

Shipwrecks and Shark Attacks: Personal Narrative vs. Reportage

English 10, Section 63
English Composition
Fall 2003
MW 12:30 – 1:45
Room 168 in 1776 G St.

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John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark* (1778)

Course Description The popular media may have dubbed the summer of 2001 "The Summer of the Shark," but fear of the sea and its minions has been with us for some time now. The knowledge that we were being sized up as prey when we're just going for a swim is enough to keep many of us out of the water. In this course, we will work with accounts of shark attacks and shipwrecks and examine survivors' claims of isolation, despair, vulnerability, and panic as the thematic starting point for our writing. Moreover, we will consider the appropriate uses, as well as the respective strengths and weaknesses, of personal narrative (inherent credibility) and reportage (supposed objectivity).

Course Objectives This course is foremost a composition class. Writing, therefore, is its preeminent focus. As a writing/composition course, this class should 1) increase students' comfort with the writing process, 2) familiarize students with both the review and revision aspects of writing, and 3) exercise students' abilities in writing with a purpose and with an audience in mind. In addition to these primary concerns, students will finish this class with an awareness of critical reading and thinking strategies.

Required Texts Chase, Owen. *The Wreck of the Whaleship Essex*. (Harcourt Brace, 1999)
Crane, Stephen. *"The Open Boat" and Other Stories*. (Dover Thrift Edition, 1993)
García Márquez, Gabriel. *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. (Vintage, 1987)
Philbrick, Nathaniel. *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*. (Penguin, 2000)

Grade Calculation

The student's final course grade will be calculated with the following weights:

- 45% Compositions (9% for each composition)
- 30% Revisions (7.5% for each revision)
- 10% Drafts for peer-review sessions (2.5% for each draft)
- 10% In-class writing, homework
- 5% Attendance

The following grading scale will be used in this class:

A	=	100 – 92
B	=	91 – 83
C	=	82 – 74
D	=	73 – 65
F	=	64 and below

Class Policies

1. **No late work will be accepted!** All drafts, papers, and revisions are due at the beginning of class on the dates listed below.
2. Students are expected to be in class on time for each meeting. However, things that present conflicts with class attendance invariably arise. Therefore, students will have four (4) free days/absences to use as they wish (illness, vacation, sleeping in, etc.), but students will have two (2) percentage points dropped from the attendance component of their grade for any absences beyond the four free days. Continued absences beyond six (6) class meetings can result in the student failing the course. Three (3) late arrivals (after the roll has been called) will count as an absence.
3. Absences do not excuse students from submitting work that is due on the day they happen to be away from class. Anything due on a day a student is absent from class should be in the instructor's mailbox 20 minutes prior to the start of class or given to the instructor in person before the roll is taken.
4. Plagiarism is a serious matter, and the University has set high standards for academic integrity. Therefore, class members should consult the University Code of Academic Integrity to familiarize themselves with this issue and the repercussions associated with any violations. Students can also visit the web site <http://www.gwu.edu/~bulletin/ugrad/unrg.html> for information on academic integrity here at the University.
5. Students should turn off (or leave at home) cell phones and pagers prior to arriving for class.
6. Students wishing to discuss a grade on a paper or assignment should meet with the instructor in his office during office hours. The instructor will not discuss grades in the classroom.

Paper Guidelines

All papers should be typed, double-spaced, and formatted with one-inch margins on all four sides. Paragraphs should begin with a half-inch indentation, and there should *not* be an extra blank line between paragraphs. The papers should have the student's name, the instructor's name, the course title, and the date (in that order) in the upper left-hand corner. Papers should have a header in the upper right-hand corner made up of the student's last name and page number. **All papers should be stapled.** The revision and draft should be fastened with a

paperclip to the composition for final submission. Students should use a fairly standard, legible font (e.g., Times Roman 12 pt. or Arial 11 pt.) when preparing their papers. Gelman Library's "Ready Reference" page has more details and an example. Students can go to <http://www.gwu.edu/gelman/ref/readyref/style.html> and click on the "Modern Language Association (MLA) Format" hypertext link for further clarification.

Course Schedule

Week 1

3 September (W) Introduction to the course, the professor, and the syllabus. Brief in-class writing assignment.

Week 2

8 September (M) Class discussion/review of the in-class writing assignment. In-class activity on writing strategies, goals, and techniques.

10 September (W) **Draft #1 due: Personal Narrative.** Peer review. Class discussion/exercises on purpose and audience.

Week 3

15 September (M) Reserve item: "Storms, Shipwrecks, and Life at Sea" from *Under the Black Flag* by David Cordingly.

17 September (W) **Composition #1 due: Personal Narrative.** Video clips: *Castaway* and *The Lord of the Flies*.

Week 4

22 September (M) *The Wreck of the Whaleship Essex* (pp. 1-51).

24 September (W) **Revision #1 due: Personal Narrative.** *The Wreck of the Whaleship Essex* (pp. 52-106).

Week 5

29 September (M) *In the Heart of the Sea* (pp. xi-91).

1 October (W) **Draft #2 due: Reader Response.** Peer review. *In the Heart of the Sea* (pp. 92-163).

Week 6

6 October (M) *In the Heart of the Sea* (pp. 164-238). Video clip: *Moby Dick: The True Story*.

8 October (W) **Composition #2 due: Reader Response.** Reserve item: "Stephen Crane's Own Story" (pp. 875-84) in *Stephen Crane: Prose and Poetry*.

Week 7

13 October (M) "The Open Boat."

15 October (W) **Revision #2 due: Reader Response.** “The Open Boat.” Video clips: *The Savage Seas*.

Week 8

20 October (M) **Student/teacher conferences.**

22 October (W) **Student/teacher conferences.**

Week 9

27 October (M) **Composition #3 due: Exposition.** Peer review. Class discussion/exercises on definition, classification, and categorization.

29 October (W) Handouts: selections from *Close to Shore* by Michael Capuzzo and the newspaper articles “Captain Fought off Sharks with Knife,” “Shark Kills Bather off Jersey Beach,” and “Dies after Attack by Fish.”

Week 10

3 November (M) **Revision #3 due: Exposition.** Handout: “Jaws!” article from *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Video clips: *The Savage Seas* and *Anatomy of a Shark Bite*.

5 November (W) Handouts: articles on *U.S.S. Indianapolis*. Video clips: *Jaws*, *The Savage Seas*, and *Anatomy of a Shark Bite*.

Week 11

10 November (M) **Draft #4 due: Argument (A).** Peer review. Class discussion on the *S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald*.

12 November (W) Class discussion/exercises on argumentation.

Week 12

17 November (M) **Composition #4 due: Argument (A).** *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*.

19 November (W) *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*.

Week 13

24 November (M) **Revision #4 due: Argument (A).** Further activities/exercises on argumentation.

26 November (W) In-class activities.

Week 14

1 December (M) In-class activities.

3 December (W) **Composition #5 due: Argument (B).** Peer review. In-class activities.

Week 15

8 December (M) **Revision #5 due: Argument (B).** Course wrap-up.