

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction & Poetry

Fall 2018: T/Th 9:30 – 10:45am

Professor: Elizabeth Nicholas

Contact: ewn221@nyu.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11am – 12:30pm

Overview

This course is designed to introduce you to the artistic craft of creative writing. It's not a literature course. We will be looking at novels, stories, and poems as creative writers – taking them apart, discussing not just what they're saying but how they work. This course will also provide an introduction to the workshop format. Tuesdays will be devoted to discussions of craft, and Thursdays will be devoted to workshops. You may submit fiction, poetry, or a combination of both over the course of the semester.

Assignments

Workshop pieces:

Stories may be between 5 – 20 pages in length, double spaced, 12pt font. If you want to submit a chapter from a novel-in-progress, you must include a paragraph-long overview of the novel contextualizing your submission.

You may submit up to 5 pages of poetry (whether one or multiple poems is up to you).

All submissions must include your name as well as page numbers. Submissions are due the Thursday before your workshop and should be emailed to the entire class. Late submissions will be penalized.

You are responsible for printing out a copy of each piece and bringing it to class. Here, you should use marginalia to identify passages you think work particularly well, areas of confusion, grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors. You will return your hard copy to the writer after each workshop, along with your workshop letter. Write your (the reader's) name on each submission and staple your workshop letter to the back.

Workshop letters:

You will write a one-page feedback letter to each writer, for each piece. On the day of the workshop, you will bring two hard copies of each letter to class, one for the writer, and one for me. These letters are meant to provide useful feedback to the writer. You'll want to identify what works and what doesn't work in a piece, identify any points of confusion, and give constructive feedback on how a piece can be improved.

Writing Exercises:

Throughout the course of the semester, I will assign various writing exercises. The purpose of the exercises is to spark your creativity, encourage you to take risks, and to help you grow as a writer.

Reading:

We will be reading several novels, short stories, and poems over the course of the semester. Our aim in these readings will be to teach you to read like a writer. This means we will be reading with an eye towards what an author is doing with language, plot, character, and style that makes each book, story, or poem effective (or not). I expect you to come to class with at least three craft elements in a reading you admire or would like to discuss, and to participate actively in all class conversations.

Final Portfolio: At the end of the semester, you will submit a final portfolio, which will contain:

- 1 revised story (along with my original marked up copy) OR
- 1 revised poem (ditto)
- 1 writing exercise expanded into a short story or poem

Grading Breakdown

Workshop pieces – 30%

Workshop letters – 20%

Class participation – 30%

Final portfolio – 20%

Office Hours

I will hold weekly office hours. You're welcome to sign up to meet with me as frequently as you'd like.

Expectations

- Show up, and show up on time. You are permitted two unexcused absences. Your grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter for any additional unexcused absences. If you arrive more than 20 minutes late to class, that will be considered an absence.
- No laptops, cell phones, or other electronic devices will be permitted during class.
- Do not plagiarize. You will be caught and penalized.
- Be thoughtful and respectful to your classmates during workshops. We will discuss workshop etiquette in more depth and devise a workshop schedule during the first week of class.

Note

- If you submit any writing which exhibits specific, potential dangers, especially about young people of college age—like sexual assault, depression, or suicide—you may expect a brief note or email from me to make sure you are okay. If you want to avoid this, please send me a quick heads up to alert me that your work is a reflection on your creativity, and not your current state of mind. With that said, I do not *at all* want to discourage you from writing about these topics – please do write freely.

Reading List

Poems:

“At North Farm,” by John Ashbery

“The Threatened One,” by Jorge Luis Borges
“The Stranger Song,” by Leonard Cohen
“Fury,” by Lucille Clifton
“For Andrew Wood,” by James Fenton
“The City of Paris has You in Mind Tonight,” by Deborah Landau
“Annabel Lee,” by Edgar Allan Poe
“Daddy,” by Sylvia Plath
“Lady Lazarus,” by Sylvia Plath
“Love Dogs,” by Jalaluddin Mevlana-Rumi
“Just Once,” by Anne Sexton
“For My Young Friends Who Are Afraid,” by William Stafford
“I Meet My Grandmother in Italy,” by Katrina Vandenberg

Short Stories:

“Wendy,” by Ka Bradley
“The Professor and the Siren,” by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa
“The Husband Stitch,” by Carmen Maria Machado
“People Like That Are the Only People Here,” by Lorrie Moore
“A Late Encounter with the Enemy,” by Flannery O’Connor
“Faith in a Tree,” by Grace Paley

Novels:

Go Tell It on the Mountain, by James Baldwin
The Lover, by Marguerite Duras
In the Café of Lost Youth, by Patrick Modiano
Pnin, by Vladimir Nabokov

Essays:

On the Morning After the Sixties, by Joan Didion
Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace, by Zadie Smith
Notes on Camp, by Susan Sontag

Recommended Reading:

Naming the World: And Other Exercises for the Creative Writer, by Bret Anthony Johnston

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Schedule

Fiction

Week 1

TUES 9/4 – Introduction

THUR 9/6 – Craft

*For the first week only, Workshop Group 1 will be permitted to submit by SATURDAY 9/8.

Week 2

TUES 9/11 – Craft

THUR 9/13 –Workshop Group 1

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 2

Week 3

TUES 9/18 – Craft

THUR 9/20 –Workshop Group 2

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 3

Week 4

TUES 9/25 – Craft

THUR 9/27 –Workshop Group 3

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 4

Week 5

TUES 10/2 - Craft

THUR 10/4 –Workshop Group 4

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 5

Week 6

TUES 10/9 – Craft

THUR 10/11 – Workshop Group 5

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 6

Week 7

TUES 10/16 – Craft

THUR 10/18 – Workshop Group 6

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 1

Week 8

TUES 10/23 – Craft

THUR 10/25 – Workshop Group 1

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 2

Week 9

TUES 10/30 – Craft

THUR 11/1 – Workshop Group 2

Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 3

Week 10

TUES 11/6 – Craft

THUR 11/8 – Workshop Group 3
Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 4

Week 11

TUES 11/13 – Craft
THUR 11/15 – Workshop Group 4
Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 5

Week 12 – Thanksgiving

TUES 11/20 – Craft
THUR 11/22 – Thanksgiving – no class

Week 13

TUES 11/27 – Craft
THUR 11/29 – Workshop Group 5
Due: Submissions from Workshop Group 6

Week 14

TUES 12/4 – Craft
THUR 12/6 – Workshop Group 6

Week 15

TUES 12/11 – Craft
THUR 12/13 – Class wrap-up