

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.015

Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 PM – 1:45 PM

Instructor: Natasha Rao
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Office Hours: By appointment

I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

—Mark Strand

Course Description

This course will serve as an introduction to the writing of original fiction and poetry. The course is structured in two components: on Tuesdays, we will discuss a number of stories and poems by established writers, and on Thursdays we will workshop our own pieces. The objective of this configuration is to learn from other writers, borrowing or subverting their strategies and applying various techniques to our own writing. By the end of this course, you will have a deeper understanding of craft elements deployed in fiction and poetry, and will be equipped with skills to use in writing and revising your own work.

Texts & Materials

1. Selected stories and materials (posted on NYU Classes or distributed in class)
2. *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine

Assignments

1. **Workshop pieces:** Over the course of the semester, you will submit one piece of fiction (7-12 pages, double spaced), and two poems (no longer than 2 pages each) to be workshopped in class. Please bring hard copies of your work to distribute in class one week before the date you are being workshopped.
2. **Workshop comments:** On weeks you are not being workshopped, you are required to bring in written responses to your peers' work. I ask that you provide line-by-line annotations directly on the page, as well as a short paragraph summarizing your thoughts.
3. **Writing exercises:** Each week, I will assign a short writing exercise related to the readings, often asking you to mimic some aspect of the pieces we will be discussing. These are due to me in hard copy the following Tuesday. They are meant to be a fun way of engaging with the texts, with the hope that the prompts will spark some inspiration. If time permits on Tuesdays, volunteers may share their pieces aloud with the class. You may expand on these assignments and turn them into pieces for workshop if you like.
4. **Final portfolio:** On the last day of class, please bring in a final portfolio of your work from the term. This will include revised editions of the pieces you brought in for workshop, as well as a short (2-3 page, double spaced) artist statement that details your developments as a writer, and a consideration of your dominant themes, obsessions, and approach to language.

Office Hours

As part of the course, you are required to meet with me once individually. You are welcome to meet with me as often as you like, and I encourage coming to office hours if there is some aspect of the course or your writing on which you would like direct feedback. I will distribute a sign-up sheet each week, or you can email me to coordinate a meeting time.

Extra Credit Opportunities

Being in New York City (and at NYU, especially), we are lucky to be right in the heart of contemporary literary action. There are countless events—readings, discussions, panels—that take place daily, and I will provide you with a list of these at the start of the term. I don't require that you go, but I highly recommend taking advantage of these opportunities, and will offer extra credit (up to 5%) if you go to one or more of these events and turn in a brief statement of your impressions.

Grading

Your grade is a reflection of thorough and timely completion of all parts of the class. I will absolutely not be grading you based on how “good” your writing is, rather, I am looking for effort and a willingness to learn. Grades will be determined based on these components:

1. **Attendance and Participation (35%)**
2. **Workshop pieces (20%)**
3. **Weekly assignments (20%)**
4. **Office hours (10%)**
5. **Final portfolio (15%)**

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation: You are required to arrive to class on time, and are allowed one unexcused absence. If you are more than ten minutes late to class on three occasions, I will count that as an absence. I ask that you come to each class ready to engage with the material—on Tuesdays, you must have read the texts carefully in order to come prepared for free-flowing discussion, and on workshop days, please come ready to participate in discussion, having thoroughly reviewed your peers' work.

Academic Integrity: Do not do not do not plagiarize. It's exceptionally easy to catch, and will immediately be reported to NYU. Plagiarizing also defeats the entire purpose of this course, as we are here to grow and get feedback on our own work.

Technology: This is a low-tech space, please do not use any laptops, phones, or tablets in class unless otherwise instructed. Remember to print a hard copy of readings ahead of time to have with you during class.

Calendar: Fall 2018

Please have read each piece BY the day that it is listed

WEEK ONE:

- T Sept. 4: Introductions, Syllabus, et al.
- R Sept. 6: “How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore
“The Talent of the Room” by Michael Ventura
Excerpt from *The Writing Life* by Annie Dillard

WEEK TWO:

- T Sept. 11: “We Love You Crispina” by Jenny Zhang
“Essay #3: Leda and the Swan” by Eric Puchner
Writing Exercise #1 due
- R Sept. 13: “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” by Raymond Carver
“The World Laughs in Flowers” by Simon Van Booy
Fiction Workshop 1 distributes

WEEK THREE:

- T Sept. 18: “Good Old Neon” by David Foster Wallace
“The Man on the Stairs” by Miranda July
Writing Exercise #2 due
- R Sept. 20: Fiction Workshop 1
Fiction Workshop 2 distributes

WEEK FOUR:

- T Sept. 25: Excerpt from *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* by Bhanu Kapil
Excerpt from *One Hundred Apocalypses and Other Apocalypses* by Lucy Corin
“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Writing Exercise #3 due
- R Sept. 27: Fiction Workshop 2
Fiction Workshop 3 distributes

WEEK FIVE:

- T Oct. 2: “The Cheater’s Guide to Love” by Junot Diaz
“Work” by Dennis Johnson
Writing Exercise #4 due

R Oct. 4: Fiction Workshop 3
Fiction Workshop 4 distributes

WEEK SIX:

T Oct. 9: No class, classes meet according to Monday schedule

R. Oct. 11: Fiction Workshop 4
Fiction Workshop 5 distributes

WEEK SEVEN:

T Oct. 16: “Short Talks” by Anne Carson
Excerpt from *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson
Writing Exercise #5 due

R Oct. 18: *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine

WEEK EIGHT:

T Oct. 23: Poetry Packet 1: Olds, Clifton, Howe, Hayden
Writing Exercise #6 due

R Oct. 25: Poetry Packet 2: Bishop, Whitman, Cummings, Hughes, Hejinian
Poetry Workshop 1 distributes

WEEK NINE:

T Oct. 30: Poetry Packet 3: Hass, Dove, Oliver, Wright
Writing Exercise #7 due

R Nov. 1: Poetry Workshop 1
Poetry Workshop 2 distributes

WEEK TEN:

T Nov. 6: Poetry Packet 3: Siken, Dickman, Rich, Neruda
Writing Exercise #8 due

R: Nov. 8: Poetry Workshop 2
Poetry Workshop 3 distributes

WEEK ELEVEN:

T Nov. 13: Poetry Packet 4: Vuong, Lorca, O’Hara
Writing Exercise #9 due

R Nov. 15: Poetry Workshop 3
Poetry Workshop 1 distributes

WEEK TWELVE:

T Nov. 20: Poetry Workshop 1
Poetry Workshop 2 distributes

R Nov. 22: No class, Thanksgiving recess

WEEK THIRTEEN:

T Nov. 27: Lee, Komunyakaa, Sharif
Writing Exercise #10 due

R Nov. 29: Poetry Workshop 2
Poetry Workshop 3 distributes

WEEK FOURTEEN:

T Dec. 4: Ekphrasis Poetry Packet
In class Grey Gallery trip
Writing Exercise #11 due

R Dec. 6: Poetry Workshop 3

WEEK FIFTEEN:

T Dec. 11: Alternative Forms Packet
Writing Exercise #12 due

R Dec. 13: In class reading and party
Portfolios due