Tales Out of School:
Fiction and Film about Teachers, Students & Schooling

FYSEM-UA 667
Wednesdays 2-4:30
Room:

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Office hours: by appointment
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Course Description: By investigating a variety of recent short stories, movies and novels about schools and schooling, participants in this seminar will seek to add complexity to their own and each other’s understanding of education and its purposes. Our central questions will include the following: What images of students, teachers and schools are presented in contemporary literature and film? What do these images suggest about the place of schooling in American life? How, according to these narratives, do the roles students and teachers play in institutional settings encourage and impede learning? In our discussions of this substantial and ever-growing body of literature—ranging from literary fiction by Sherman Alexie, Don DeLillo and Z. Z. Packer to blockbuster tales depicting superhero schools and academies of magic—we will also investigate the seams between our identities as people and our personae as students and teachers. Over the course of the term, students will write a handful of short response papers, a concise analytical essay and a final project that can be fiction, non-fiction, or a hybrid of both. In class discussions and writing assignments, we will attempt to reinvigorate and reshape our perspectives on the pitfalls and possibilities of going to school, perhaps adding in our own way to the wider debate about education in our culture.

Course Requirements:
Attendance: 10%
Participation: 10%
Short response papers: 25%
Close Reading Essay: 25%
Oral presentation: 5%
Final paper: 25%
Course policies:

**Attendance and Participation:** Preparation, attendance, and speaking during discussions are all important parts of the class. Much of the learning in seminar courses occurs through active discussion and in-class writing rather than through lectures. One of the most important opportunities for learning in a small, writing-intensive class like this is to share your own writing and discuss the work of other writers—including your classmates. Therefore, to do well, you’ll need to show up. More than one un-excused absences will most likely make it difficult for you to do your best work, and may in turn lower your final grade; more than two absences will put you at a severe disadvantage in the course, because the work we do in class is designed to help you understand the final essay assignments. Always get to class on time. Documented medical conditions and the observance of religious holidays are legitimate excuses for an absence. Please get in touch with me about each absence.

**Support & Civility:** It is important for us, as a community of thinkers and writers working together for a semester, to treat each other (and each other’s thoughts, ideas and identities) in a civil and supportive spirit. It is also important to remember that help and support are available outside of your classes. I understand that college life can be stressful and overwhelming and I encourage you to reach out if you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers free, confidential counseling services. You can reach them 24/7 at the hotline 212 443 9999 or during walk in hours at 726 Broadway, 344. Find out more at [http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html](http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html)

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:** Students are expected—often required—to build their work on that of other people, just as professional researchers and writers do. Giving credit to someone whose work has helped you is expected; in fact, not to cite the work is a crime. Plagiarism is the severest form of academic fraud. More specifically, plagiarism is presenting as your own a phrase, sentence or passage from another writer’s work without using quotation marks; presenting as your own a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work; presenting as your own facts or ideas gathered from the Internet; another student’s work with your name on it; a purchased paper or “research” from a term paper mill. Other forms of academic fraud include “collaborating” between two or more students who then submit the same paper under their individual names; submitting the same paper for two or more courses without the knowledge of all teachers involved; giving permission to another student to use your work for a class. Consult the Purdue OWL website for accepted forms of documentation. When in doubt about whether your acknowledgement is proper and adequate, ask me.

The academic community takes plagiarism very seriously. In any instance of academic dishonesty in a student paper, students will be asked to explain the circumstances of the work called into question. When plagiarism is confirmed, this can result in failure of the essay, failure of the course, a hearing with the Dean and/or expulsion from the university.

**Rewrites:** You are allowed one rewrite during the semester. Revision guidelines are available on NYU Classes; please consult these guidelines before you begin the process of rewriting an assignment for the class.
THE WRITING CENTER:
I encourage all my students to visit the NYU Writing Center. Here is the WC website: https://nyu.mywconline.com. Make appointments well in advance, as the Writing Center is an especially popular destination around draft-time. The schedule is already online, and appointments usually begin during the second week of classes.

Week 1: Introduction to the course. What are our stories about school? What does it mean to be a teacher, or a student? In class: Barthelme’s “The School”; Huck Finn (brief excerpt).

Week 2: Questions of Innocence and Experience
Reading: Louisa May Alcott, Little Men (Chapter 2: The Boys; 17 pages)
Charles Baxter, “Gryphon” (17 pages)
Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum, “Accomplice” (18 pages)
Ha Jin, “In the Kindergarten” (8 pages)
Short response #1 due.

Week 3: The Teacher as Savior, the School as Salvation
Readings: Don Delillo, “The Angel Esmeralda” (20 pages)
James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues” (25 pages)
Dale Russakoff’s “Schooled” (New Yorker May 19, 2014; 15 pages)
Screening: excerpts from Freedom Writers

Week 4: High School Horror Show
Reading: Stephen King, Carrie, Part 1: Blood Sport (81 pages)
Rebecca Solnit, “Abolish High School” (4 pages)
Screening part 1: Carrie (1976)
Assignment due: Short response #2

Week 5: Privilege in the Academy
Reading: Tobias Wolff, “Smorgasbord” (17 pages)
Sherman Alexie, “Indian Education” (10 pages)
bell hooks, “Confronting Class in the Classroom” (14 pages)
Selected articles about subject position & class gap in American colleges.
Screening part 2: Carrie

Week 6: Elsewhere: Our Experience of College
Reading: Z. Z. Packer, “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (available online; 52 pages)
John Updike, “The Christian Roommate” (16 pages)

Assignment due: Close Reading Essay

**Week 7:** School Drama  
Reading: David Mamet, *Oleanna* (96 pages)  
Screening part 1: *Whiplash*

**Week 8:** Adult Education  
Reading: Lorrie Moore, “Terrific Mother” (40 pages)  
Charles Baxter, “Fenstad’s Mother” (14 pages)  
Screening Part 2: *Whiplash*

Assignment due: Short response # 3

**Week 9:** School and Nature  
Reading: Lynn Barber, *An Education* (excerpts)  
Nicholson Baker, “Fortress of Tedium: What I Learned as a Substitute Teacher” (available online; 8 pages)  
Sherman Alexie, “Superman and Me” (available online; 4 pages)  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature” (43 pages)

**Week 10:** Schools for Superpowers  
Reading: Lev Grossman, *The Magicians* (pages 1-86)  
Pat Pinsent, “The Education of a Wizard: Harry Potter and His Predecessors” (23 pages)

Assignment due: Short response #4

**Week 11:** Workshop  
Reading: Rick Moody, “Primary Sources”  
Lev Grossman, *The Magicians* (pages 87-165)  
Presentation of research questions.  
Screening Part 1: *Moonlight*

Assignment due: Annotated bibliography.

**Week 12:** Group work  
Reading: Reviews, interviews and critical articles related to *Moonlight*.  
Small groups will discuss the final day’s school story film fest.

Screening Part 2: *Moonlight*

Assignment due: Short response #5

**Week 13**: Workshop

Peer review & editing workshop.
Reading: Re-read and annotate primary texts.
Assignment due: Rough draft of final project.

**Week 14**: Last day of class.
Final papers due.
Readings.
Screenings curated by student groups.