?
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> **Week Three:** Characters—Who are our stars?
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> **Week Four:** Plot—How do we structure an entire novel?
>
> **Week Five:** Writing—How do we write a novel, overcome burnout, and fight writer's block?
>
> **Week Six:** Impressions—How do we introduce and close our novel?
>
> **Week Seven:** Editing—How do we edit a novel?
>
> **Week Eight:** The Playground—Tips for writing bonus content, crafting book covers, drawing illustrations, and keeping our novel-writing process fresh

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Creative Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.

The Novel
Lesson Two: What Makes a Novel Great?
SAMPLE LESSON

If we felt like it, we could all sit down and write 218 pages of words. Those words could follow a plot, include characters, etc. Yet, when all was said and done, we (probably) wouldn't have *The Great Gatsby*. So, what's the missing piece?

Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce every English major's best friend: *Style*. Just like your style in clothing influences your appearance—are you casual, businessy, bohemian, surfer, eighties, a mix of all of the above?—a novel's style influences the reading experience. It's *how* the words are pieced together—the personal flair, the cultural influences, the literary choices that influence a piece of writing.

Developing your personal style takes time and practice, and there is plenty of room to explore. Actually, that's part of why writing a novel is such a valuable experience! You spend more time with your characters, your technique, and your ideas—and that time allows you to hone your style.

REMEMBER LAST WEEK?

When you thought back to your favorite and least favorite reads, I bet elements of style came into play. Were there scenes that struck you? Breathtaking descriptions? Vivid characters? Or, perhaps, dry dialogue? Confusing subplots? Long, long, *long* scenes about the whaling industry (looking at you, *Moby Dick*)?

Now, some of these elements are subjective. Maybe you love modernist poetry, but your mom can't stand it. Maybe you can't stand *Moby Dick* while your American literature professor ranks it as an all-time favorite. That's another reason why it's good to consider your opinions about published works; they could be cues of *your* personal style.

Certain parts of "good" style, however, seem to be consistent across most readers. For example, a dry, stilted scene will typically turn your readers off, unless you are intentionally using it to make a point. So, how do we figure out what's "good" and what isn't?

WHAT IS GOOD STYLE?

Since there's a lot of individuality at play here, we don't want to assign you boxes of "good" and "bad." Instead, let's consider broad concepts and see how they might play into our novels.

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind:

- **Do** remember that engaging, realistic characters drive a story.
- **Don't** include too much exposition or "telling, not showing" (e.g. walking your reader through information instead of showing it via action, description, or dialogue; making your characters to reveal information that the author feels must be stated for the plot—even though it wouldn't naturally come up in conversation).
- **Do** read your writing aloud and listen to how the sentences sound together. Is there a flow or a rhythm? Does it feel stilted?
- **Don't** force yourself to follow another writer's style. You may be inspired by a bunch of different authors, but there is no one "right" or "wrong" style!
- **Do** keep your plots logical for your world. (It's okay if your world follows different rules than reality, so long as they stay consistent!)

WHAT ARE OUR GOALS?

Now, how do we go about developing our own style? Often, it's informed by our goals for the project.

Think about it in terms of visual art. If an artist wants to represent a peaceful morning scene, her brushstrokes and colors mimic that feeling—soft pastels, gentle strokes. The style follows the painter's goals.

So, let's begin with goals for our project. Are there themes that interest you? (Courage, redemption, love, trust, etc.) Do you want to develop a new world? Would you like to explore a certain genre or character in-depth?

Once you have several goals in mind, consider how your style can make them happen. Here are a few examples:

- **I want to write about courage.** Most likely, I'll include challenging obstacles, strong characters, and consider my characters' internal lives—what are they thinking and feeling? How can my readers empathize with it?
- **I want to develop a new world.** Besides brainstorming my world, I'll use description to paint a vivid picture of that world. I'll also select dialogue and action to naturally build this place.
- **I want to write a gripping mystery.** I'll use my word choice and sentence structure to build suspense... and weave in foreshadowing. Plus, I'll need strong characters to lead the plot along.

This is an abstract task, so it's completely okay to need time or help. If you'd like to bounce ideas off of someone, feel free to reach out!

Once you have your goals settled, we would recommend keeping them somewhere easily-accessible and inspiring. Perhaps it's a note at the top of your document, a virtual sticky on your desktop, or an index card on your desk. Of course, your themes and goals may shift as you actually begin drafting. That's natural! Roll with the punches, modify as necessary, and never forget the inspiration and passion that drives your writing.

BONUS: NOVELING NUDGE #2 –

Again, this is not mandatory. However, if you are working on your novel and would like a little accountability, choose a goal for this week.

If you choose to try one, let me know so I can cheer for you!

- **If you have an inspiring idea . . .** write at least fifteen minutes this week.
- **If you have got writer's block . . .** find a hint of inspiration (through brainstorming, picking a topic you enjoy, switching characters, etc) and write for ten-minutes straight—set a timer and keep your fingers moving the whole time! Ignore the typos and mistakes. Just keep writing it out!
- **If you are not sure where to go next . . .** review where you've gone so far, and list three directions your story could go. (This can be for the next chapter, a subplot, a character's growth or redemption, or the finale!) Pick one and start working towards it. Remember, you can always switch to one of the others!

If you would like to write a 50,000-word novel over these eight weeks, achieve these word counts:

- **Weekly total:** 12,500
- **Recommended daily count:** 893 words per day

Assignment 2: My Novel Goals

Now that you have considered your favorite novels, let's shift the focus to *your* novel.

If you haven't already, **settle on one novel idea to pursue during the class.** Again, you won't need to write the entire novel, but we'll build on it throughout the assignments.

If you'd like to change ideas at any time, just send me an email so I can follow your responses! Always have a reason why you want to set aside a project, though. I've been tempted to set aside several ideas simply thanks to writer's block, but they've turned out to be my favorites.

Do some serious thinking and answer the following questions:

- **Stylistically, how would you describe your writing style?** *If you aren't sure, tell me about the kind of writing that you love best, whether it's your creation or your pick for reading material.* Do you love description? Do you focus on characters? Are religious themes your driving factor? (For example, Ms. Lydia is a character-driven slice-of-life writer who struggles with description, *loves* dialogue, and is most inspired by authors from the Jazz Age and beyond.)
- **Why do you want to write this particular novel?** (For instance, you may be interested in a certain character or want to explore a certain theme. This may be a story you're expanding. Or it might just seem like fun!)
- **What theme(s) will your novel have?**
- **After your readers finish your novel, what do you want them to have learned or felt?**
- **As a writer, how do you want to grow or improve through writing your novel?** (For example, do you want to try a new genre? Finally complete a novel? Focus more on your characters?)