Midterm Exam Study Guide

In this exam, you will encounter several passages from the texts we’ve read as a class. Following each of these passages will be a small set of questions.

The following is a complete list of all the texts that can be covered on the exam:

\* “The First Day” & “The Sunday Following Mother’s Day” by Edward P. Jones

\* “The Captain” by Rattawut Lapcharoensap

\* “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor

\* “Brokeback Mountain” by Annie Proulx

\* “The Semplica Girl Diaries” and “Victory Lap” by George Saunders

\* “Us and Them” by David Sedaris

\* “Love In the Age of Ick” by Diana Joseph

\* “Poetic Manifesto” by Dylan Thomas

\* Poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Li-Young Lee, and Yusef Komanyakaa

\* “The Nature and Aim of Fiction” by Flanner O’Connor

\* “The Elephant in the Village of the Blind” (tale from oral storytelling tradition)

The exam requires you to be able to identify these texts, as well as their authors, by name. In addition, you should be ready to demonstrate close familiarity with the names of characters and the description of important events and ideas depicted in these texts.

The midterm exam will ask you to do several things with *terminology*:

1. Define terms
2. Identify examples of terms in texts, and
3. Interpret or Reflect on passages from texts with terms as your guides

The following is a complete list of all the terms you might be tested on:

* **point of view (pov)**: the perspective from which a story (or any text) is told; used to identify the relationship between the entity/voice speaking and the subjects and events depicted; first-person (I/we); second-person (you/you all); third-person (she/he/it/they);
* **omniscience:** (related to point of view, especially the third-person): all-knowingness; the ability of a narrator to move anywhere in space and time, especially into the thoughts and feelings (into the minds) of a work’s characters; omniscience exists on a spectrum ranging from *total omniscience* (all-knowingness) to an *objective* *point of view* (camera-eye). Between these two ends of the omniscience spectrum exist varying degrees of *limited omniscience* (points of view that demonstrate omniscient abilities, but that restrain the telling of the story in one or more ways.
* **3rd person limited omniscience, central intelligence pov**:a point of view that applies its omniscience to a central character (or characters); in other words, a pov that privileges one (or more) character(s) over the other characters by granting greater access to this character’s existence, especially this character’s mind.
* **Psychic distance**: a point-of-view (perspective) concept dealing with how much or how little the reader has access to a character’s psychological-emotional reality (access to a character’s mind); occurring on a spectrum, *great (vast) psychic distance*, marked by seemingly objective or neutral language, denies the reader access to a character’s mental interiority; on the opposite end of the spectrum, *near psychic distance* (or no psychic distance) immerses the reader in a psychological, emotional, or spiritual reality, marked by vivid language, as experienced by a character. (For review, see excerpt from John Gardner (111) on ‘Modules’. Study how the language patterns (word choice, sentence length and construction) shift from one example to the next.)
* **Tense**: indicated by verb tenses; the tense of a work orients the reader to ‘time’ and the temporal relationship between events.
* **Temporal Distance**: concerning both tense and pov (perspective and time); the distance in time between the occurrence of events and the telling of those events; great (vast) temporal distance exists between a narrator telling a story that happened, say, 60 years prior to the telling; whereas small (no) psychic distance will exist between a narrator events if that narrator is telling events right now, just as they happen; pertinent a narrator/character’s ability to reflect, ponder, and potentially interpret the events depicted.
* **“Telling & Showing”**: a writing principle pertinent to all writing acts and styles that emphasizes the importance of pairing concrete examples with claims (presumed but not shown) to be true; in other words, writing that “tells” makes *claims*, whereas writing that “tells & shows” makes claims and supports them with *evidence*. “Telling” is likely to appear in summary, whereas “showing,” in its most prominent form, is done in scene; however, “telling & showing” cannot be associated exclusively with summary and scene (respectively); these two terms appear on a spectrum, and every writer alternates and blends showing and telling in his or her own style.
* **Voice**: the vivid use of language (word choice, cadence) to depict the personality of a character and/or narrator.
* **Tone (of voice)**: mood, “feel”; a work’s tone is created by at the level of language, through word choice and cadence. The content of a work is not a reliable indicator of tone; tone can take apparently happy content and present it with a grim tone, or oppositely, take grim content and present it comically.

And last, but not least:

* **Subtext:** the unstated (suggested) meaning and implications of a text, created narrative restraint and omission; a reader must “read between the lines” to perceive subtextual significance; in other words, the reader fills in what the work (writer) leaves out; in order to be perceived of, subtext demands that a reader ‘see’ a greater symbolic (or rhetorical) structure below the explicitly stated parts of a work.