Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction & Poetry

Course: CRWRI-UA 815 // Spring 2017 // Section 013
Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:00am - 9:15am
Location:

Instructor: Vanessa Moody
Email: 
Office Hours: TBD

Objectives

Throughout the semester, we will build an intimate writing community in which we will engage with literature as we would with old friends.

The bulk of our class consists of writing workshops, where you'll have the chance to share writing in various stages of development with your peers. This takes courage! And you'll be providing feedback to your peers on their writing, too. That, too, takes courage. So, most importantly, we will create for each other a safe space in which questions are just as valuable, if not more so, than answers; mistakes are not only okay, but encouraged; and experimentation isn't risky, but required.

In order to promote growth in your writing, we're going to be reading from some of the best! You will be exposed to a hefty, but certainly not exhaustive, body of writers and readings that will provide the springboard off of which to launch into your own voice and writing projects. Some of the stories, poems, and essays we read will be to your taste; others may not. But every one offers a unique set of learning tools.

You've already made an impressive move--choosing to be in this 8:00am class--so I have no doubt that you're excited about reading and writing. We're going to channel that passion into growth in your work. By the end of this semester, you'll have a portfolio that will make you proud.
Policies

Intolerance will not be tolerated.
Words and actions matter. The workshop is a space that requires trust and vulnerability.
Respect is essential.

Attendance
In a small workshop, the absence of even one fellow writer is missed. Your classmates will feel the loss of your participation. For that reason, attendance at all classes is mandatory.

Of course, if you’re ill and contagious, I want you to stay home and recover. Excused absences, such as for illness or other emergencies, require an official note. Please do let me know as soon as you believe you will have to miss class for an extenuating circumstance. We will work together to create a plan to keep you on track in the course.

If you must miss class for any other reasons, you should communicate this unexcused absence with me as soon as possible so we are able to discuss and develop alternate plans to compensate for missed class time and participation. Otherwise, unexcused absences will affect your grade negatively.

Arrive a few minutes early so you are ready to begin class promptly at 8:00. Chronic tardiness will be regarded as unexcused absences.

Technology (or Lack Thereof)
There is no need for screens of any kind in this class. Please keep your phones on silent and out of sight, and leave laptops and tablets stored away. If you have a letter of accommodation, exceptions will of course be made.

For this reason, please do bring a notebook and writing utensil to each class, and keep your readings handy.

Late Work
Submitting work past the deadline will negatively impact your grade. If you anticipate that your work will be late for any reason, please let me know ahead of time—and as soon as possible—so that we can discuss whether it will be possible to minimize this grading impact.
**Required Texts**
Most readings will be posted online to our class site. Please print these readings in order to refer to them during class. Outside of the readings that can be found online, there are two required books for this class:

*Fortune Smiles* by Adam Johnson
*The Book of Light* by Lucille Clifton

**Important Due Dates**
I will assign short writing prompts throughout the semester with particular due dates, but there are a few standard due dates to always keep in mind.

Readings should be completed for the class at which they will be discussed. Please refer to our class site rather than our syllabus for accurate reading assignments, including required vs. suggested readings.

Workshop submissions are due via email by 10pm on the Thursday before your workshop.

Workshop letters are due during the class period that corresponding pieces are being workshopped. Come prepared with two printed copies of your letters--one for the author and one for me.

**Workshop Guidelines**
During our second week of class, we will have a “Workshopping Workshop” in order to become familiar with the way a workshop is run. I will be presenting further guidelines for a successful workshop at that time, but the gist of these guidelines is this:

1. Read each piece carefully.
2. Have your workshop letter prepared before class.

**A Note on Content**
The writing you and your peers might turn in, like some of the writing we will be reading, is likely to express and engage intimately with the full range of emotions and situations in the human experience. If the writing of a fellow student leaves you concerned for their safety or the safety of others, please feel free to reach out to me about those concerns.

Likewise, if you find the content of one of our assignments difficult to engage, please reach out to me, and we’ll discuss how best to proceed. There is merit in reading works that tackle troubling themes through difficult or disturbing moments, but I do not wish for you to do so at the expense of your personal wellness.
Ongoing Assignments
It’s difficult to produce the best writing you’re capable of signing your name to if you’re writing it all the night before it is due. These ongoing assignments exist to establish consistent writing practices, engagement with content, and access to support.

Reading Reflections
For every assigned reading, please note one to three sentences or lines that are instructive to you as a writer. Perhaps they demonstrate a technique you’d like to use in your own writing, evoke an image you find moving, or reveal a power you didn’t know writing held. Or perhaps a sentence is instructive in that you’d like your writing to do just the opposite. Be prepared to share these sentences or lines in class.

Sentence of the Day
At any time from 12:00am through 11:59 pm daily, please email your sentence of the day to our class email list. There is no particular time you should submit your sentence.

“I couldn’t think of anything to write today,” is a sentence, and it’s better to submit that than nothing at all! The object here is not to submit your most brilliant writing (although, by all means, do submit sentences that make you proud, if you’re written any that day!), but to create a habit of daily writing, no matter how small. This is a simple practice you can continue throughout your life, no matter your path or profession.

Shared Syllabus
Each one of you should add at least three suggestions to the Shared Syllabus on our class site. This syllabus is not required reading for our course, but rather recommended “reading” for life. “Reading” in this case includes anything, really--movies, museums, restaurants, streets, parks, recipes, interviews, articles, books, plays, musicals, songs, symphonies, operas, paintings, sculptures, dances…

Ultimately, the Shared Syllabus will represent a collage of our interests, inspirations, and aspirations. It will be an excellent resource to turn to if you’re at a loss for where to begin with your writing.

Office Hours
You should be meeting with me at least twice throughout this semester. If my office hours do not work with your schedule, please reach out to me via email so we can discuss alternate times.
Final Portfolio
Your final portfolio will include pieces that have been workshopped in class as well as writing that I have yet to see.

For all pieces that were workshopped, please include both your original draft and your edited draft. Include also a reflection upon the revision process for that piece. Was any particular feedback helpful or insightful? How did you make your revision decisions? Do you see the piece as finished, or ready for further revision?

You need only include one draft for all un-workshopped pieces, unless you’d like to show the progression of those pieces. The choice is yours.

You will also create an artist’s statement exploring your relationship to your writing and your writing process.

Required Portfolio Content
Collected Sentences of the Day // from January 24 through May 4, allowing for days off
Workshopped Pieces // form poem, free verse poem, flash fiction, short story, and your choice
Revision Reflections // one for each of the above pieces
Other Writing // in-class writings, assignments, work turned in for non-workshopping weeks
Artist’s Statement // guidelines to be distributed as we near the end of the semester
**Further Suggestions**

As with the rest of this syllabus, participating in the following activities will benefit your writing tremendously. Unlike the rest of this syllabus, your adherence (or lack thereof) to these suggestions won’t affect your grade. These are simply practices I have found helpful in my own writing and hope you may find helpful in yours.

**Meet Writers**

Meet up with each of your classmates outside of class. Grab tea or coffee together, take a stroll around Washington Square Park, or simply read together in the same space. You never know just who might be the perfect reader for your work.

**Attend Readings**

You could make attending readings in NYC your full-time job, and you *still* wouldn’t be able to attend all of the readings in this city. There’s so much out there--good, bad, and everything in between. Listen to what folks are writing, check out how they’re presenting themselves, and observe how listeners are reacting to the material.

**Browse Bookstores/Libraries**

Some of my favorites independent bookstores are Book Culture, The Strand, Three Lives and Co., Books of Wonder, Bookbook, The Astoria Bookshop, Bluestockings, and BookCourt, but there are so, so many to explore. You might also want to check out Midtown Comics, Forbidden Planet, or other comic book shops. And visiting Barnes & Noble and taking note of their displays gives you a great sense of what’s being promoted and read widely at the moment. Lastly, if you haven’t already, get your NYPL card! Free books!

**Read**

One of the most useful skills you could develop as a writer is the ability to describe and sell your work to agents and readers using terms with which they’re already familiar. It’s helpful to be able to tell someone that your voice might remind them of A, B, or C writers, or that your projects would interest fans of X, Y, and Z books. Read widely. Read outside your tastes, outside your realm of comfort.
Schedule
(Some of the below are Required Readings; others are Suggested Readings. Always refer to our class site for an accurate list of readings.)

Week 1
Jan. 24 Hello // Introductions, Syllabus Review, Process Writing Exercises
Jan. 26 Writing on Writing // James Baldwin, Kate Bernheimer, Joan Didion, Neil Gaiman, Zadie Smith

Week 2
Feb. 2 Workshopping Workshop: A How-To // Anonymous Packet

Week 3
Feb. 7 Form Poetry Workshop // Austen Group
Feb. 9 Flash Fiction // six-word stories, Twitterature, micro fiction, flash fiction, fables

Week 4
Feb. 14 Form Poetry Workshop // Baldwin Group
Feb. 16 The Inbetweeners // Eula Biss, Anne Carson, Maggie Nelson, Claudia Rankine, Virginia Woolf

Week 5
Feb. 21 Flash Fiction Workshop // Austen Group
Feb. 23 Works in Translation, Part I // Anna Akhmatova, Simone de Beauvoir, Jorge Luis Borges, Paul Celan, Elena Ferrante, Clarice Lispector, Herta Muller, Haruki Murakami, Pablo Neruda, Jose Saramago, Leo Tolstoy, Can Xue

Week 6
Feb. 28 Flash Fiction Workshop // Baldwin Group
Mar. 2 Works in Translation, Part II // Anna Akhmatova, Simone de Beauvoir, Jorge Luis Borges, Paul Celan, Elena Ferrante, Clarice Lispector, Herta Muller, Haruki Murakami, Pablo Neruda, Jose Saramago, Leo Tolstoy, Can Xue

Week 7
Mar. 7 Free Verse Poetry Workshop // Austen Group
Mar. 9 Poetry Jukebox // John Berryman, Gwendolyn Brooks, e.e. cummings, Rita Dove, Allen Ginsberg, Louise Gluck, Frank O’Hara, bell hooks, Langston Hughes, Yusef Komunyakaa, Audre Lorde, Bernadette Mayer, Marianne Moore,
Alice Notley, Sharon Olds, Mary Oliver, Carl Phillips, Sylvia Plath, Gertrude Stein, Dylan Thomas

Week 8  
**Spring Break! // No Class**

Week 9  
Mar. 21  **Free Verse Poetry Workshop // Baldwin Group**  
Mar. 23  **Collections, Part I // Adam Johnson’s *Fortune Smiles***

Week 10  
Mar. 28  **Short Story Workshop // Austen Group**  
Mar. 30  **Fiction Jukebox, Part I // Octavia Butler, Raymond Carver, James Joyce, Jhumpa Lahiri, Alice Munro**

Week 11  
Apr. 4  **Short Story Workshop // Baldwin Group**  
Apr. 6  **Collections, Part II // Lucille Clifton’s *The Book of Light***

Week 12  
Apr. 11  **Edited Draft Workshop // Austen Group**  
Apr. 13  **Fiction Jukebox, Part II // Junot Diaz, W.E.B. Du Bois, Yiyun Li, Dorothy Parker, George Saunders**

Week 13  
Apr. 18  **Edited Draft Workshop // Baldwin Group**  
Apr. 20  **Graphic Novels & Comics // Alison Bechdel, Cece Bell, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Matthew Inman, Gene Luen Yang**

Week 14  
Apr. 25  **Bring Anything Workshop // Austen Group**  
Apr. 27  **First Chapters // Thomas Hardy, Stephen King, Vladimir Nabokov, J.K. Rowling, and Alice Walker**

Week 15  
May 2  **Bring Anything Workshop // Baldwin Group**  
May 4  **Portfolio Reading Party // share work & discuss summer writing plans**

Week 16  
**Finals Week // No Class**  
Due: Final Portfolios due on or before 11:59pm on May 9.
How to Make the Most of this Class
(Or: How to Get that Grade You Want)

I’ve intentionally included the grading breakdown last; it is the least important element of this syllabus. As long as you’re following class policies, completing work on time, engaging and participating in class, treating our workshop with respect, and demonstrating effort, care, and growth in your writing, there’s little reason not to expect an A.

I have been clear throughout this syllabus about behavior and actions that will result in losses of letter grade. Below is a summary of the actions you should be striving toward. They are equally weighted in your grade calculation.

Participate.
Turn in your sentences of the day. Contribute to the Shared Syllabus. Show up to class. Arrive on time (early). Read the readings. Share what you learned. Discuss and debate. Be respectful as you do so. Listen. Attend office hours. 25%

Write.
Challenge yourself to produce the best work you’re personally capable of writing on any given day. Work on a piece over the course of multiple days. Review and revise it before turning it in. Stick to the guidelines set forth in assignments. Submit writing before deadlines. 25%

Workshop.
Engage thoughtfully and thoroughly with the work your peers are sharing. Read submissions multiple times before class. Write respectful feedback letters with constructive criticism. Communicate with kindness. 25%

Synthesize.
Gather your writings over the course of the semester. Revise and refine your workshop pieces in response to workshop feedback. Reflect upon your voice and vision as a writer, your accomplishments this semester, and your goals for the summer. Submit this cumulative review of your semester’s achievements in your Final Portfolio. 25%