

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction & Poetry

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Room
M & W 9:30 – 10:45
CRWRI-UA.815.001
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THIS CLASS

This is an introductory writing workshop. This means you are here because you have an interest in writing and you are hoping that I, along with your peers, can make you a better writer. I bet we can. I believe in us. Is this your first workshop? Welcome. You look great today. This isn't an English Literature class but we will be reading pieces of writing that I find exemplary in hopes of studying the craft of writing and to further understand what makes these word-vessels work so well. A good writer is first and foremost a good reader. We will read and discuss this work, as well as our own work and the work of our peers.

MORE ON THIS CLASS

This is an introductory class to writing fiction and poetry. You are all expected to try your hardest to write some of both. That said, I am much more concerned with you writing interesting, present, and vulnerable work than I am with anyone adhering to a genre. The world is changing. Some of my favorite writers make multimedia work. Some of my favorite books are very hard to pin to one genre. In this class, I am going to place a lot of emphasis on some of these hybrid texts. These are often pieces of writing that explore elements from multiple genres simultaneously and start to bend our notions of what a poem or a story is. Once that's out the window, all that matters is if the work moves us. This doesn't mean that we aren't encouraged to write poems that look like poems, or stories that look like stories (most poems and stories look that way for good reason) but it does mean that we aren't confined to that.

Once we really get trucking along, much of the class will consist of two sections: craft and workshop.

In our craft discussions, we'll work together to dissect the day's reading material. Somewhere in each of these pieces of writing there's a valuable craft lesson waiting for us. In the pursuit of craft, we will also share in the joy, misery, embarrassment, and ecstasy of in class writing assignments and exercises.

In workshop, we will discuss, compliment, and critique the work of our classmates. It is so vital that you have read their work thoroughly. Poems, especially, should be read more than once. This is why it's also so vital that all work is submitted by the deadline. You are required to return notes and feedback to your classmates. You can choose to write on the printed document itself or to type them up separately and print that out.

WORKSHOP SUBMISSIONS

Those being workshopped on Mondays must submit their work by 11:59pm on the Thursday prior to class. Those being workshopped on Wednesdays must submit their work by 11:59pm on the Sunday prior to class. These submission deadlines are not to be taken lightly.

OBSERVATIONS

I need everyone to buy a notebook. The cheaper, the better. If what you want is a very expensive notebook, go for it, but this could potentially place inhibiting pressure on what you fill it with.

Starting now (today), I want you to write 14 observations in that notebook a week. I don't want any metaphors or similes in these and I'm not concerned with high lyricism. These will not be graded for quality, and if you don't want me to read them due to privacy, I will honor that. The only part of this that will affect your grade is whether you do them or not.

I chose 14 because that's two a day; I suppose I will have no idea if you do 5 on Monday, 3 on Thursday, and 6 on Saturday, but I strongly encourage you to stick with at least two a day, so that it becomes a habit. This should be easy and take up very little of your time. It's about learning to see. It's about specificity. Today I saw a man tear a slice of tomato into small pieces, and eat them one at a time. Today I also saw the sunset turn the reflective beams of a construction site orange. See how easy that was? If you do two a day, after a few weeks it will no longer feel like a chore.

Doing them throughout the day may prove far easier than sitting down to do them at a designated time. If you don't have your notebook on you and there's something observation-worthy (hint: there always is,) make a note on your smartphone then transfer that note to your notebook when you get home.

REQUIRED TEXTS

I am going to do my best not to make you buy a lot of books. I will give printouts or send links/PDFs in lieu of purchasing books whenever possible. At this moment, there are only three books that I am requiring everyone to purchase. This may change as the course progresses. These books are:

- *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson
- *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* by Claudia Rankine
- *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson

You are expected to write a brief response to each of these and share and discuss these responses with the class. When approaching these books, keep in mind that this is a writing course, and that we should consider them the way a skilled carpenter regards the house he or she is standing in.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

This class will not have a final exam, but on the last day of class you will turn in a final portfolio. This portfolio will consist of your revised pieces of writing, as well as your earlier drafts of that writing so that we can track the progress of these pieces. It will also include a brief written statement about your writing and your progress throughout the course.

OFFICE HOURS

I will hold weekly office hours. I'd love to see you there.

A MANDATORY NOTE ON PLAGIARISM

Please don't. You will fail.

HOW GRADING WORKS

I like to think of this syllabus as a document that, like the climate, will potentially change throughout the course of the semester. What will not change is the grading rubric:

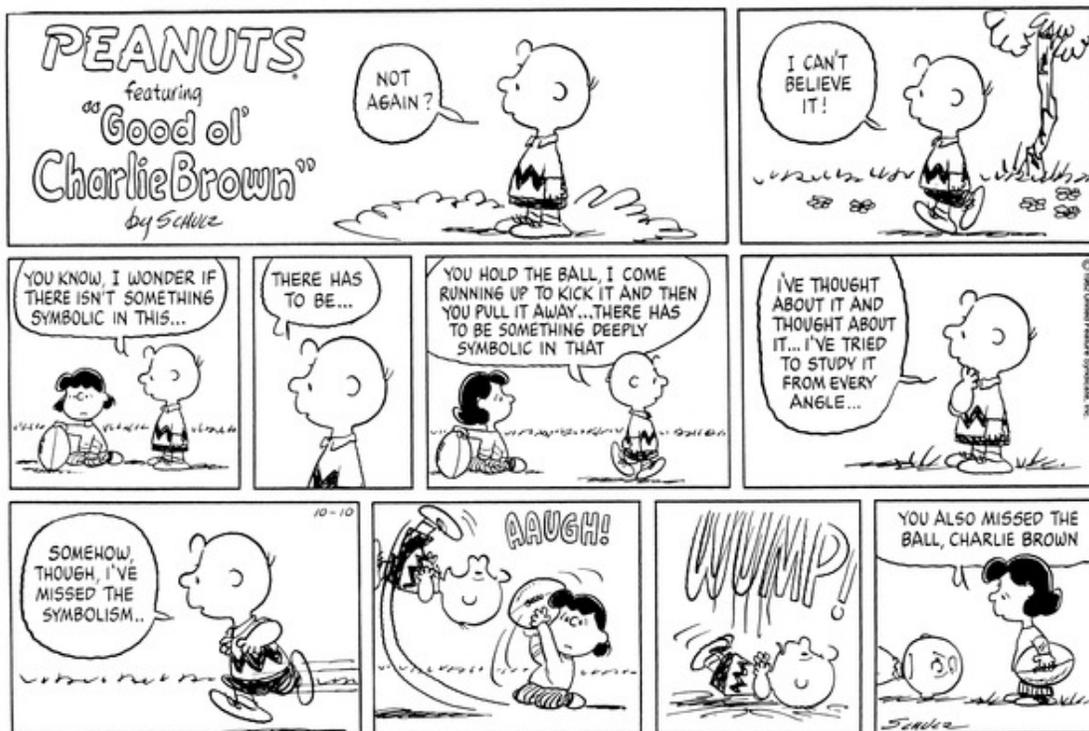
- **40%** Your writing, much of this percentage will come from the submission of a final portfolio
- **30%** Attendance and in-class participation
- **30%** Reading the assigned materials, reading and responding to your peers' work, completing observations, and coming to class prepared

ATTENDANCE

Everyone is required to attend every class. You're allowed one unexcused absence, after that each unexcused absence will lower your final grade by half a letter (A to A-, etc.) I understand that emergencies happen. If one does, just email me and we can talk on a case-by-case basis. Tardiness (arriving more than 10 minutes late) is also taken seriously. If you're tardy three times that counts as one unexcused absence. In a class like this, where we are sharing and discussing personal work, being absent or tardy can be very disruptive and hinders the workshop environment. It's critical that we all take this seriously.

EXTRA CREDIT

If you attend a reading throughout the semester and give me a 500-word response to it, I will award you extra credit. If you already have an A+ and you attend a reading anyway, you will simply become a more well-rounded human being.



“There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of?”

James Joyce, “The Dead”