

Introduction to Creative Writing
Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.011
Meeting Times: MW 12:30-1:45PM
Classroom: TBD

Instructor: Caitlin Barasch

Email: cb3231@nyu.edu

Office Hours: Mondays 10:30am-12pm. If this slot doesn't work for you, please email me to schedule an alternative time. I want to meet with each of you at least once over the course of the semester.

Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works."

—Virginia Woolf

"The greatest part of a writer's time is spent in reading, in order to write; a man will turn over half a library to make one book."

—Samuel Johnson

"If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."

— Toni Morrison

Course Overview & Objective:

In this class, you will write original fiction and poetry, give and receive critical feedback, and read a range of short stories and poetry with a writer's attention to the conventions of craft. I'm confident this course will introduce you to at least one writer who inspires you, someone whose work you'll continue to read even after this course has ended.

In your own writing, I will encourage all of you to write what you fear, what you love, what you obsess over. See where it takes you.

Grading

—Class Participation: 35%. This is a discussion-based class that thrives on an enthusiastic and impassioned exchange of ideas. It is therefore essential that you are willing and motivated to speak during discussion of the assigned readings, as well as during critiques—or “workshops”—of your classmates. I will not allow the use of electronics; we will give each other the focus, attention, and respect we all deserve. If your comments in class are frequent, thoughtful, inquisitive—proving a deep engagement with, and consideration of, the material—you will receive the highest possible grade in class participation. It's as simple as that.

—Writing Assignments: 35%. This includes workshop submissions, feedback letters for your classmates, and reading responses.

- 1) You will submit **two original short stories** (double-spaced, 1500-5000 words) and **three original poems** (single-spaced, maximum 3 pages-per-poem) over the course of the semester; **please bring sixteen hard-copies** of your submission to hand out during class **exactly one week** before your workshop date.
- 2) Please bring **two hard-copies** of each feedback letter (300 words minimum) to class on that classmate's workshop day (one for me, and one for your classmate). Be as

constructive, specific, and respectful as possible in your feedback letters when critiquing strengths and weaknesses of your classmates' work.

- 3) Each week, you will be required to write a **400-word response** to the assigned readings. You can concentrate on one piece, or compare several. These responses need not be formal analyses. After detailing your general impressions (what resonated with you?), attempt to deconstruct the author's craft techniques, and explain why (or why not) you found their technique effective. Readings are assigned on Wednesdays, so please email me your **response by Sunday at 10pm** so I have time to read them before Monday's discussion. You might find it helpful to bring a print-out of your response to use as a reference during class, though this is not required.

—Class Presentation: 10%. In the style of The MOTH Story Slam, you will verbally tell the class a story. It doesn't need to be memorized word-for-word; choose a story you know well, a story you would tell your friends. Approximately **eight minutes** in length, it will also have a clear arc—beginning, middle, and end. Sharing stories aloud has always been an instinctual human practice, and it will be useful to compare/contrast storytelling techniques used on the page vs. the "stage." Because most MOTH stories are true, you're encouraged (but not required) to select a story from your own life. The alternative: tell us a story that happened to someone you know, such as a friend or family member.

—Final Portfolio: 20%. On **Monday, December 17th**, you will turn in a portfolio containing revisions of **at least three** of your workshop submissions. Your grade will depend on how effectively you incorporate the feedback you received in class.

Policies:

Attendance and participation:

Workshops, as well as craft discussions, depend on every student's enthusiastic engagement with the material. Please be physically and mentally present, and **please be on time**. Two or more instances of lateness will count as an unexcused absence, and only one unexcused absence will be permitted. Each subsequent unexcused absence will result in a grade decrease: A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, and so on.

Plagiarism:

Just don't. This is a course where creative expression, your own unique voice, is valued above all—isn't that why you're taking it? As such, there is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy; any instance of plagiarism will be reported to the department.

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities

726 Broadway, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10003-6675

Telephone: 212-998-4980 Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114

Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Student Wellness Policy:

Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt my attention. Please send me an email putting this work in context before

submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to, please reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

Reading Assignments:

The following readings/schedule are subject to change, based on our collective progress & intellectual inquiry. If so, you will be notified in advance. I will provide all PDFs of the readings via the NYU Classes portal or a Google Group (??) but I expect you to print & annotate all the readings and bring them to class to look at during discussions.

SCHEDULE:

~Fiction Workshops~

Week 1:

9/5: Introductions, review syllabus, determine workshop groups & presentation dates. Workshop etiquette hand-out for reference.

Reading assignments due (to be discussed) next class:

Lorrie Moore, "How to Become a Writer"

Annie Dillard, "Write Til You Drop"

Donald Barthelme, "On Not Knowing"

Week 2:

9/10 Craft seminar on assigned readings, in-class writing exercise

9/12 Workshop **Group A** (four students).

Reading assignments due next class:

ZZ Packer, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere"

Rebecca Lee, "The Banks of the Vistula"

Michael Cunningham, "White Angel"

Week 3:

9/17 Craft seminar on assigned readings

9/19 Workshop **Group B** (four students)

Reading assignments due next class:

Vladimir Nabokov, "Signs and Symbols"

Alice Munro, "Floating Bridge"

Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Week 4:

9/24 Craft seminar on assigned readings; student presentation

9/26 Workshop **Group C** (four students)

Reading assignments due next class:

Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes El Memorioso"

George Saunders, "Pastoralia"

Jim Shepard, "The Netherlands Lives With Water" or

"Your Fate Hurtles Down at You"

Week 5:

10/1: Craft seminar on assigned readings; student presentation

10/3: Workshop **Group D** (three students)

Reading assignments due next class: (Monday's class is canceled due to fall break, so we will not be extensively discussing these in class; instead, I will expect high-quality reading responses, as per usual, **emailed to me by Tuesday, 10/9, at 10pm**)

Jhumpa Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter"

John Cheever, "The Enormous Radio"

Nam Le, "Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice"

Week 6:

10/8: NO CLASS

10/10: Workshop **Group A**

Reading assignments due next class:

Kelly Link, "The Faery Handbag"

Carmen Maria Machado, "The Husband Stitch"

Haruki Murakami, "Super-Frog Saves Tokyo"

Week 7:

10/15: Craft seminar on assigned readings (briefly discussing Lahiri, Cheever, Shepard as well); student presentation

10/17: Workshop **Group B**

Reading assignments due next class:

Raymond Carver, "Beginners"

Raymond Carver ed. Gordon Lish, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love"

Week 8:

10/22: Craft seminar on assigned readings; student presentation

10/24: Workshop **Group C**

Reading assignments due next class:

Emily Bronte, "remembrance" & "the night is darkening round me"

Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay"

Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl"

Lydia Davis, "We Miss You"

Week 9:

10/29: Craft seminar on assigned readings; student presentation

10/31: Workshop **Group D**, in-class writing exercise

Reading assignments due next class: (*poems on poetry*)

Kaveh Akbar, "The Perfect Poem," "Calling a Wolf a Wolf"

John Ashberry, "But What Is the Reader to Make of This?"

Zbigniew Herbert, "I Would Like to Describe"

Fernando Pessoa, "Autopsychography" & "Discontinuous Poems" (Pessoa's other persona, Alberto Caeiro)

Mary Oliver, "The Poet With His Face in His Hands"

Gary Snyder, "How Poetry Comes to Me"

Seamus Heaney, "Digging"

~poetry workshops begin~

Week 10:

11/5: Craft seminar on assigned readings; in-class writing exercises; two student presentations

11/7: Workshop **Group A & B**

Reading assignments due next class:

Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" (villanelle) & "Sonnet"

W.H. Auden, "Musee des Beaux Arts" & "The Composer"

Allen Ginsberg, "America"

Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again"

Wallace Stevens, "Gubbinal" & "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"

Week 11:

11/12: Craft seminar on assigned readings, two student presentations

11/14: Workshop **Group C & D**

Reading assignments due next class:

Carolyn Forché, "The Colonel"

Wisława Szymborska, "The End and the Beginning"

Lisel Mueller, "Beginning With 1914" "Curriculum Vitae" "The End of Science Fiction"

Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise"

Week 12:

11/19: Craft seminar on assigned readings; two student presentations

11/21 NO CLASS/THANKSGIVING BREAK

Reading assignments due next class:

Sharon Olds, "Sex Without Love" & "Hip Replacement Ode"

Patrick Rosal, "Ode to Eating a Pomegranate in Brooklyn"

Emily Dickinson, "Hope is the thing with feathers," & "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun"

Terrance Hayes, "Boogie Woogie Blues"

Morgan Parker, "Afro"

Week 13:

11/26: Craft seminar on assigned readings, two student presentations

11/28: Workshop **Group A & B**

Reading assignments due next class:

Robert Frost, "Birches"

Selected haikus (Issa, Basho)

Joy Harjo, "She Had Some Horses"

Jane Hirshfeld, "Heat" & "When Your Life Looks Back" & "My Life Was the Size of My Life"

Edna St. Vincent Millay, "Time Does Not Bring Relief"

Week 14:

12/3: Craft seminar on assigned readings, two student presentations

12/5: Workshop **Group C & D**

Week 15:

12/10: Workshop **Group A & B**

12/12: Workshop **Group C & D**

MONDAY 12/17: Final portfolios/revisions due! Please put them in my box in the basement of the Writers House by 1:45pm. I will retrieve them no later than 2pm.