

Bad Decisions - An Introduction to Fiction & Poetry

Instructor: Hallie Newton

CRWRI-UA.815.006

TR: 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM

Office Hours – by appointment

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Bad Decisions

Secrets, sex, drugs, music. Bigotry, gambling, religion. Willfulness. Risks, values, repercussions. These are just a few ingredients that help make a great story, a great poem, a great work of art. This introduction to fiction and poetry class focuses on how characters' bad decisions influence a narrative and how writing boldly offers a wealth of creative possibilities.

Objective

To examine how agency and active choices influence you, your characters, your voice, and the story inside fiction and poetry. To discover your personal process of writing.

In class

It can be an isolating life, reading and writing alone in your room. In this class, we'll build and make the most of our community, with group writing, group reading, and group discussion. In this way, we'll explore the process of the writer and study the art of taking chances in your work. This class is active. We'll talk movies, music, stories, poems, art, and things that inspire you, the writer.

For this, you must bring a notebook that is dedicated to this class AND THIS CLASS ONLY, every day. You must bring a pencil or pen. Tech stuff – iPads, computers, smartphones, etc. – is not allowed in class.

Homework

Will be weekly writing assignments and reading assignments. Late work will be accepted on a case-by-case basis. However, if your work is consistently late (more than twice), and if you do not do the reading (I can tell), your grade will be affected. If you are sensitive to specific content, you'll have to do some other reading and writing assignments.

Workshop/Craft

The semester will be divided between workshop, where we examine the work of our peers, and craft, where we examine the work of established writers.

Writers and other artists

We'll examine work by: Erin Belieu, T.C. Boyle, Junot Diaz, Annie Proulx, E.E. Cummings, Eileen Myles, Walt Whitman, Patti Smith, Gil Scott Heron, James Baldwin, Denis Johnson, and others.

How to submit workshop pieces

The week before your workshop, you must bring 16 printed of your work – one for each of your classmates, and one for me. Printed, not emailed. All writing should be in Times New Roman, double-spaced, and 12 pt. font.

Try to make your fiction submissions between 5-14 pages.

Poems should be no longer than three pages. If you want to write a few poems about a theme you're exploring, feel free to do so.

How to workshop your peers

Read each submission twice, provide line edits, and write a brief note summarizing your feedback. This class presents rare opportunity: a captive audience invested in praising the strengths and diagnosing the weaknesses of your original work. We're going to make the most of it. We'll talk in more specifics about workshop protocol, but the gist is: we can slog along with me facilitating, or we can explore new ground if everyone participates.

How to read craft

This isn't reading comprehension class, it's reading for writers. As writers, it's our job to notice the construction of sentences, the construction of stories, notice when and how our emotions are affected, and figure out what tools work for us, and what to leave behind.

Bring the required reading to class. Get in the habit of marking up the work. We'll discuss in class what affects you, and what you question.

Office Hours

I'm available for office ours by appointment. Please email me to set up a time and place.

Tech and food

Are not allowed in class. I am strict about this. Tech lowers your attention span, and creates a rift in conversation. If I see you using tech in class without permission, it will show negatively in your class participation and effort grade. If, for any reason, you are using tech in class, and I discover it is limiting your ability to focus, it will negatively affect your grade.

Attendance

Workshop classes are a group experience that promotes creativity and teamwork. Absence and tardiness is damaging to your peers' experience as well as your own.

If you are tardy more that three times, I'll take a letter off your grade for each additional tardiness, whether there is an excuse or not.

If you are absent more than two times, I'll take a letter off your grade for each additional absence, whether there is an excuse or not.

Grading

Timeliness of assignments 20%

Effort put into assignments – both in and out of class 20%

In-class Participation 40%

Portfolio 20%

Portfolio

Your portfolio of work due at the end of the semester will include:

- One REVISED poem
- One REVISED short story
- One writing prompt from homework or class. If it's something from class, or from your notebook, please retype it on a computer.

Our syllabus is subject to change over the course of the semester, to suit our interests and match our pacing. Please know that final portfolios will be due in my mailbox on Dec. 15.