

Final Exam (Creative Short Story) Rubric	
Criteria	Short Story Elements
Engagement with Course Materials and Themes (7pts)	Incorporates class themes such as absurdity, inevitability, race, class, gender, gender-bias, patriarchy, coming-of-age experiences, etc. Demonstrates an engagement with characters, settings, and details from course materials that reflects a thorough engagement with the authors we've read: Lesley Nneka Arimah, Leone Ross, Octavia Butler, and Jesmyn Ward
Elements of Magical Realism (7pts)	Clearly utilizes the 5 elements of magical realism that Wendy B. Faris outlines. Incorporates at minimum, three obviously identifiable uses of elements of magical realism: a strong presence of the phenomenal world, an irreducible element of magic, events or feelings that occur and create unsettling doubts for the reader, merging realms (living vs. ghostly, reality vs. supernatural), and/or disruptions of conventional conceptualizations of time, space, or identity.
Story Development (6pts)	Plot does not have to be linear or chronological, but it must be cohesive. Story is well-developed and has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Treatment of character from course story is thoughtful and reflects an understanding and engagement of the story in which they were introduced
Formatting, Grammar and Mechanics (5pts)	12pt, TNR font, 1" margins, single-spaced heading, include citation for the story the character you're referencing as the last line in the heading, includes an original story title, and contains few or typos

SaMiah Washington
Professor Little
GS 170
20 March 2024

Arimah, Lesley Nneka. "What Is a Volcano." *What It Means When a Man Falls From the Sky*, pp. 201–212.

Arimah, Lesley Nneka. "What It Means When a Man Falls From the Sky." *What It Means When A Man Falls From the Sky*, pp. 151–174.

Butler, Octavia E., and Alan Giana. *The Evening and the Morning and the Night*. Pulphouse Publishing, 1991.

It Takes a Village to Kill a Child

It starts with a child born to two young parents in the small rural Caribbean island of Keylani. Her parents had tried for years to conceive but had ultimately accepted that due to fertility issues, children just weren't in the cards for them. That's when the girl's mother, Aiyani fell ill. Upon visiting Niobe, the island's eldest healer, midwife, and mother to all, Ayani was informed that she had finally been successful in her attempt at creating life. The old woman sat her down, performed a thorough examination and once it was completed she cautioned her on the difficulties of raising a baby girl. At the end of the visit Niobe haphazardly joked that this miracle child may be the island's once in a generation treasure. However, Ayani was simply happy to finally become a mother. And six and a half months later her baby girl was born.

Though the island was only home to 632 people, with the child being the 633rd, the girl was adored by all who met her. It quickly became apparent that the child wasn't like most of the other village children her age. As an infant she rarely cried and often entertained herself by observing the interactions between those around her. Her father Olu often speculated that her curiosity would take her very far once she began her formal education. Her mother however only wished that the child have a long life full of happiness. Though the child had yet to manifest any extracting capabilities Olu held fast to his dreams that she would eventually become an accomplished Healer after completing an apprenticeship with elder Niobe. However, the child had yet to develop any skills in extraction upon completing primary school. While most of her peers who had already developed their extraction types had advanced to secondary school with the knowledge of their future careers, the girl found herself stuck in the general studies track.

Though most students in general studies tended to let their motivations dwindle at the realization that they are destined to remain civilians, the girl remained eager, driven by her curiosity.

Eventually, the summer before her final year the girl was summoned by Niobe. Unsure of why the elder would want to see her, she rushed to the woman's home in the center of town.

"Do you know why I've called you here?" Niobe called to the girl before she could even enter the small canopy.

"No Ma'am" the girl replied, letting herself in and joining the woman at the dining room table.

"You're in need of a mentor are you not?" the woman replied without looking up from the mixture she rhythmically concocted.

"General studies students aren't granted mentors ma'am" the girl replied gently.

"My dear, what makes you think anything about you is 'general'?" the woman exclaimed as she pointed her worn pestle at the girl.

"Well I have no capabilities Elder Niobe"

"Child you are more capable than you know. Return to me once you've graduated and then tell me what you do not have." And with the wave of her weathered hand she dismissed the girl.

Though she didn't wish to doubt her elder, the girl was certain that Niobe was mistaken about her. Unlike her father, the girl didn't have many elaborate dreams for her life. She was more than content with the idea of living her life as a civilian like her parents. The one thing the girl wanted more than anything else though was to one day have a love as true as theirs.

One day while traveling into town to shop for groceries, the girl encountered a familiar face. Walking among the many shoppers of the market the girl saw a classmate of hers, Isla, the only other student aside from herself in the general studies course that actually cared about learning. She always admired Isla, finding her work ethic inspiring and her passionate demeanor comforting, plus she wasn't too bad on the eyes either. Before she knew it the girl was walking right up and introducing herself. The two quickly became friends, bonding over their experience in the general studies track. They made plans to hang out and soon found themselves spending the entire summer together. Eventually, they began dating and entered their final year of secondary school as a couple.

Throughout the year the girl heeded Elder Niobe's words and tried to remain vigilant of any changes she may be experiencing. However, this was hard to do when she was so unaware of what signs to look for that may indicate any developing capabilities. After going so long without any, the girl couldn't even imagine herself as an Extractor. Despite her best efforts she found herself questioning Niobe thinking to herself even if the midwife was correct about her what made Niobe so sure that she was destined to be a healer, what if she manifested the ability to extract a person's personality abnormalities, instead of their diseases and ailments. Could she really see herself becoming an enforcer? Would she even want to?

After some time the girl eventually let go of these seemingly irrational concerns, focusing instead on making the most of her final year of school and spending as much time as possible with Isla whom she'd grown to love. They eventually decided to take their relationship to the next step devising a plan to spend at least one romantic night together before they graduated and were forced to join the strenuous search for employment as civilians.

Once the night came around, the girl did everything in her power to make sure it went smoothly. She ensured that her and Isla had the canopy to themselves and that everything was organic and comfortable. Yet what the girl didn't know was that this night would change everything. Just as soon as the two had initiated their intimate night something strange began to happen, as if a physical manifestation of their connection, a bright golden thread as thin as a spider's web appeared connecting the girl's hearts. Slowly, the thread detached itself from Isla and coiled its way deep into the girl's core. Once the thread was no longer visible the girl could have sworn she felt a flash of something right behind her eyes but as quickly as she felt it it had disappeared.

"What was that just now?" Isla exhaled her voice barely above a murmur.

"Was that me? Did I just-" The girl couldn't even finish her thought aloud.

But as if reading her mind Isla answered: "No, that couldn't have been your capability manifesting. I've never seen an extraction that looked like that before. I've never seen *anything* like that before."

"Then what else could it have been? Do you feel any different?" Isla paused her whole body going stiff.

"Yeah I do. But I don't know how to explain it."

“Please try” the girl pleaded but then the two just sat in silence. They sat so long that the girl wondered if Isla had even heard her. Then eventually Isla shifted.

“I feel lighter, it's as if you took away my worries, like all of my deepest thoughts no longer exist.” Then she stared off into space before eventually deciding to head home promising to call the girl later.

The next day the girl sat her parents down and broke the news to them claiming that she had manifested her extraction capabilities and that she assumed she was destined to become an enforcer. Her father could barely contain his excitement while her mother was more concerned about her wellbeing and asked about Isla. She warned about the dangers of untrained extraction and demanded that she and Isla make a visit to Elder Niobe. Later that day both girls sat uncomfortably in Niobe's canopy, bustling with several of her apprentices, awkwardly explaining the details of their romantic night. Eventually, after the explanation was over, the elder approached the girls and ran a full inspection on each of them then upon concluding she dismissed Isla to return home with a clear bill of health. Once Isla was gone Niobe turned to the remaining girl asking: “Do you still believe yourself incapable?” and when the girl remained silent: “You're right you aren't capable of extraction”.

“But ma'am-” the midwife held up a finger and glared at the girl silently cutting her off.

With her finger still in the air she explained “You aren't capable of extraction because you aren't an Extractor. You're a Keeper, specifically you are a Secret Keeper. I told Ayani you'd be a once in a generation treasure. Return tomorrow and I'll teach you everything you must know.” And with that she gave a wave of dismissal and the girl left speechless.

Overnight rumors spread of the girl's newly acquired ability and eventually every last one of the other 632 people on the island of Keylani had heard at least one version of the story. The most popular version being that anyone the girl is sexually intimate with has all of their innermost secrets extracted. The next morning on her way to meet with Niobe, the girl got a first hand account of the different public opinions of her and her new found manifestation. Some of the villagers heckled her as she walked through the town asking her to demonstrate her extraction for them while others avoided even crossing her path afraid that just being in her vicinity would suddenly make her aware of their many secrets. The girl ignored them all, finding patience and tolerance deep within herself until finally she arrived at Elder Niobe's canopy.

For months the girl studied under Elder Niobe, learning more and more about what it meant to be a Secret Keeper and how her capabilities work. “Luckily for you I have been graced with a life long enough to have seen the manifestation of one other Secret Keeper prior to you unfortunately though” the old woman pauses for a moment then let out a deep sigh continuing “unfortunately, Secret Keepers don’t tend to have very long lifespans. The one before you died when she was around your age, possibly younger.”

“How did she die?” The girl asked, feeling a deep and unexplainable sorrow in the pit of her stomach.

“Killed.” the old woman says simply “If you haven't noticed people don’t take too kindly to the idea of someone knowing their secrets. And unlike you the last Keeper wasn’t so easy to get along with.” The woman looked off into the distance before adding quietly “she was a fighter.”

The girl spent the rest of the day learning about the history of Keepers and how their capabilities allow them to be hosts for the secrets they extract instead of simply making them cease to exist. “It is for this reason that all documented Keepers have been historically infertile. I wasn’t sure about it until I performed that inspection the last time you were here with Isla but as far as I can tell you are no different than the rest.” she says gently then quickly moves on. “Infertility in Keepers is a direct result of the sexual function of the work. In short if a Keeper were to get pregnant then their responsibility to their child would outweigh their responsibility to their community thus they simply are unable to have children.” The lessons continued to inform the girl of her responsibilities and expectations as a Secret Keeper and Niobe helped her grow into a respectable woman.

Eventually, one day Elder Niobe fell ill and with no apprentices competent enough to heal her she died. The woman was impacted deeply by this loss and found herself feeling unsure of what direction her life was going to take. No longer in contact with her childhood girlfriend Isla she had still maintained hope that the love she sought would one day find her. She ultimately decided that she wanted to do some good for her community believing that that is what her mentor would have wanted. So she took to the community trying to fill the hole that the healer had left. Over time the village grew to accept the woman and ultimately hailed her as a goddess. They built her a large chapel to live where they could visit her and gift her their offerings and secrets. Day by day the woman had numerous visitors looking to alleviate their suffering and

guilt. And each time it was like her very first experience with Isla she would get a brief flash of their secret but then as quickly as it arrived she would forget it. Men and women alike would visit her day after day some out of curiosity and others out of guilt. Yet day by day the woman sat in the chapel with an unwavering dedication to her community and neighbors. The woman addressed each person with the same kindness and patience secretly hoping for the day that love would return to her life. And then one day it did.

Isla had come to visit the woman in the chapel. Assuming that it was a visit like any other the woman welcomed Isla into her bed yet all Isla wanted was to catch up with the woman. So they talked for hours on end about their lives and the unexpected changes they each had been through since school. Finally, Isla let the woman in on a heartbreaking secret. She had heard rumors spread throughout the island that many of the villagers had grown suspicious of the woman and were plotting a way to get rid of her so that their secrets would never be revealed. Isla expressed her desire for the women's safety and even offered to help the woman escape the island and leave everything behind to be together. Yet, the woman wasn't upset or scared or even angry at the news. In fact she had thought it was long overdue. She only had one question: "How long do I have?"

"They are planning to attack at the new moon" Isla answered "thats plenty of time to get out of dodge!" But the woman refused, explaining that she still had a responsibility to her community and couldn't abandon them despite their suspicions of her. She revealed that this was the fate of a Secret Keeper. In response Isla simply kissed her forehead and sat with her explaining that she would stay by the woman's side just as the woman stayed with the people.

Over the next month and a half the woman continued welcoming person after person into her bed and as time passed the flashes of secrets became more and more similar. They were flashes of her own downfall, plans to kill her mixed with bits of remorse yet just as before she could never maintain those memories. And just as promised day in and day out Isla stood guard outside of the secret keepers room. Until one day the woman fell ill, afraid Isla journeyed outside of the chapel in search of any healer who still supported the woman and would be willing to help. She searched far and wide to no avail and eventually decided to turn back.

However, upon returning Isla found the chapel in complete disarray the woman's bedroom had been completely ransacked and to Isla's dismay there was blood everywhere. Isla hoped to have made it in enough time to stop the villagers in their attack but unfortunately she

had arrived too late. There lying dead on the floor faced down at the foot of her bed was the woman she had fallen in love with, the woman she had begged to leave, the village's beloved Secret Keeper. There on the floor lay the human manifestation of love and tucked under her body in a small little bundle of cloth and bloodsoaked bedsheets: was me a child born of the village's secrets just in time to bear witness to their biggest one of all. The child of truth born from love and secrets have been left to tell the tale.