Adham Mahmoud  
Intro to Creative Writing  
Tues & Thurs 12:30 pm – 1:45 pm  

Intro to Creative Writing Syllabus

“Poetry, I feel, is a tyrannical discipline. You’ve got to go so far so fast in such a small space; you’ve got to burn away all the peripherals.” – Sylvia Plath

“Fiction is one of the few experiences where loneliness can be both confronted and relieved. Drugs, movies where stuff blows up, loud parties — all these chase away loneliness by making me forget my name’s Dave and I live in a one-by-one box of bone no other party can penetrate or know. Fiction, poetry, music, really deep serious sex, and, in various ways, religion — these are the places where loneliness is countenanced, stared down, transfigured, treated.” – David Foster Wallace

This course is meant to spark your literary interests, talents, and inclinations, so that you can walk away with a clearer image of who you are – or rather, who you might be – as a writer. This applies to everyone, from those who might have never written before, to those who are fairly decided on their preferred forms of writing, and everyone in between. You will read a fair amount of short stories and poems, and then write your own. You will critique the works of your classmates, and help one another on this path of self-discovery and skill improvement. And if you enjoy the crafts of fiction and poetry, rest assured: you will have a great time.

Texts and Materials:
All readings will be uploaded to NYU Classes, so your wallets remain safe. That being said, you will be required to print out readings and bring them to class on the day of their discussion.

Class Structure:

We will workshop on Tuesdays. For fiction workshops, we will discuss three works of fiction. For poetry workshops, we will discuss five poems.

On Thursdays we will work on craft. This will involve discussing readings, talking stories, poems, and all sorts of other narrative forms. We will watch videos of interviews and readings. It will be a cool and relaxed discussion that you will enjoy, so long as you’re interested.
Course Structure and Grading:

Workshops – 40%

- **Submissions (20%)**:
  
  You are required to submit one short story, one poems throughout the semester, to be workshopped in class. You will email this work to the class a week before you are to be workshopped. (For example: if you are to be workshopped on Tuesday, the 28th. You must email the class on Thursday, the 23rd, by 11:59 PM.)

  Short stories should be 4-6 pages long.

- **Critique (20%)**:
  
  You are required to print the work of your classmate, read it, annotate it (as will be shown to you during the first class), and write them a brief response letter, of two to three paragraphs. A sample of this will also be shown to you. A copy of this letter must be emailed to me before every workshop.

Craft – 30%

- **Reading Responses (10%)**:

  On Thursdays you are required to submit a one page (times new roman, 12pt, double-spaced, one inch margined) response to the reading assigned for that class. Do not use the first third of the page with date, professor name, title, and so on. Just write, and then use a pen to put your name and date after printing. This shouldn’t take more than half an hour of your time. It is not an essay, it a response. Every Thursday I will expect at least one student to read out their response in class.

- **Final Essay (20%)**:

  This assignment is going to force you to think and write about a novel as a writer. Below you will find a list of more than ten novels. You get to choose any one of them you’re interested in, and write a 5-8 page essay following a prompt I’ll assign you once you’ve selected the novel.
Participation and Attendance – 30%.

- In terms of discussion in class, some of you will be able to engage more than others. It’s just how we’re built as human beings. If you’re relatively shy, I will not give you a hard time, so long as I can see that you care and that you’re trying your best to speak up and step out of your comfort zone. If, on the other hand, you simply don’t care, this will affect your participation grade heavily. I will be able to tell the difference.

- You are allowed two absences throughout the semester, reserved in cases of illness, emergencies, and religious holidays. Every additional absence will result in your grade being lowered one degree (from B+ to B), unless you provide proof of a serious emergency and an email from your academic advisor.

Please note: For all of the above, you will be graded on effort, not quality. If you do the work, attend class, participate, and care, you can expect an A, regardless of how talented you are as a writer and reader. Please know that I will notice when a response has been written half an hour before class, about a work that was not read, with the help of Sparknotes and redundance. In terms of quality I only expect improvement throughout the semester.

Policies:

- **Timeliness:** Please respect your classmates and be on time. If you are more than fifteen minutes late to class, you will be considered absent. And if you are in a habit of arriving late quite frequently, it will add up to an absence.

- **Format:** All submitted work, except for poems, must be size 12 font, with one inch margins.

- **Technology:** Because our class will revolve around conversation, it is detrimental to have laptops open in front of us while we talk to one another. No laptops allowed.

- **Late Submissions:** I will not accept any late reading responses. For this reason, I will allow three missed responses throughout the semester. As for the final essay, every day that it is late, will result in a lowering of your grade by one degree (B+ to B).

- **Sensitivity:** Workshops are an environment in which allow ourselves to be vulnerable. We all have the right to artistic freedom and honest opinion. We must, however, be
sensitive to the vulnerability, comfort, and safety of our classmates. There is a fine line between constructive criticism and attack – one that will be enforced when needed.

- **Plagiarism:** Please don't do it. This will get you in deep trouble with the university.

- **Food:** You can eat and drink anything that will not cause a distracting smell or sound.

- **Office hours:** I will ask that you come meet me twice. Once in the middle of the semester, to discuss your novel selection for the final essay, and once towards the end, to discuss your portfolio. You can come meet me any additional times you'd like, as well.

- **Missing your own workshop:** It is disrespectful to have your classmates read and critique your work, and not show up for your workshop. Don’t do it.

**Final Portfolio:** Along with your final essay, you are to submit one rewrite of a poem, and a rewrite of your story, with the help of the critique you received in class. Rewriting/editing is arguably the most important skill a writer must have. If you don’t know what this means, don’t worry, it will be explained in class.

**Final Essay Novel Selection:**

- The Easter Parade – Richard Yates
- Oscar Wao – Junot Diaz
- A Farewell to Arms – Hemingway
- Things Fall Apart – Chinua Achebe
- Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen

- The Color Purple – Alice Walker
- Americanah – Chimamanda Adichie
- Lolita – Nabokov
- White Noise – Don Delillo
- Slaughterhouse Five – Vonnegut

**Tentative Schedule:**

Tuesday, January 23rd: Introductions and Syllabus Review.

Thursday, January 25th: **Denis Johnson and Richard Yates**

Tuesday, January 30th: **Students 1,2, 3, and 4 Poetry Workshop.**

Thursday, February 1st: **Yusef Komunyaaka and Frank O’Hara**

Tuesday, February 6th, **Students 10, 11, and 12 Fiction Workshop**

Thursday, February 8th: **Zadie Smith**
Tuesday, February 13th: Students 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 Poetry Workshop
Thursday, February 15th: Allen Ginsberg and Charles Bukowski

Tuesday, February 20th: Students 13, 14, and 15 Fiction Workshop
Thursday, February 22nd: David Foster Wallace

Tuesday, February 27th: Students 10, 11, 12, and 13 Poetry Workshop
Thursday, March 1st: Morgan Parker and Danez Smith

Tuesday, March 6th: Students 1, 2, and 3 Fiction Workshop
Thursday, March 8th: Joyce Carol Oates and Amy Hempel

Spring Break

Tuesday, March 20th: Students 14 and 15 Poetry Workshop
Thursday, March 21st: Ocean Vuong and Solmaz Sharif

Tuesday, March 27th: Students 4, 5, and 6 Fiction Workshop
Thursday, March 29th: George Saunders

Tuesday, April 3rd: Students 7, 8, and 9 Fiction Workshop
Thursday, April 5th: Lorrie Moore and Michael Chabon

Tuesday, April 10th: Students 1, 2, 3, and 4 Preference Workshop
Thursday, April 12th: Jorge Luis Borges and Pablo Neruda

Tuesday, April 17th: Students 5, 6, 7, and 8 Preference Workshop
Thursday, April 19th: Junot Diaz
Tuesday, April 24th: Students 9, 10, 11, and 12 Preference Workshop

Thursday, April 26th: Kendrick Lamar, Jay-Z, and Logic

Tuesday, May 1st: Students 13, 14, and 15 Preference Workshop

Thursday, May 3rd: Final Class Party

Tuesday, May 8th: Submission of Final Essay and Portfolio, by 5 PM at Lillion Vernon Creative Writing House.