

SPECULATIVE FICTION, Fall 2024

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:00-2:00pm; Tuesday 11:15am-1:00pm & 2:00-4:15pm; digitally for three hours on Thursday, by appointment.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *The Martian Chronicles*, Ray Bradbury
- *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin
- *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood
- *The Story of Your Life and Others*, Ted Chiang
- Additional readings distributed digitally.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Encompassing genres ranging from science fiction to fantasy and horror, “speculative fiction” is a term meant to be inclusive of all forms of literature which play with and/or exceed our expectations of “realistic” narratives. This does not mean this kind of literature is a retreat or escape from our reality; indeed, speculative fiction is one of our most powerful tools for considering profound contemporary and historical questions, from the political to the philosophical to the deeply personal, and how all three intersect. This course focuses on some of the most challenging and provocative explorations undertaken by fiction - examinations of human civilization and technological development, memory and identity, history and its legacies of exploitation - which topics are especially suitable for treatment in speculative experiments. We’ll read these fictional texts alongside critical essays, as well as writing essays of our own, to participate in the energetic discussion which springs up around the very best speculative fiction.

A major focus of this course is critical reading: the ability not only to **understand what the text says**, but also to **interpret what the text does on a deeper level**. To do so we will examine **how each text was received in its historical moment** as well as determining **what we can take from it today**. Your insights and interpretations will be the building blocks of our class sessions; it will be a dialogue with the past and a meditation on the present. You will be expected to articulate your perspective on the texts and engage with other perspectives in a respectful and productive manner. In addition, we will develop the skills of research and analytical writing, preparing you for complex intellectual tasks useful both in academic and professional settings.

COURSE GOALS

- Develop critical thinking and critical reading skills
- Engage with critical literary articles and apply their insights
- Recognize the ways in which literature can be used to explore our world and ourselves
- Analyze literary texts both orally and in writing
- Develop strategies for effective academic writing

READINGS BY WEEK

Weeks 8/12 - 8/26 – *The Martian Chronicles*
Week 9/4 – Selected Short Stories
Weeks 9/9 - 9/23 – *The Left Hand of Darkness*
Week 9/30 – Selected Short Stories
Weeks 10/9 - 10/25 – *Oryx and Crake*
Weeks 11/4 - 11/18 – *The Story of Your Life and Others*
Weeks 12/2 - 12/13 – Project Work

****Project due 12/15 before 11:59 pm*****

ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING

In-Class Participation - 25%
Reflections, Questions and Contributions - 40%
Interpretive Project - 35%

Grading: A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ starts at 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D* 69 and below

Presence and Preparation (25%): Your participation in each class session will be vital for the overall experience. Come to every class on time, prepared with your reading notes and your book, and be ready to contribute to our discussion. You will be expected to play an active role in each session, sharing your ideas, building on those of other students, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. Participation is mostly based on you verbally engaging in class discussion. Behaviors that damage your participation grade include lateness, disruptiveness, absences, not bringing your texts to class, and not regularly participating in class discussion or other class activities.

Thought and Discussion (40%): The groundwork for class discussion is laid through sharing reflections about the assigned reading within your cohort. You will reflect on the reading by presenting or responding to a well-framed question or interpretation on your online cohort discussion board; you should focus on a specific aspect of the text, using direct textual reference. Your cohort will also collectively contribute a thematic thread to the ongoing class discussion, as well as taking turns choosing the next week's reading. Engaging with the texts, working with your cohort, and contributing to the class will secure this part of your grade.

Interpretive Project (35%): A week at the end of the quarter will be set aside for you to work on your final projects. These can be anything from an analytical paper to a video essay to a creative work in whatever medium, as long as it engages with one or more of the texts we read during the quarter; the key is that they be *interpretive*, either enriching our understanding or transforming the text. They will be graded on a simple scale of A (100), B (85), C (70) with an adapted rubric, focusing on effort and sophistication evident in the product.

Where applicable, projects will need to use **MLA citation** to cite the literary works both in-text and in a Works Cited page. We will go over this in class, but if you have questions please ask me or visit the OWL Purdue website. **Most importantly, make sure the words and ideas in your paper are your own.**

COURSE POLICIES

ATTENDANCE: Regular and punctual class attendance is expected and required of all students. If you are not in class when it officially begins, you will be marked tardy. If you show up to class ten or more minutes late, you will be marked absent for the day. You will also be marked absent if I see you sleeping.

LATE WORK: Late assignments will not be accepted without an in-person discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. Reading assignments and major papers will be turned in electronically, unless otherwise stated; if I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we do not discuss a plan for, you risk receiving no credit for it. Please make every effort to make sure assignments are timely, and that you meet the deadlines as outlined in the syllabus. **If you must miss a class, plan ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the rare case of an excused absence (those deemed so by the school), you will need to contact me via email to make arrangements to get your missed work in.

TECHNOLOGY: Please render your cell phones silent before you enter class, put them out of sight, and refrain from using them in class unless otherwise instructed. Laptops use is for designated in-class writing and research assignments only. Unauthorized use will earn a warning, followed by an improper use of computer designation in the attendance record.

INDIANA ACADEMY UNEXCUSED ABSENCE POLICY

It is the policy of the Indiana Academy that any absence from class is unexcused, except for illness, death in the family, college or school-related activities, and extenuating circumstances. When a student is absent from a class, the instructor reports the student absence to the Faculty Attendance Coordinator in the Office of Academic Affairs. Unless the absence is excused by a school official, it is considered unexcused. The decision as to whether an absence is excused is not determined by the instructor. Four or more unexcused absences in any particular class a student takes will lead to academic and residential consequences to be determined by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Residential Life that may include detention, residential groundings, parent/principal conference, among others.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

You are responsible for the integrity of your work and you are required to produce work that is academically honest. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. Submitting someone else's paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. Attempting to take credit for someone else's words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism. Direct and indirect plagiarism, both of which we will discuss in class, are unacceptable and have serious academic consequences. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, contact me and we can sort it out. Please refer to the student handbook for additional information, including information that is new this year.

APPROPRIATE USE OF LLM/‘AI’ TECHNOLOGY

Official Humanities Division Statement:

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.

Instructor Statement:

Large language models (more colloquially known as AI chatbots) are powerful tools which are rapidly altering the landscape of humanities scholarship. As with many such devices, there are benefits and drawbacks. Take for example motorized transport: automobiles made remarkable things possible for transit and logistics. It has also fostered a sedentary lifestyle, with all the concomitant health problems (i.e. driving instead of walking causes your legs to wither, your heart to weaken, your lifespan to contract).

Similarly, while large language models can accelerate a number of tasks, **it risks replacing invaluable skills and leading to the atrophy of the very capacities this class is meant to exercise and refine.** Letting an LLM write for you will not only produce mediocre, intellectually vacuous work, it will also cause your own abilities to shrivel precisely when they should be developing. It is also a priori plagiaristic: **all the words a LLM uses are drawn from uncredited, uncompensated sources.** It is not a voice from nowhere; it is stolen language. I want you to use your own words and ideas, and credit the words and ideas of others when you use them.

For the purposes of this class, **LLM/AI chatbots can be legitimately used for research purposes:** you can ask them questions (though always double check, since they frequently ‘hallucinate’) to increase your awareness of a topic, with the understanding that proper sourcing and citation must follow. **They may not be used to produce prose that represents itself as your own.** If you have doubts about the appropriate use of this technology, simply get in touch with me and we can clarify.

IA WIRELESS DEVICE POLICY

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, The Indiana Academy for Science, Mathematics and Humanities prohibits student use of wireless communication devices for non-instructional purposes in the classroom. As such, any and all portable wireless devices that have the capability to provide voice, messaging, or other data communication between two or more parties, must only be used for academic purposes directly tied to the classroom activity or related educational task. Exceptions to this wireless device policy are eligible through academic accommodations, individualized education programs, or with instructor approval permitting the use of a wireless device for justification related to health, safety, and/or

well-being. The improper use of a wireless device in an active classroom setting is subject to disciplinary action including but not limited to; a verbal warning, temporary seizure of said device by a school official, an unexcused absence for the class in question, written communication to parent/guardian, among other elevated consequences for repeated improper use.

INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE STATEMENT

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State's commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, Inclusive Excellence at the Indiana Academy emerges as one of the priorities of our living and learning community. We strive to exist together respectfully and compassionately, creating an environment where every member can thrive. Unfortunately, there might be occasions when something occurs that disrupts our progress toward meeting these objectives. In this case, we encourage any member of the Academy community to file a Campus Climate Report (CCR) https://bsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mbRbL5acAntUTI. All reports will be taken seriously, and appropriate responses will be carried out by Academy administration.

DISABILITY SERVICES

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The [Office of Disability Services](#) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at **765-285-5293** or dsd@bsu.edu.

LITERATURE NOTE

Important literature is often about the deepest and most difficult struggles of humans to live authentically in a complex world. Through the thoughts and experiences of literary characters, we can examine and evaluate our personal responses to life's mysteries, complexities, disappointments, and joys. In addition, we begin to understand how a writer, in his or her own struggle to experience creatively, has responded to the social, political, and artistic environment of his/her times. The English Department at the Academy selects reading material that reflects these human struggles, has endured the test of time, and has earned a respected place in the universe of letters. The instructors will often include recently published poems, stories, and articles that reflect the diversity of contemporary cultures and experiences.

If, because of the powerful nature of the reading experience, you are unable to read and study a specific text with reasonable analytic objectivity, please confer with your instructor. Alternative texts are available.