As the t-shirt says, “Rhode Island is Not an Island,” and yet there remains something "insular" about it. Insularity, to outsiders, may suggest a limited worldview, and yet, even within such ‘small places,’ the drama of life plays out with no less energy and (perhaps) more immediacy than in grander venues. This semester, we will take a tour of a number of "small places,” ranging from Jamaica Kincaid’s Antigua, J.R.R. Tolkien’s Shire, Steven Millhauser’s museums, Shirley Jackson’s ‘Castle,’ and Marilynne Robinson’s fictional town of Fingerbone. At each of these places, we’ll seek to orient ourselves using local knowledge, examining the degree to which geography is – or isn’t – destiny.

This is a reading class; keeping up with each week’s reading is essential. Because it’s a summer course, though, we do have only five books – about one per week – as opposed to the nine or ten books I usually assign in the full-semester version of this course. We’ll supplement our readings with films, some of them based on the novels and stories we’ll be reading, some of them more loosely or thematically related. We will make use of our course blog for weekly response writings, due by Wednesday of each week, as well as links to readings and online resources. There will also be one 3-5 page final paper based on a book or film of the student’s choosing, as well as an open-book final exam.

The topic of the paper is open to any book or film that’s part of our class. I encourage you to meet with me at any time, and I am always glad to read and comment on preliminary drafts.

Books (Available at the RIC Campus Store)

Jamaica Kincaid, A Small Place; J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit; Marilynne Robinson, Housekeeping, Steven Millhauser, The Barnum Museum, Shirley Jackson, We Have Always Lived in the Castle.

Films and Video (Shown in class)

The Hobbit (1977)  
The Illusionist (2006)  
The Haunting (1963)  
Housekeeping (1987)
COURSE SCHEDULE


Week IV (July 22-25) *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Monday: Chapters 1-3. Tuesday: Chapters 4-7. Wednesday: Chapters 8-10 (end). Thursday: In-class film, *The Haunting*.


Week VI (August 5-8). Monday: Discussion of *Housekeeping* (film). Tuesday: Final discussions and review. Wednesday: In-class open-book exam. Final paper due Thursday August 9th (no class meeting, but I will be there to collect papers).