The premise of this course is that cross-media consideration of different forms of storytelling can illuminate each particular form as well as the underlying nature of storytelling itself. This course will begin with a consideration of the nature and role of stories and storytelling: Why are stories so appealing? Why are they so powerful? What do we accomplish by fashioning them, telling them, and listening to or watching them? How and why do they work? We will then consider some of the basic issues that are common to all modes of storytelling – e.g., what constitutes a story? What is the truth value of various kinds of storytelling? How are various kinds of storytelling shaped toward a particular effect? We will then consider four of the most important media for telling stories – fiction, film, photography, and drama – with emphasis both on the common elements among them and on their differences. What are the characteristic narrative strategies of each medium? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each medium in regard to storytelling? What kinds of stories does each medium seem to convey most effectively? If you have a particular story to tell, what might you gain and lose by choosing one medium over another?

We will investigate these questions not in the abstract or theoretically but by considering a number of iconic examples in each medium. Our emphasis will be on our own careful examination of each example, on the historical or cultural contexts that illuminate each of them, and on what we can make of the links among the examples. And along the way, we will keep our attention on what these stories convey – their themes, their underlying messages – as well as on how they convey them.