English 200, Microfiction: An Introduction to the Very Short Story

**Description**

Narrative fiction is traditionally divided into two major categories, the novel and the short story, with the transitional category of the novella serving to cover very long short stories or very short novels. But over the last thirty years or so there has been a publishing boom in what some critics consider a new genre of the very short story, variously labeled as “microfiction,” “flash fiction,” or “sudden fiction.” This new form seems to be an indirect descendant of such ancient literary types as the parable, fable, fabliau, and myth, on the one hand, and a relative of such nonliterary modern forms as the pop song, music video, TV commercial, cartoon, and comic strip, on the other. We will read, discuss, and write about a series of critical essays on the topic and a large number of very short stories (most of them under one page in length) to analyze their characteristics and to consider their relationship to some of these other very short forms.

**Texts**

Steve Moss, ed. *The World’s Shortest Stories* (0762403004)

Steve Moss and John M. Daniel, eds. *World’s Shortest Stories of Love and Death* (0762406984)


The texts are available from the UMD campus bookstore, but can usually be found even cheaper at online stores. Please use the ISBN numbers to be sure you’re getting the right books. We will also be reading a series of critical essays on microfiction: these will be made available online through the course site.

**Course Requirements**

Your course grade will be based on four major components:

1. two short (500-word) essays analyzing the readings and criticism, each submitted as a rough draft and then as a revised final version (30% of your grade);
2. participation in three online discussions (30%);
3. three original microstories, again developed through drafts and revisions (25%);
4. one final essay examination (15%).