Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

Instructor: Daniel Murage
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Class Schedule: TR 1:30 PM – 4:40 PM

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Course Objectives

The purpose of this course is to inspire the production of new works of fiction and poetry, and to learn how to think about those works critically and constructively in order to revise and improve them. We will cover the basics of the writing process and build a community in which we will share, critique and revise our work. In the role of writer, we will also read, discuss, and respond creatively to a series of texts throughout the semester. For your final project, you will submit a portfolio of revised work along with a critical response detailing your progress throughout the semester.

Course Structure:

We will be meeting twice a week, three hours per class with a twenty-minute break halfway.

Tuesday's classes will be dedicated to discussing assigned reading texts. We will pay close attention to elements of style (plot, character development, language, dialogue) and evaluate how effective the writer is in entertaining/enlightening/moving us. You will be expected to bring a short-written response to class every week.

Thursday’s classes will be dedicated as workshop day. We will critique each other's work, offering helpful feedback. If you are to be workshopped, you will bring copies of your submission to the class one week in advance of your assigned workshop date. You may submit an expanded and revised version of your written response (unless it's an analytical piece, in which case it does not qualify for workshop submission). As a courtesy to everyone in the class, cross-check your work for avoidable grammatical errors, incorrect sentence structure, or any other avoidable errors.

Here are the guidelines for workshop:

→ A short story submission should be between 4-15 pages while a poetry submission should be 1-5 pages.
→ If you are being workshopped, wait for your peers to finish commenting on your work. You will get an opportunity to discuss your work only at the end of the workshop.
→ Those not being workshopped shall bring hardcopies of their edits on the piece to be workshopped.
→ Those not being workshopped shall also bring 2 copies of a 1-page comments/suggestions response to the cohort’s submissions (one will be presented to me, and the other to the cohort at the end of workshop period.)
Course Components:

Written response: At the beginning of Tuesday’s class, you are required to submit a written response to me.

The written response can either be:
1. An analysis of the assigned readings for that week,
2. Your own piece that employs the techniques used in the assigned readings for that specific week,
3. A response to a writing assignment given by me in class, or
4. An experimental piece in any media form—video, pictures, painting, music etc.,—that uses/discusses techniques employed in assigned readings.

Portfolios: At the end of the semester you will submit a portfolio of original fiction and poetry (produced in this class) that you have edited and revised based on feedback from your classmates and from me.

The portfolio will include:
1. Cover page with your Name and Date
2. A 1-2-page reflection letter addressing your writing and revision process, as well as a reflection on the stories that influenced/did not influence your thinking/writing over the semester, and why.
3. Thoroughly revised versions of three of your workshop submissions

Attendance
You are allowed one unexcused absence over the course of the semester. All other absences must be excused with official documentation (doctor’sadvisor’s note etc.) or discussed with me in advance. Common permissible absences might include familial obligation, religious or civic duties. Any absence not discussed with me in advance will result in your overall grade being lowered to one degree (e.g. A to A- and so on).

Grading
Class Participation & Preparation – 20%
Written response – 20%
Workshop submissions & Peer Feedback – 40%
Portfolio– 20%

Course Administration:

Submission format: All submissions for the class should include Name, Title of Piece, Class Code and Page Numbers (strictly 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced).

Classroom etiquette: Every student is expected to behave respectfully towards fellow students in this class. Bullying or harassment of any kind on other students in unacceptable and may lead to disciplinary action.

Late submissions: All submissions must be submitted on time. For each day an assignment is late, you lose a letter grade on that assignment.

Accommodations: If you require accommodations of any kind in order to make this class run more smoothly for you because of a physical or learning disability, please bring this to my attention during the first week of class and we will work together to make arrangements.

Electronics: The use of any electronic devices is not allowed. You will receive one warning if seen; repeat usage will be counted as an absence for that specific day.
Extra credit: You can receive extra credit by attending a reading at NYU or elsewhere in the city and writing a 1-2-page response about your thoughts about the event, what you learned etc. (make sure to attach a flyer, ticket stub, program of the event etc.) These count as written responses and would thus be submitted at the beginning of class when you’d normally submit the written response. Maximum of 2 per student.

Week one: Introduction
A Model World – Michael Chabon
Good Readers and Good Writers – Vladimir Nabokov

Week two: Characterization
A Short History of Zaka the Zulu – Petina Gappah
Vanka – Anton Chekhov
On Rocky Islands – George Saunders

Week three: Structure
No One's a Mystery – Elizabeth Tallent
How to write about Africa – Binyavanga Wainaina
The Overcoat – Nikolai Gogol
That Crafty Feeling – Zadie Smith

Week four: Magical Realism
The Smallest Woman in the World – Clarice Lispector
The Metamorphosis – Franz Kafka
Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles – Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Week five: Poetry
Exodus album (select songs) – Bob Marley
Select songs – Nina Simone
How to Paint A Girl – Gbenga Adesina

Week six: Review and Finalize Portfolio