

## CREATIVE WRITING: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY AND FICTION

Course: CRWRI-UA.815.005

**Time:** Monday/Wednesday 2:00 PM - 3:15 PM.

**Instructor:** Lisa Gerard

**Email:** Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu

**Class Location:** TBD

**Office Hours:** Before or after class, by appointment.

**Office Location:** Lillian Vernon Writers House (58 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street) - Office #B004

### ***Humor***

“Humor is mankind’s greatest blessing.” – Mark Twain

One element that will tie most of our readings together is humor. This doesn’t mean we’ll be reading humor pieces, explicitly. However, the assigned stories and poems will employ a comic voice—albeit in *very* different ways—that make them feel alive and memorable and fun. You’ll find that Lorrie Moore funny is very different than Vladimir Nabokov funny, just like Anne Carson’s humor is not at all the same as Dorothy Parker’s. While students will not be expected to use humor in their own writing, we will consider the ways in which and how this voice is working (or not working) in the craft component of this course. But in the end, David Foster Wallace puts what matters very nicely: “What the really great artists do is they’re entirely themselves. They’re entirely themselves, they’ve got their own vision, they have their own way of fracturing reality, and if it’s authentic and true, you will feel it in your nerve endings.”

### **Overview**

The purpose of this course is to become a better writer. The course has two parts: (1) the writing workshop, and (2) the craft of fiction and poetry.

In the craft portion, we will read stories and poems *as writers*. Rather than taking the literature-class approach, we will take apart the stories and poems with the objective of identifying what we would want to use to make our own writing feel more alive. What’s working, what isn’t, and why? What makes a character feel real? What holds our attention? We will learn the rules *and* how to break them. On workshop days, we’ll be looking at the writing of our peers with these same writerly and readerly lenses, and critique their writing both supportively and constructively, noting a piece’s strengths as well as its weaknesses. In-class writing prompts and other short writing assignments will put all of this into practice and give you new ways to flex your creative muscles. By the end of the semester, your journals and writing portfolios will have hopefully led you towards a better sense of your own voice, strengths, and interests as a writer.

### **Course Structure**

Our class meets on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Mondays will be dedicated to lessons on craft, while Wednesdays will be our day for workshopping your writing.

#### ***Mondays (Craft of Fiction & Poetry)***

- You will be expected to have read all assigned stories or poems before class.

Readings will either be distributed in class or posted to our class Dropbox. Please bring these readings to class either as a hard copy or on e-reader devices.

- In your writing journal, please write at least three lines/sentences that you either liked or did not like from the assigned readings. You should be prepared to read these aloud and share your reason(s) for liking/disliking it.
- You can also expect to do in-class writing assignments to help inspire new material.

***Wednesdays (Workshop)***

- Students will submit a poem or story (please consult the schedule) the week before it is scheduled to be workshopped. You will be expected to bring sixteen hard copies of your work. \*Please note that there is a page limit of 20 pages for fiction pieces.
- Over the course of the semester, you will workshop one story and one poem.
- Students are expected to have, thoroughly read, marked up, and line edited each submitted piece. (We will go over this on the first day of class.) You will also prepare a brief response letter to the writer about the submission. \*Please bring two printed copies of your response letters.
- Each story slated for that particular day will be discussed and critiqued, identifying both strengths and weaknesses. Roughly 3-4 pieces will be workshopped each week.

**Required Texts**

- Pnin, Vladimir Nabokov
  - Autobiography of Red, Anne Carson
  - Chapters One & Three from *Prep* by Curtis Sittenfeld (The assigned pages will be distributed, but I highly recommend the entire book.)
- \*If you use an e-reader, I will provide the e-book versions.

All other course materials will be provided in the form of handouts or pdfs, all of which will be posted to our class Dropbox.

**Provisional Reading Lists**

***Fiction***

Martin Amis	Lorrie Moore	John Updike
Michael Chabon	Alice Munro	Kurt Vonnegut
Junot Díaz	Vladimir Nabokov	David Foster Wallace
Jhumpa Lahiri	George Saunders	Evelyn Waugh
Kelly Link	Curtis Sittenfeld	

***Poetry***

Lewis Carroll	Matthea Harvey	Sharon Olds
Anne Carson	Langston Hughes	Dorothy Parker
Sandra Cisernos	Dorothea Lasky	Edgar Allan Poe
Ethan Coen	Patricia Lockwood	Matthew Rohrer
Emily Dickinson	Vladimir Nabokov	Anne Sexton

## **Essays**

“Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale,” Kate Bernheimer

“On Keeping a Notebook,” Joan Didion

“Why I Write,” George Orwell

“Thank You, Ester Forbes,” “Mr. Vonnegut in Sumatra,” “Rise, Baby, Rise!” George Saunders

“That Crafty Feeling,” Zadie Smith

“How to Write With Style,” Kurt Vonnegut

“A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again,” David Foster Wallace

## **Grading**

40% - Workshop Submissions

- Each student will workshop one story and one poem. All pieces should be submitted on time. Submissions will be graded on effort, *not* talent.
  - o Submissions are to be double-spaced and in 12-point font (Times New Roman) with 1-inch margins.
  - o Fiction submissions should not exceed 15-20 pages. Poetry submissions should consist of 3-5 poems of substance. Please contact me if you are working on a long-form poem.

30% - Participation

- All reading assignments are to be completed on time.
- Students are expected to participate in discussions on assigned readings. (I encourage you to write out some notes beforehand so you have some comments to refer to while discussing our readings.)
- Students will record three lines from the week’s readings that they liked or disliked in their writing journals and be prepared to share their reasoning.
- Students will schedule a midpoint meeting to review their journaling progress.
- For each workshop submission, students are expected to write a brief response letter to the writer and come to class with two printed copies of these letters.

30% - Final Portfolio

- One copy of each original story and poem submitted for workshop
- A revised version of one story and one poem.
- Writing Journal (your notes, in-class writing assignments, etc)

## **Portfolio**

By the final day of class, each student will submit a portfolio of his/her writing. This will consist of the following:

- Cover page
- Table of contents
- One revised story
- One revised poem

\* Page numbers and your last name should be noted in the bottom right-hand corner.

## **Journals**

On the first day of class, every student will receive a writing journal. This journal will be used for in-class writing assignments and other prompts that I might ask you to do as short take-home assignments. Students will also record the three sentences/lines they liked or disliked from the week's reading assignments. I encourage as much note-taking as possible. Are you reading something interesting in your spare time or for another class? Did you see a movie or watch a show that gave you a crafty idea? Write it down. Lorrie Moore once pointed out what she thought was the difference between the writer and the non-writer: "The non-writer thinks she'll remember it in the morning." The writer knows she won't, and she's right. If something comes to you, don't leave it for the morning.

Students will turn in their journals at the halfway point of the semester to review their progress. The journals will also be submitted along with the final portfolio for thorough review.

## **Attendance Policy**

Class will begin promptly at 2:00pm. Students are required to attend all classes. A writing workshop is a small community, and everyone's presence and participation is necessary for it to function.

Because emergencies sometimes arise and people get sick, each student is allowed one unexcused absence (with the exception of the day you are being workshopped). For every unexcused absence that follows, a half-letter will be deducted from your grade. Two late arrivals will count as an absence, so please do be on time. Absences due to medical emergencies must be excused with a note from a doctor. Please bring the note to the next class you attend. If you are aware that you are going to be absent due to a religious holiday, please let me know by email before the class.

## **Classroom Etiquette**

It is important to be respectful, constructive, and generous when giving feedback on another student's work. An ideal workshop is open and supportive. Attacking your classmates will not make their writing or your writing better, nor will it help your grade. We will discuss in detail on our first Wednesday how to give constructive criticism. Disrespectful or inappropriate behavior in class will not be tolerated.

## **Office Hours**

Each student is expected to meet with me after his/her first workshop, but I do encourage meetings after each workshop turn (and to discuss craft and writing in general). Please email me at [Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu](mailto:Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu) to set up a meeting time. My office (#B004) is on the basement level of the Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, which is located at 58 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, between 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

## **Tech Policy**

With the exception of e-readers (should you choose to use one), we will observe a strict no tech policy. Laptops will not be allowed, and cellphones should be on silent and stowed away. In-class writing assignments will be done in your journals, which I will distribute the first day of class.

### **Extra Credit Policy**

You may obtain extra credit by completing **two** of the following assignments:

- Attend a reading and write a one-page response (Discuss your impressions and what you learned that you can apply to your own writing. Submit the response within one week of the event. I encourage you to attend events that are part of the Creative Writing Program's public reading series. You can find more information [here](#).)
- Write a book review of at least two double-spaced pages (standard formatting applies) on a novel, short story collection, or collection of poetry.
- Go to a museum and write a poem or short story inspired by a work of art. You must include the museum ticket and a photo of the artwork along with the writing assignment.

### **Plagiarism**

Don't do it. You will receive a zero on the assignment and will be referred to the college for disciplinary action. NYU's policy on academic integrity can be reviewed [here](#).

### **Student Wellness**

If you submit a piece of creative work that exhibits potential dangers—such as depression, suicide, or murder—expect that I will email you to check in. However, you can preemptively send me an email explaining that this is simply creative work and not reflective of your state of mind.

If you think your mental health and well-being is affecting your classroom performance, please let me know. Also remember that the NYU Wellness Exchange Hotline can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at (212) 443-9999.

## **SCHEDULE**

**Note:** Readings and assignments are subject to change. You will be notified in advance should there be any adjustments.

**Wednesday, September 5** – Introductions, Course Overview, Workshop Protocol

**Monday, September 10** – Craft and Writing Advice Discussion, In-Class Writing, Fiction and Poetry Craft Examples

\*Homework due: “That Crafty Feeling” by Zadie Smith, “How to Write with Style” by Kurt Vonnegut, and “How To Be A Writer” by Lorrie Moore; Journal Writing Assignments/Writing Prompts

**Wednesday, September 12** – Workshop Round 1.1

**Monday, September 17** – Michael Chabon & Kelly Link

\*Homework due: “The Halloween Party” and “The Little Knife” by Michael Chabon and “Travels with the Snow Queen” by Kelly Link

**Wednesday, September 19** – Workshop Round 1.2

**Monday, September 24** – Lorrie Moore

\*Homework due: “Paris,” “You’re Ugly Too,” and “The Jewish Hunter,” by Lorrie Moore, & “How To Date a Brown Girl (Black Girl, White Girl, or Halfie)” by Junot Díaz

**Wednesday, September 26** – Workshop Round 1.3

**Monday, October 1** – Sandra Cisernos, Emily Dickinson, Patricia Lockwood

\*Homework due: Assigned poems by Sandra Cisernos, Emily Dickinson, Patricia Lockwood

**Wednesday, October 3** – Workshop Round 1.4

**Monday, October 8**                    **NO CLASS – *Fall Recess***

**Tuesday, October 9 (Legislative Day)** – *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson

\*Homework due: Read *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson

**Wednesday, October 10** – Workshop Round 1.5

**Monday, October 15** – Ethan Coen, Sharon Olds, Matthew Rohrer, Anne Sexton

\*Homework due: Assigned poems by Ethan Coen, Sharon Olds, Matthew Rohrer, & Anne Sexton

**Wednesday, October 17** – Workshop Round 1.6

**Monday, October 22** – Langston Hughes, Vladimir Nabokov, Edgar Allan Poe

\*Homework due: Assigned poems by Langston Hughes, Vladimir Nabokov, & Edgar Allan Poe

**Wednesday, October 24** – Workshop Round 1.7

**Monday, October 29** – Lewis Carroll, Matthea Harvey, Dorothea Lasky, Dorothy Parker  
\*Homework due: Assigned poems by Lewis Carroll, Matthea Harvey, Dorothea Lasky, & Dorothy Parker

**Wednesday, October 31** – Workshop Round 2.1

**Monday, November 5** – Martin Amis & Kurt Vonnegut  
\*Homework due: “Career Move” by Martin Amis and “Welcome to the Monkey House” drafts by Kurt Vonnegut

**Wednesday, November 7** – Workshop Round 2.2

**Monday, November 12** – *Prep* by Curtis Sittenfeld  
\*Homework due: Chapters One (Thieves) and Three (Assassin) from *Prep* by Curtis Sittenfeld

**Wednesday, November 14** – Workshop Round 2.3

**Monday, November 19** – Workshop Round 2.4 + Jhumpa Lahiri  
\*Homework due: “The Third and Final Continent” by Jhumpa Lahiri; Journal Assignments (and get a head start on *Pnin*!)

**Wednesday, November 21**                      **NO CLASS** – *Thanksgiving Break*

**Monday, November 26** *Pnin* by Vladimir Nabokov  
\*Homework due: Read *Pnin* by Vladimir Nabokov

**Wednesday, November 28** – Workshop Round 2.5

**Monday, December 3** – George Saunders  
\*Homework due: “My Flamboyant Grandson,” “Sea Oak,” “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline,” and “Thank You, Esther Forbes” by George Saunders

**Wednesday, December 5** – Workshop Round 2.6

**Monday, December 10** – David Foster Wallace  
\*Homework due: “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” by David Foster Wallace; Final Portfolio Prep

**Wednesday, December 12** – Workshop Round 2.7 + Final Class Celebration  
\*Homework: Work on your Final Portfolios (due Friday, December 14 at 5pm EST!)

**\*\*FINAL PORTFOLIOS ARE DUE BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 5PM EST\*\***  
Final portfolios will be turned in directly to me, either in my office (58 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Office #B004) or to my mailbox in the Writers House. These will be graded and placed in my mailbox for you to pick up by **Wednesday, December 19 at 10am EST**.