Course description

In this course students will read and discuss published essays that fall into three categories: "People You Know," in which writers evoke figures from their lives; "Trouble," or essays that describe predicaments the writers faced; and "The Personal in the Journalistic," or works that combine discussion of the writers' personal lives with discussions of well-known outside subjects (a famous movie or 9-11, for example). The published essays we discuss will be grouped in the order given above. As we conclude each grouping, students will turn in personal essays, at least 1,500 words in length, related to that particular topic. In addition, each week at least two students will have pieces workshopped, according to the schedule below. Workshopped pieces do not have to fit in any of the three categories, but any workshopped piece may be revised and submitted as one of the three category essays. Workshopped pieces will also be at least 1,500 words. Finally, each week students will participate in an in-class exercise.

Requirements

ATTENDANCE. This class is not a drop-in center. Your attendance is required. If you miss a class, I must know ahead of time, and I must know the reason. Unannounced absences will result in a lower grade. Also: while class is in progress, please remain in the classroom except for breaks.

WRITTEN WORK. See course description, above.

ASSIGNED READING. See below, under “Schedule of Readings/Assignments/Workshops.”

EXCLUSIVITY. Work for this class may not be submitted for other classes, and work written for other classes may not be submitted for this class.

MUTUAL RESPECT. In this class students are to support one another’s work with honest but respectful and constructive criticism.
PARTICIPATION. Students should come prepared to discuss their peers’ work and the assigned reading.

Intermediate Creative Nonfiction

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS/READINGS/WORKSHOPS

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Week One
Discussion of three essays read prior to class (these will be emailed to students):
Vivian Gornick, excerpts from *Fierce Attachments*
Gayle Pemberton, “The Hottest Water in Chicago”
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni: “Lalita Mashi”
In-class exercise(s)

Week Two
Discussion of essay read prior to class:
Phillip Lopate, “Willy”
Jo Ann Beard, “The Family Hour”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

Week Three
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Zadie Smith, “Smith Family Christmas,” “Accidental Hero,” and “Dead Man Laughing”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

Week Four
Discussion of essay read prior to class: James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son”
(Baldwin’s essay is the concluding piece in “People You Know” and also the first in “Trouble”)
In-class exercise (time permitting)
Workshop:

TROUBLE

Week Five – “People You Know” essay due
Discussion of essay read prior to class: James Baldwin, “Equal in Paris”
In-class exercise (time permitting)
Workshop:

Week Six
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Meghan Daum, “My Misspent Youth”
Week Seven
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Truman Capote, “Derring-do”
In-class exercise (time permitting)
Workshop:

Week Eight
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Martín Espada, “The Puerto Rican Dummy and the Merciful Son”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

Week Nine – “Trouble” essay due
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Christian Wiman, “The Limit”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

THE PERSONAL IN THE JOURNALISTIC

Week Ten
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Ian Frazier, “Canal Street”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

Week Eleven
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Jonathan Lethem, “Defending The Searchers”
In-class exercise (time permitting)
Workshop:

Week Twelve
Discussion of essay read prior to class: George Saunders, “Buddha Boy”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

Week Thirteen
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Jo Ann Beard, “The Fourth State of Matter”
In-class exercise
Workshop:

Week Fourteen – “Personal in the Journalistic” essay due
Discussion of essay read prior to class: Joan Didion, “The White Album”
In-class exercise
Workshop: