

V. Sample Syllabi

I. Course title: **Science Fiction**

(to fulfill an undergraduate second year general literature requirement)

Course description:

This general science fiction course will focus on four questions:

1. Science fiction is the literature of change. How does each work treat change? Among the kinds of change to consider are evolution, devolution, education, difference, innovation, etc.
2. Science fiction imagines situations that are estranged from our world and that are also reflections of the world in which they were written. What concerns of the time and place in which it was written are reflected in a work? What present concerns do you see reflected in the work? What significant differences from the real world does the work portray and what is their metaphorical or thematic importance?
3. Science fiction is in conversation with itself. That is, each work answers back to the works written before in some way. How is each work different from previous works in the course? How is it similar to them?
4. This is the unifying thematic question. The particular works of science fiction upon which this course focuses all explore the question of what it means to be human. What does each work have to say about what it means to be human? For instance, where is the dividing line between human and non-human: animal, machine, artificial intelligence, created being, alien, clone, etc. What are the ethical, philosophical, and/or moral implications the work raises concerning these issues? How are these questions relevant in metaphorical terms to the world we live in?

The text will be *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction*, the stories assigned chronologically, approximately three per class. In addition, we will be reading *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (*Bladerunner*) by Philip K. Dick, and *The Mount* by Carol Emshwiller.

For each class students should write responses to two of the four questions above reflecting their careful reading of the assignment due that day. In addition, students will take a midterm and a final and write two 5-page papers based on the daily responses.

II. Course title: **The Classic Science Fiction Short Story**

These are suggestions for an upper-division survey course that should attract students with an interest in the genre from departments across campus. The readings may be reduced to only those pairings that most appeal to the instructor, which would slow the pace to accommodate less experienced readers such as first-year college students. A smaller selection of pairings might also be chosen in order to make room for sf criticism, novels, television shows or films, in which case the title would be adjusted to reflect the added media and materials.

The goal is to introduce the classic sf short story without oversimplifying its diversity. Readings and discussions will emphasize how stories on similar themes have been told in very different ways. Some of the suggested pairings also show that many works from earlier eras have affinities (of viewpoint, style, characterization, etc.) with more recent sf. The course is designed to raise multiple issues about science fiction; it is not intended to build towards any one overarching definition of—or prescription for—the genre.

To focus on contrast is a good approach for teachers who prefer not to cover every decade consecutively but who do want students to absorb literary-historical contrasts and contexts. Students closely read two contrasting stories each session, immersing themselves in the kind of textual details that advance their critical skills but also inviting teachers to provide background material on each author and topic presented that day. An advantage of setting up the class by using contrasts of various kinds is that paper topics of the compare-and-contrast variety will come into sharp and rapid focus for teachers and for students, who will learn how to approach this writing task as they read and discuss works in tandem.

Twelve and a half weeks of sessions are given, leaving time in a 14-15 week semester for review classes and in-class testing. The syllabus assumes that classes meet twice a week for 80-90 minutes per session. The first two weeks introduce some influential texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while the last few cover the most recent stories printed in the *Anthology*; but as in the earliest sessions, many of those are assigned in tandem with texts from a different era. Overall the approach is more through topics than through chronology.

Note: The only textbook needed to teach the class as described below is *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction*. All the stories in the volume are assigned; in two sessions, three texts rather than two are considered.

- Week 1 **progenitors—the French “voyage extraordinaire” versus the British scientific romance:** Jules Verne, Excerpt from *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864); H.G. Wells, “The Star” (1897)
- poisoned love—science and sexual attraction/repulsion:** Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844); Fritz Leiber, “Coming Attraction” (1950)
- Week 2 **mother and son—scientific romances from two eras:** E.M. Forster, “The Machine Stops” (1909); Brian Aldiss, “Supertoys Last All Summer Long” (1969)
- three important styles:** Ray Bradbury, “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950); Arthur C. Clarke, “The Sentinel” (1951); Ursula K. LeGuin, “Nine Lives” (1969)
- Week 3 **postapocalyptic insights:** Theodore Sturgeon, “Thunder and Roses” (1947); Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds” (1983)
- sf parables of motherhood:** Judith Merril, “That Only a Mother” (1948); Pamela Zoline, “The Heat Death of the Universe” (1967)
- Week 4 **offbeat tales of space travel:** Robert Sheckley, “Specialist” (1953); Stanislaw Lem, “Seventh Voyage” from *The Star Diaries* (1971)
- animals in space:** Clifford Simak, “Desertion” (1944); Cordwainer Smith, “The Game of Rat and Dragon” (1955)
- Week 5 **alien sexuality:** Catherine L. Moore, “Shambleau” (1933); James Tiptree, Jr., “And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill’s Side” (1972)
- benighted astronauts:** J.G. Ballard, “Cage of Sand” (1963); Samuel R. Delany, “Aye, and Gomorrah. . .” (1967)
- Week 6 **1950s sf noir and 1980s cyberpunk:** Alfred Bester, “Fondly Fahrenheit” (1954); William Gibson, “Burning Chrome” (1981)
- the New Wave’s spectacular stylists:** R.A. Lafferty, “Slow Tuesday Night” (1965); Harlan Ellison, “‘Repent, Harlequin!’ Said the Ticktockman” (1965)
- Week 7 **rethinking human history:** William Tenn, “The Liberation of Earth” (1953); John Kessel, “Invaders” (1990)
- ecological crisis and survival:** Frank Herbert, “Seed Stock” (1970); John Varley, “Air Raid” (1977)

- Week 8 **rethinking sexual myths:** Leslie F. Stone, “The Conquest of Gola” (1931); Frederik Pohl, “Day Million” (1966); Joanna Russ, “When It Changed” (1972)
- positronic versus folkloric robots:** Isaac Asimov, “Reason” (1941); Avram Davidson, “The Golem” (1955)
- Week 9 **first person singular—sf and solipsism:** Robert A. Heinlein, “All You Zombies—” (1959); Greg Egan, “Closer” (1992)
- through the eyes of a child:** Eileen Gunn, “Computer Friendly” (1989); Geoff Ryman, “Everywhere” (1999)
- Week 10 **sf’s twisting plots:** Philip K. Dick, “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale” (1966); Kate Wilhelm, “Forever Yours, Anna” (1987)
- interplanetary, light and dark:** Stanley G. Weinbaum, “A Martian Odyssey” (1934); James Patrick Kelley, “Think Like a Dinosaur”(1995)
- Week 11 **strange encounters:** Nancy Kress, “Out of All Them Bright Stars” (1985); Misha Nogha, “Chippoke Na Gomi”(1989)
- tales of chastened embodiment:** Robert Silverberg, “Passengers” (1968); Pat Cadigan, “Pretty Boy Crossover” (1986)
- Week 12 **unreliable narrators:** Carol Emshwiller, “Abominable” (1980); Bruce Sterling, “We See Things Differently” (1989)
- sf metamorphoses:** Edmond Hamilton, “The Man Who Evolved” (1931); Charles Stross, “Rogue Farm” (2003)
- final class **sf parables of reading:** Gene Wolfe, “Useful Phrases” (1992); Ted Chang, “Exhalation” (2008)

III. Course title: **The Major Themes of Science Fiction**

This is a survey of science fiction focusing on major themes of the genre. The readings are organized into one-to-two week thematic modules; a 15-week semester can accommodate most or all of the modules, though if the stories are supplemented with novels and/or films, the instructor will need to scale back the number of units included. Shorter terms will need to work with either fewer modules or fewer stories.

The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction is organized into nine thematic units (see Thematic Table of Contents, pp. viii-x): Alien Encounters, Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse, Artificial/Post-Human Life-forms, Computers and Virtual Reality, Evolution and Environment, Gender and Sexuality, Time Travel and Alternative History, Utopias/Dystopias, and War and Conflict. Modules based on these themes may be clustered so that they dovetail fruitfully into one another: Evolution and Environment, for example, would fit neatly with Artificial/Post-Human Life-forms, which could then segue into Computers and Virtual Reality. Alternatively, the modules on Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse, Utopias/Dystopias, and War and Conflict can be grouped to highlight issues of social antagonism and breakdown.

The stories within each module may be arranged chronologically, to show the development of the theme over time, or connected via sub-themes. This syllabus follows the latter approach. Each pairing represents a single class session of roughly 75 minutes.

Module 1: Alien Encounters

Mind Parasites: C.L. Moore, “Shambleau” (1933) and Robert Silverberg, “Passengers” (1968)

Alien Wonders: Stanley Weinbaum, “A Martian Odyssey” (1934) and Arthur C. Clarke, “The Sentinel” (1951)

Ethical Dilemmas: Robert Sheckley, “Specialist” (1953) and James Patrick Kelly, “Think Like a Dinosaur” (1995)

Communication Problems: Nancy Kress, “Out of All Them Bright Stars” (1985) and Gene Wolfe, “Useful Phrases” (1992)

Module 2: Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse

With a Bang, with a Whimper: H.G. Wells, “The Star” (1897) and J.G. Ballard, “The Cage of Sand” (1963)

Nuclear Aftermaths: Ray Bradbury, “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950) and Misha Nogha, “Chippoke Na Gomi” (1989)

Social Breakdown: Fritz Leiber, “Coming Attraction” (1950) and Octavia E. Butler, “Speech Sounds” (1983)

Module 3: Artificial/Posthuman Life-forms

Poisoned Relationships: Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844) and Brian Aldiss, “Super-Toys Last All Summer Long” (1969)

“Rational” Machines: Isaac Asimov, “Reason” (1940), Alfred Bester, “Fondly Fahrenheit” (1954), and Avram Davidson, “The Golem” (1955)

Becoming Other: Ursula K. Le Guin, “Nine Lives” (1969) and Ted Chiang, “Exhalation” (2008)

Module 4: Computers and Virtual Reality

Commodified Selves: Philip K. Dick, “We Can Remember It For You Wholesale” (1966) and William Gibson, “Burning Chrome” (1982)

Virtual Lives: Pat Cadigan, “Pretty Boy Crossover” (1986) and Eileen Gunn, “Computer Friendly” (1989)

Module 5: Evolution and Environment

Abandoning the Human: Edmond Hamilton, “The Man Who Evolved” (1931) and Clifford D. Simak, “Desertion” (1944)

Hybridity: Frank Herbert, “Seed Stock” (1970) and Charles Stross, “Rogue Farm” (2003)

Module 6: Gender and Sexuality

Battle of the Sexes: Leslie F. Stone, “The Conquest of Gola” (1931) and Joanna Russ, “When It Changed” (1972)

Posthuman Love Stories: Frederik Pohl, “Day Million” (1966) and Greg Egan, “Closer” (1992)

Gender Frustration: Samuel R. Delany, “Aye, and Gomorrah...” (1967) and Pamela Zoline, “The Heat Death of the Universe” (1967)

Loving the Alien: James Tiptree, Jr., “And I Awoke and Found Me Here on th Cold Hill’s Side” (1972) and Carol Emshwiller, “Abominable” (1980)

Module 7: Time Travel and Alternative History

Time Loops: Robert A. Heinlein, ““ All You Zombies—”” (1959), Stanislaw Lem, “The Seventh Voyage” (1971), and Kate Wilhelm, “Forever Yours, Anna” (1987)

Raiding the Past, Invading the Future: John Varley, “Air Raid” (1977) and John Kessel, “Invaders” (1990)

Module 8: Utopias/Dystopias

Urban Enclosures: E.M. Forster, “The Machine Stops” (1909) and Harlan Ellison, “‘Repent, Harlequin!’ Said the Ticktockman” (1965)

Things to Do in Utopia: R.A. Lafferty, “Slow Tuesday Night” (1965) and Geoff Ryman, “Everywhere” (1999)

Module 9: War and Conflict

Nuclear War and Its Aftermath: Theodore Sturgeon, “Thunder and Roses” (1947) and Judith Merrill, “That Only a Mother” (1948)

Cultural and Inter-Species Conflict: William Tenn, “The Liberation of Earth” (1953), Cordwainer Smith, “The Game of Rat and Dragon” (1955), and Bruce Sterling, “We See Things Differently” (1989)

Science Fiction (undergraduate full-year course)

This course is an introduction to some of the history, theory, and representative works and authors of science fiction (sf) literature. From early novels such as H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) to stories published into the twenty-first century, the course will examine such types of sf stories as speculations about alien encounters, stories about new technologies and artificial intelligences, stories about technology's effect on changing definitions of the human, and stories of apocalyptic speculation. The course aims to examine science fiction as a genre with its own specific history and conventions, at the same time as it will consider some of the ways in which contemporary Western culture has adopted science fiction as a particularly powerful descriptive discourse.

course format: two terms, with 2-hour lectures and two-hour seminars that alternate weekly

Required reading:

The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction, ed. Arthur B. Evans et al. (WASF)

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*

Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot*

Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers*

Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

James Tiptree, Jr., *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever*

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

Jack Womack, *Random Acts of Senseless Violence*

Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Cory Doctorow, *Eastern Standard Tribe*

Term 1

week 1-2: H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)
H.G. Wells, "The Star" (1897; WASF)

week 3-4: Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot* (1950)
Davidson, "The Golem" (1955; WASF)

week 5-6: Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End* (1953)
Cordwainer Smith, "The Game of Rat and Dragon" (1955)

week 7-8: Robert A. Heinlein, *Starship Troopers* (1959)
Arthur C. Clarke, "The Sentinel" (1951; WASF)

week 9-10: Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
Brian Aldiss, "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long" (1969; WASF)

week 11-12: *Wesleyan Anthology 1*
Editors, "Introduction"
Stone, "The Conquest of Gola" (1931)

Sturgeon, "Thunder and Roses" (1947)
Judith Merrill, "That Only a Mother" (1948)
Heinlein, "All You Zombies –" (1959)
Dick, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (1966)
Le Guin, "Nine Lives" (1969)
Recommended: Moore, "Shambleau" (1933); Simak, "Desertion"
(1944); Leiber, "Coming Attraction" (1950); Pohl, "Day Million"
(1966)

Term 2

- week 1-2:** James Tiptree, Jr., *Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* (2004)
"And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side" (1972)
"The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973)
"The Women Men Don't See" (1973)
"Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!" (1976)
"Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976)
"The Screwfly Solution" (1977)
"We Who Stole the *Dream*" (1978)
Andy Huang, "Doll Face" (2005) (<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zl6hNj1uOkY>>)
- week 3-4:** William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)
Pat Cadigan, "Pretty Boy Crossover" (1986; *WASF*)
- week 5-6:** Jack Womack, *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* (1993)
Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds" (1983; *WASF*)
- week 7-8:** Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998)
Geoff Ryman, "Everywhere" (1999; *WASF*)
- week 9-10:** Cory Doctorow, *Eastern Standard Tribe* (2003)
Charles Stross, "Rogue Farm" (2003; *WASF*)
- week 11-12:** *Wesleyan Anthology 2*
Russ, "When It Changed" (1972)
Gibson, "Burning Chrome" (1982)
Kress, "Out of All Them Bright Stars" (1985)
Egan, "Closer" (1992)
Kelly, "Think Like a Dinosaur" (1995)
Chiang, "Exhalation" (2008)
Recommended: Varley, "Air Raid" (1977); Emshwiller, "Abominable" (1980);
Gunn, "Computer Friendly" (1989); Kessel, "Invaders" (1990)