Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction and Poetry

Instructor: Jess Pane
Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.003
Meeting Times: MW 8:00 am to 9:15 am
Classroom:
Office: 58 W. 10th Street
Office Hours: By Appointment
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TEXTS

*We the Animals* by Justin Torres
Course Reader: Available at Unique Copy Center (252 Greene Street)


OBJECTIVE
Over the course of the semester, through writing prompts and reading assignments, we will work together to build stories and poems. We will talk about the different craft aspects that a piece of writing is utilizing, but also how the piece of writing is speaking to community and larger themes of identity and narrative history. Please note that the reading list is largely made up of writers who identify as POC and/or LGBTQ and/or allies.

STRUCTURE
For the first couple of weeks we will be mostly discussing craft, moving between both fiction and poetry, sharing and mini-workshopping our take home prompts and then move into a more workshop heavy schedule. Each craft idea will build off one another to see how a story/poem fully forms and how many layers go into a narrative.

EXPECTATIONS

**Homework Prompts (20 points):** Each week there will be a take home prompt (500-1000 words). These are meant as a way to build and develop a story/poem over time. Your ability to write will not be graded, but each prompt must be turned in to receive credit.

**Reading responses (10 points):** 500-1000 words on reading assignments. I am most interested in what lines/paragraphs of the piece excited you, what you read that maybe you hadn’t seen done before, and what feeling you were left with when you were done reading.
Workshop Pieces (20 points): Everyone will be workshopping twice. For our second workshop, I want the focus to be on how the critique and edits of your first story/poems were taken into account. But you may also write something completely new.

Class participation and attendance (20 points): Everyone is expected to participate. For every third absence, the grade will be dropped one letter grade. We can discuss excused and unexcused absences in class and feel free to talk to me if you have any concerns. I know this class is at 8 am, but arriving late disrupts the class. If you are over 15 minutes late, it will count as an absence. Laptops and e-readers will not be permitted unless with a note from the Moses Center.

Final portfolio/journal (30%): At the beginning of the semester, I will hand out a journal. You will be keeping your homework assignments, in class writing prompts, notes you took in class, and thoughts in this journal. Feel free to decorate, collage, paste photos and keepsakes, and ideas. At the end of the semester, you will be required to show me the journal you were given at beginning of the semester.

Integrity: Do not plagiarize. Writers spend an enormous amount of time on their writing, you should too. If I find out something is plagiarized, I will need to contact the school.

Conference: Each of you will be meeting with me at once during the semester.

Please note: Since we will be talking about lived experiences, and especially since the work we will read is heavily based on a writer’s experiences and often relates traumatic events, I do not want to misunderstand a piece of writing as fiction when it might be a cry for help. If you submit a piece of writing that exhibits dangers—like murder, depression, suicide—I will email to ask if you are okay. Since writing is full of murder, depression, and suicide, you can send me an email before submitting and let me know it is only meant to be creative. If over the course of the semester, you begin to feel like you do need to talk to someone, then I can help you reach out to the Wellness Center.

COURSE SCHEDULE

M 1/23/17
Introductions and syllabus
Pass out journals
Prompt: Sandra Cisneros “My Name”

W 1/25/17
Discuss the basics of storytelling.
Reading Homework: Aracelis Girmay’s “On Kindness” and ZZ Packer’s “Brownies”

M 1/30/17
Watch Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s video “The Danger of a Single Story.”
Discuss “On Kindness” and “Brownies”
Take home prompt: Make a list of at least 10 identities in which you see in yourself and write one or two sentences about each one.
**W 2/1/17**  
Character development  
Homework: Read opening selection from the novel *Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparnata, openings of two short stories, and two poems.

**M 2/6/17**  
Beginnings.  
Homework Prompt: Write an opening.

**W 2/8/17**  
Introduction to workshops, how to discuss a classmates’ story. Mini workshop of homework prompts.  
Homework: Readings Maggie Nelson and Solmaz Sharif

**2/13/17**  
How do we incorporate lived experiences into fiction and poetry? Discuss Maggie Nelson and Solmaz Sharif.  
Homework Prompt: Write a true account of an event in one column, disguise it in the other column.

**2/15/17**  
Present homework prompts, how do fictional accounts differ from the real accounts, and what it means to write about people we know.  
Homework: Read *We the Animals* by Justin Torres. Take 10 photos of your friends/family and describe each setting/details and what is happening in 5-10 lines. Try to make a story with the photographs.

**2/20/17: No Class**

**2/22/17**  
Discuss the photography homework assignment. Each of you will be sharing your photographs. Discuss *We the Animals*.  
Homework: “Grace” by Chinelo Okparanta

**2/27/17**  
Homework Prompt: Write a scene utilizing what we’ve learned so far.

**3/1/17**  
Mini Workshop.  
Homework: Read “Voyage of Sable Venus” by Robin Coste Lewis
3/6/17
What is narrative history in writing?
Homework Prompt: Visit a museum and write a poem from the titles of art work and your experience looking at art that day and/or throughout your life.

3/8/17
Mini workshop of poems. How do we talk about poetry?

3/13/17-3/19/17: Spring Break

3/20/17
What can a love poem look like? In class reading of “I Watch her Eat an Apple” by Natalie Diaz and “I’m Not Ready to Die Yet” by Aracelis Girmay
Homework: Continue to build on a story/poems. 5-10 pages. We’ll begin workshopping in one week.

3/22/17
Endings: what needs to happen.
Volunteers will turn in their work to be workshopped.
Homework: Read “Frame” by Robin Coste Lewis and other poems.

3/27/17
Workshop
The next volunteers will turn in their work.

3/29/17
Workshop
The next volunteers will turn in their work.

4/3/17
Workshop
Homework: Read a sampling of Odes by Sharon Olds. Write an ode.

4/5/17
Got through workshop. Let’s talk humor.
Homework: Journal of Ugly Sites by Stacy Szymaszek

4/10/17
Imitation as homage.
Homework Prompt: Pick a story or poem we’ve read this semester, dissect its structure and theme and begin to write a story or poem that is in conversation with the piece you selected.

4/12/17
Revision
Homework: A sampling of poetry.

4/17/17
Forms and free verse.
Homework: Continue revising your previously workshopped stories/poems or write something new, but one detail must stay the same from the original piece you submitted.
Homework: A sampling of *Zami: The New Spelling of My Name* by Audre Lorde

4/19/17
Poet as Essayist
Volunteers will turn in their work to be workshopped.
Journals are to be shown in 2 ½ weeks. Fill them in!

4/24/17
Workshop (on revised pieces)
Volunteers will turn in their work to be workshopped.

4/26/17
Workshop (on revised pieces)
Volunteers will turn in their work to be workshopped.
Journals to be shown in 1 week. Fill them in!

5/1/17
Workshop (on revised pieces)

5/3/17
We’ll be going on a field trip for a bookstore tour so we will try to figure out a different time everyone can meet.

5/8/17: Last Class: Share our favorite stories/poems from the semester or new pieces we’ve discovered. We can also talk about publishing. Most likely with donuts in the park.

FURTHER READING:
*Twelve Tribes of Hattie* by Ayana Mathis
Maggie Nelson
Eileen Myles
Audre Lorde
June Jordan
Jericho Brown
Hilton Als
Carson McCullers
*Alphabet* by Kathy Page
Kirstin Valdez Quade
Michelle Tea
Marlon James
Nicole Dennis-Benn
James Baldwin
Naomi Jackson
Natalie Diaz