Creative Writing: Intro to Fiction and Poetry - CRWRI-UA.815.002

Spring 2018

Instructor: Brittany Shutts
Contact: bs3289@nyu.edu
Class Times: Mondays and Wednesdays 12:30pm - 1:45pm
Office Hours: TBA
Location: TBA

“A story is simply a sequence of language that produces a chemical reaction in our bodies. When it’s done well, it causes sorrow, elation, awe, fascination. It makes us believe in what’s not there, but it also pours color over what is, so that we can feel and see the world anew. It fashions people, makes us care for them, then lades them with conflict and disappointment. It erects towns, then razes them. A story switches on some unfathomably sophisticated machine inside us and we see, gloriously, what is not possible.”

– Ben Marcus, Introduction to New American Stories

“Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”

– Samuel Beckett

Overview

The purpose of this course is to become a better writer. The class has two parts: 1) The craft of fiction and poetry and 2) the writing workshop. In the craft portion, we will read stories and poems as writers. We will take apart texts and use what we learn in our own writing. What makes a character feel real? What makes a poem stick with us? How do we hold a reader’s attention? We will learn the rules; we will learn how to break the rules. We will also do writing prompts that incorporate new techniques and force us to flex writing muscles we might not normally use. On workshop days, we will praise and critique student writing. We will identify the strengths and weaknesses of each submission and offer fodder for future revisions of the workshop pieces. By the end of the course, you will have a better sense of your own voice and know your strengths. You will hopefully feel more at ease in a workshop environment and feel comfortable critiquing work.

Course Structure

We will meet on Mondays and Wednesdays. Mondays will be spent honing our craft and Wednesdays will be spent workshopping student writing.
Monday: Craft of Fiction/Poetry
- We will read and analyze short stories and poems as writers. We will read with the intent to fill our writerly toolboxes with techniques that we can use to enrich our own work.
- Students will bring in three sentences/lines (typed and printed) each week that they liked or hated to discuss in class. Be prepared to read the sentences aloud to the class.
- We will also do in-class generative writing assignments to catalyze new work. Prepare to read these aloud as well.

What to bring to class on Mondays:
- Your notebook
- Hard copies of the craft stories, poems, and any other assigned reading
- A copy of the 3 sentences/lines you liked best

Wednesday: Workshop
- Each Wednesday we will workshop 3-4 poems/stories.
- Students will submit a poem or story (15 pages max. for fiction) the week before it is scheduled to be workshopped. Bring in 16 copies of the poem or story to class to distribute.
- Prepare to workshop 1 story, 1 poem, and 1 piece in whichever genre you choose.
- Students will read workshop stories and mark up and underline their copies to turn in to the writer.
- Students will also come prepared for workshop with a brief letter to the writer about the workshop piece. Please bring 2 copies of each note – one for the writer and one for me.
- We will praise and critique each piece, identifying its strengths and weaknesses.

What to bring to class on Wednesdays:
- Your notebook
- Copies of the stories or poems that will be workshopped that day
- 2 copies of each letter to the writer
- If you are being workshopped the following week: 16 copies of your story/poem

Required Texts
I want to avoid making you buy a lot of books. The following two are required:

- Autobiography of Red by Anne Carson
- Don’t Let Me Be Lonely by Claudia Rankine

All other materials will be provided in the form of printouts or PDFs.

Provisional Reading Lists
The following lists of reading materials are subject to change in accordance to the needs and interests of the class.

**Fiction**

Lorrie Moore – “How to Be a Writer”; “People Like that Are the Only People Here”
George Saunders – “Jon”
Donald Barthelme – “The School”; “Me and Miss Mandible”
Gabriel Garcia Marquez – “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”
Franz Kafka – “The Metamorphosis”
Maryse Meijer – “Love, Lucy”; “The Daddy”
Lucy Corin – “Madmen”
Lydia Davis – Select flash fiction stories
Charlotte Perkins Gilman – “The Yellow Wallpaper”
Jamaica Kincaid – “Girl”
Carmen Maria Machado – “The Husband Stitch”
Karen Russell – “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves”
Aimee Bender – “The Healer”
Roxane Gay – “Requiem for a Glass Heart”
Kelly Link – “Valley of the Girls”
Clarice Lispector – “The Smallest Woman in the World”
Tao Lin – “Love Is a Thing on Sale for More Money Than There Exists”
Lesley Nneka Arima – “Who Will Greet You at Home”
Judy Budnitz – “Where We Come From”; “Saving Face”
Alissa Nutting – “Dying Is All I Think About”

**Poetry**

Anne Carson – *Autobiography of Red*
Claudia Rankine – *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*
Matthea Harvey – Mermaid Poems
Dorothea Lasky – “Monsters”
Brigit Pegeen Kelly – “Song”
Patricia Smith – “Medusa”
Langston Hughes – “The Negro Dreams of Rivers”
Allen Ginsberg – excerpt of Howl
Sharon Olds – Selections from Odes
Elizabeth Bishop – “One Art”
Sylvia Plath – “Daddy”
Pablo Neruda – “Ode to the Onion”; “Ode to Broken Things”
Dylan Thomas – “Do not go gentle into that goodnight”
Ada Limon – “How to Triumph Like a Girl”
Harryette Mullen – Selected prose poems
Yusef Komunyakaa – “The Deck”

**Essays**

Ben Marcus – “Introduction” from New American Stories
George Saunders – “Rise, Baby, Rise!”

**Grading**

- 40% Workshop submissions
  - Writing works of fiction and poetry and submitting them to workshop on time on the day that they are due
  - Fiction and poetry submitted will be graded on effort, not talent!
- 30% Participation
  - Completing all reading assignments
  - Contributing to discussions of craft and workshop pieces
  - Bringing your 3 typed sentences/lines per week
  - Writing and turning in copies of letters
- 30% Portfolio
  - 1 revised story
  - 1 revised poem
  - A collection of your typed in-class writing assignments
  - Submitted on time on the last day of class

**Portfolio**
A portfolio of your writing must be submitted by the last day of class. This portfolio will consist of the following:

- Cover page
- Table of contents
- A collection of your typed and printed writing assignments
- 1 revised story
- 1 revised poem

Be sure to add a heading with your last name and page numbers. Print, staple, and bring it to class.

**Attendance Policy**

Class will begin promptly at 12:30pm. Everyone is required to attend all classes. A writing workshop is a small community and everyone’s presence and participation is necessary for it to function. I know that emergencies sometimes arise or people get sick, so everyone is allowed one unexcused absence (although not on the day you are up for workshop!). For every unexcused absence that follows, I will deduction of one letter from your grade. If you arrive late twice, this will also count as an absence. If you have another class immediately before this one that might prevent you from arriving on time, please email me to let me know. 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**

A writing workshop is an intimate community and sharing your writing requires some vulnerability. No one here is a perfect writer. We are all here to try, fail, and fail better. It is important to be respectful and generous when giving feedback on another student’s work. An ideal workshop is relaxed, 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**

I’d like to meet each student for office hours after their first workshop and I encourage you to meet with me more after each of the following workshops as well. Email me at bs3289@nyu.edu to set up a time.

**Tech Policy**

We will observe a strict no tech policy. Laptops will not be allowed. Cellphones will be silent and out of sight. You will not need a tablet or e-reader for any of our readings. We will do any in-class writing assignments with a pen and paper.

**Extra Credit Policy**
You may obtain extra credit by attending a reading and writing a 1 page response. Discuss your impressions and what you learned that you can apply to your own writing. Submit the response within one week.

**Plagiarism**

Don’t do it. You will receive a zero on the assignment and you will be referred to the college for disciplinary action. It is a waste of everyone’s time to workshop plagiarized work. If at any point you feel so much pressure that you are thinking about plagiarism at all, please contact me. Consult the link below to view NYU’s policy on academic integrity:

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity

**Student Wellness**

I don’t want to misinterpret a cry for help. 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 ask if you’re doing okay. If you want to avoid this, send me a quick email to accompany your submission explaining that your work is just creative and not a reflection of your state of mind.

If you are aware of any sensitivities to certain content that might come up in the texts we read, please let me know at the beginning of the semester.

If you think your mental health and well-being is affecting your classroom performance, please let me know. There is no need to go into unnecessary detail. If I can alleviate any unnecessary stress, I will do so. Remember that the NYU Wellness Exchange Hotline can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at (212) 443-9999.

**FAQs**

**How do I format my workshop submissions and letters?**

- Times New Roman font
- Size 12 font
- 1” margins all around
- Heading for submissions: Last name and page numbers on bottom right hand corner

**Will I be graded on how good my writing is?**

Your writing will be graded on effort, not talent! If you arrive to class late, miss classes, fail to submit on time, neglect to write letters to other students in the workshop, etc. the quality of your stories and poems will not compensate for it.

**Why are we reading things aloud? I am an introvert and this is cruel.**

Reading our own work aloud helps us develop our voice. It also heightens your awareness of how your sentences and lines sound aloud and alerts you to any clunky language.

**Can I eat during class?**
I’m aware that our class is during lunch time and that you maybe be coming from a morning class or just waking up. You’re welcome to bring quiet and inoffensive snacks that won’t distract you, me, or the rest of the students.

**Can I switch workshop dates with another student?**

Yes, but you and the other student must both email me confirmation 24 hours before the day that the piece will be distributed. Once the story or poem is distributed, there will be no switching.

**What if I have a disability that might prevent me from completing assignments on time and requires accommodations?**

The Moses Center can provide you with the necessary documentation to get these accommodations. You can contact the Moses Center at mosescsd@nyu.edu. Please provide this documentation to me by the add/drop deadline on 2/4/18.

**What if another student’s behavior, writing, or workshop comments make me uncomfortable?**

If you feel comfortable approaching the person privately or via email to express your concerns, I encourage you to do so. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable approaching the other student, please let me know privately or via email so that I can address the situation.

**How do I contact you?**

Send me an email at bs3289@nyu.edu. Keep in mind that I may not response to emails that are sent over the weekend until Monday.