Short Fiction Final Exam—Short Discussion (Open Book, Open Notes, & Open Internet Access Permitted). . Choose nine (9) of the following questions to demonstrate your reading comprehension, writing abilities, knowledge of literary and rhetorical devices/theory, and ability to synthesize information to craft substantive, engaging critical insights. All students are required to provide an answer to the reflection prompt evaluating your participation this semester. 1. Use MLA style—original questions must precede your responses. 2. Answer questions in any sequence, but you should consider how you order your responses for overall effect. 3. Omit the Works Cited page. Russell Banks—"Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story” What is an unreliable narrator? How does Ron prove himself one? What details can we look to in the narrative that reify this idea? How do we determine whose account of a story or events are accurate, trustworthy? Relate, specifically, how an idea or skill from this course will aid in future your assessments of the character of others? Donald Barthelme – “The School” Revision requires cutting all excess content and language to control meaning for the reader. How does Barthelme incorporate the most essential elements and events for effect? Select a passage to demonstrate a new technique in his work and how you can also incorporate this skill in another course? Rick Bass – “The Hermit's Story” “The Hermit’s Story” presents a frame story rife with the five components of imagery. Select one image from the initial, outer story that has a parallel in the magical, inner story. How do the sensory images Bass limns remind the reader of the essence of what it means to be human in this world? Richard Bausch – “The Fireman's Wife” Before Jan states or thinks her desire to leave Martin, how—either via speech or actions—does Bausch signal this eventuality to the reader? Although negative capability is a literary term, how does the term apply to Jan? How does the concept apply to all our lives and what might we conclude as a result? Amy Bloom – “Silver Water” Rose and Violet’s relationship as siblings and allies seems to come from a place of unconditional love and acceptance—and each willing to face their perspective on reality directly. Provide an example illustrates this dynamic. Does the family’s candor make finding an expert resource such as Walker more or less difficult? How can individuals determine when to accept or reject the advice or treatment or both from some authority figures who are clearly out of their depth? Robert Olen Butler – “Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot” The husband-turned-parrot returns to torment himself further in his afterlife with the same obsessions he suffered as a mortal. Why would he choose to subject himself to the anxieties of his human life? How does the parrot’s limited vocabulary reinforce the concept that a limited vocabulary may impede communicating the nuances of complex ideas and emotions? Beyond limited vocabularies, does lacking emotional intelligence mean relationship failure is inevitable? Sandra Cisneros - Never Marry a Mexican In “Never Married a Mexican,” Cisneros centers the concerns women of divided loyalty who have successfully assimilated into American culture, yet consciously and unconsciously act in ways that demonstrate internalized racism. How do individuals with competing intersectional identities build lives and community amid “familial and cultural pressures as well as traditional gender roles” (Yudin & Kanoza 2001)? Using the narrative, discuss the ways the ways in which individuals attempt to exert control—and how those efforts succeed and fail. Ron Hansen – “Wickedness” Often, weather forms the basis for small-talk and inconsequential pleasantries. How does Hansen force readers to engage with the cataclysmic events of this 1888 blizzard in Nebraska? Provide an example from “Wickedness” where seemingly inconsequential decisions lead to devastating results? Does everything—indeed—happen for a reason? Why does Hansen force the reader to contemplate common existential questions and statements such as “Why do bad thing happen to good people?” and “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle.” About what or to whom does Hansen’s title apply? Jamaica Kincaid – “Girl” In “Girl” Jamaica Kincaid uses a highly specific narrative voice to issue a catalog of imperatives for her daughter—with only two rebuttals from her child (i.e., noted in italics). Although the reader must assume the mother possesses positive motives, is the mother also complicit in the continued subjugation of her daughter? Why is the mother choosing exerting authority and control by means of respectability politics? In what ways do parents and guardians possibly limit the possibilities for their children by failing to examine culture and tradition? What legacy are we unconsciously bequeathing to future generations? Jhumpa Lahiri – “A Temporary Matter” Lahiri’s deft use of characterization for Shoba and Shukumar makes each of their escalating disclosures feel believable. How does each character’s behaviors show vulnerability while also foregrounding the chasm between the couple? Based upon this short story, how would you define closure? Moreover, given that characterization employs speech, appearance, thoughts, and actions, should we conclude that actions supersede all else? Reginald McKnight - The Kind of Light That Shines on Texas Reginald McKnight limns how people and communities who would never describe themselves as bad people actively use privilege and authority to impede the education of others. Provide examples of how teachers entrusted to bestow knowledge complicate Clint’s life. Limn the ways in which the protagonist must expend additional energy to acquire the same learning in environments hostile to his existence. What implications does this story have for campus life at SMU? Susan Minot – “Lust” The episodic nature of Susan Minot’s “Lust” works against typical notions of the Freytag model, yet the structure produces a frangible unity. Thus, how does Minot’s use of style, tone, and diction craft a kind of narrative arc, which shows the narrator as a dynamic character who becomes decidedly cynical? We must wonder—if no one discusses the either/or-both/and nature of love and lust, or if we merely connote sex with love—how can women like the narrator conceptualize ideas such as objectification and agency and pleasure? Rick Moody – “Boys” In this bildungsroman, Moody condenses thirty years into a straightforward, chronological narrative. How does the writer make use of locale, setting, and milieu while still maintaining narrative tension? Why would the author present this collapsing of time? How does Moody’s use of gerunds (i.e., -ing words) create verisimilitude, mimicking the nature of daily life? And does this effect compare with the lived experience of humanity vis-à-vis the passage of time? Tim O'Brien – “The Things They Carried” In O’Brien’s “The Things They Carried,” the writer explores the liminal space between literal and figurative. How do the characters’ choices of what to carry function as talismans, escape, and survival? How does this Vietnam narrative provide possible insights to the psychological states of veterans as they return to civilian status. In a universal sense, are people cognizant of “the things they carr[y]” as we interact with others and build our lives? Daniel Orozco – “Orientation” Orozco’s deadpan narrator guides a new employee through onboarding. Identify an instruction or explanation the narrator provides that says more about him than the situation he’s referencing. Now, how does the previous simultaneously advance the plot? Provide an example from your life that illustrates the same concept. May we draw any conclusions about contemporary work culture in the United States? Leslie Marmon Silko – “Tony's Story” In Silko’s story, we experience the difference between talk and action—especially when consequences only exist within bureaucratic structures. Analyze how and why Silko demands that the reader witness the graphic nature of unchecked prejudice and power. In what ways does Silko’s narrative (e.g., juxtaposing tribal cultural beliefs vs. more modern ways) shift the reader’s experience of the story? Is Silko’s demarcation between talk and action a means of indicting the larger culture’s seeming apathy about abuse in the face of overwhelming evidence? Amy Tan – “Two Kinds” In “Two Kinds” Tan explores vicarious notions of the American Dream and American exceptionalism. How do these foundational myths complicate parent/guardian relationships with children? In what ways does our fascination with media conflate talent with the work, dedication, perseverance, and luck required to perfect a skill—and also succeed (N.B. distinctio required)? How does Tan’s use of dialogue create immediacy while simultaneously highlighting the ways in which families fumble in their efforts toward authentic communication? Alice Walker – “Nineteen Fifty-five” Draw a parallel (i.e., a minimum of three instances) involving the throughline of cultural appropriation in Alice Walker’s cultural appropriation. How does Traynor seek to ameliorate these issues in his relationship with Gracie Mae? If borrowing technique, style, and content to craft new works remains commonplace within the arts, how do we distinguish between the iterative but respectful impulse and intentional erasure? How do our personal biases and historical ignorance continue to perpetuate these transgressions? Mandatory: To begin, by means of incorporating each of the following: attendance, participation in class discussions, responding to discussion boards, visiting during office hours, online peer editing, writing center visits, and interacting with peers—assign yourself a realistic participation numerical and numerical grade. Then, assess how you may have wasted time, energy, and money by avoiding engaging with the knowledge/experience of face-to-face instruction at a prestigious liberal arts institution. Next, briefly identify how you intend to transform the remainder of your stay at SMU into something more than a quest for a diploma. To conclude, discuss the importance of becoming a lifelong learner in an age of rapid obsolescence.