

Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction & Poetry

Spring 2020

Instructor: Kukuwa Ashun

Time: M/W 9:30 - 10:45 am

Location:

Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.009

Office Hours: By Appointment

Email: ka1983@nyu.edu

“When you’re writing, you’re trying to find out something which you don’t know. The whole language of writing for me is finding out what you don’t want to know, what you don’t want to find out. But something forces you anyway.” - James Baldwin, *The Paris Review* 1984

Course Overview: This introductory course explores the beauty of language through critical reading and creative writing. We will spend our semester reading and discussing works primarily by historically marginalized identities (i.e., writers of color, women and non-conforming writers, LGBTQIA+ authors) who’ve ruptured the notion of the “traditional” literary canon through their work. We will be interspersing poems, hybrid texts, and short stories to show how written works obtain similar qualities through different forms. While working through these contemporary texts, we will also examine how authors choose to stay in conversation with the world around them and whether or not these techniques are effective for a wider audience.

Structure: Mondays will be dedicated to craft and technique. We will review the assigned texts, analyze how these stories/poems are in conversation with each other, and discuss how these methods can inform our own writing. On **Wednesdays** we workshop! Workshop will consist of two short stories (8-12 pages) and two poetry submissions (1-2 pages) over the course of the semester. Workshopped stories will be submitted the Monday before your workshop day.

Note: If your assignment is due on a Monday when we don’t have a scheduled class, you’re responsible for emailing your assignment to me by 9:00 am on that day.

Required Texts: Copies of the required texts will be shared and uploaded to the class site each week. It will be your responsibility to print out your own copy and bring them to class for our discussions.

Course Requirements:

Reading Assignments are crucial for class discussions. We’ll be focusing on how specific techniques inform subject matter and how this can be translated into our own work. In order to ensure that readings are taken seriously, every week, one student will give a 5-10 minute mini-presentation introducing the materials. (Think about these questions: Who wrote this piece? Where was it published? What is something in the author’s background that informed this text?) In preparation for these discussions, you must come to class with 3-5 observations you have about each reading.

Writing Assignments are also crucial for your growth and development as a writer. **On Mondays, your workshop material is due. Which means, it is your responsibility to print out copies of your submission and distribute them to the class prior to your workshop day.** In addition, for each student's workshop, you are expected to write a one page, single-spaced response to their work. You must bring two hard copies to class (one for your fellow student, and one for me). Your critiques should convey generosity and be constructive. I would highly recommend dedicating a paragraph to positive feedback and another paragraph for any questions or opportunities for improvement. Be specific! Please do not just say you "liked" or "didn't like" it. I will be reading and reviewing critiques as part of your grade.

Grading Breakdown: Grading is not based on your "talent" as a creative writer, but on your diligence, punctuality, thoughtful critiques, and ability to follow directions.

Writing Assignments: 40%

- Two Short Stories
- Two Poems
- Student Critiques

Class Participation: 40%

- Attendance
 - Note: Please be respectful to your classmates. Class will begin promptly, so you must be punctual. As students, you must hold yourself accountable. After twenty minutes, your lateness will be marked as an absence. Every unexcused absence will result in a one-third drop in your cumulative grade (ex: A → A-, B- → C+). Any planned absences (religious holidays or celebration) must be communicated to me via email weeks in advance.
- Weekly Observations/Questions
- Mini Presentation

Revised Portfolio: 20%

- Revised Short Stories
- Revised Poems
- Student Critiques

Extra Credit: 10%

- 500-word Response to a Literary Event On Campus

Office Hours: You will be required to meet with me (for twenty minutes) the week after your first submission and the week before your final submission. This is an incredible one-on-one opportunity for us to talk about any questions, comments, or concerns you have about class.

Technology: Phones and laptops are not permitted.

Disability Disclosure Statement: Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Student Wellness Policy: Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor's attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

Counseling Services:
726 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
(212) 998-4780

Wellness Center:
24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999
Email wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

READING SCHEDULE*

Week One: Introductions

M: Jan. 27 -- Introductions, Syllabus Review, In-Class Reading/Exercise

W: Jan. 29 -- "Eight Letters to a Young Writer" by Teju Cole, Workshop Etiquette & Review

Week Two: *Set(ting) It Off* (On Worldbuilding)

M: Feb. 3 -- "Zimmer Land" by Nana Kwame-Adjei Brenyah, "Power" by Audre Lorde, "not an elegy for Mike Brown" by Danez Smith

W: Feb 5 -- Fiction Workshop (Group A)

Week Three: *Lemonade* (On Strong Narrative Voice)

M: Feb 10 -- “Raymond’s Run” by Toni Cade Bambara, “Backwards” by Warsan Shire, “For the Dogs Who Barked at Me on the Sidewalks in Connecticut” by Hanif Abdurraqib, “B.F.F.” by Hieu Minh Nguyen

W: Feb 12 -- Fiction Workshop (Group B)

Week Four: *Pariah* (On Identity)

M: Feb 17 -- NO CLASS, President’s Day

W: Feb 19 -- “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid, “Battle Royale” by Ralph Ellison, “The Contract Says We’d Like the Conversation to be Bilingual” by Ada Limón, “Self-Portrait as So Much Potential” by Chen Chen

Week Five: *Bao* (On Brevity)

M: Feb 24 -- “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks, “Carpathia” by Yesse Lee Kercheval, “genetics” by Jacqueline Woodson, “Canary” by Rita Dove

W: Feb 26 -- Fiction Workshop (Group C)

Week Six: *Daughters of the Dust* (On Womanhood & Resilience)

M: Mar. 2 -- “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou, “Homage to my Hips” by Lucille Clifton, “Any Further West” by Kali Fajardo-Anstine

W: Mar. 4 -- Fiction Workshop (Group A)

Week Seven: *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (On Marriage, Structure & Transitions)

M: Mar. 9 -- “The Husband Stitch” by Carmen Maria Machado, “Roselily” by Alice Walker, “Decency” by Emily Jungmin Yoon, “Object Permanence” by Nicole Sealey

W: Mar. 11 -- Fiction Workshop (Group B)

Week Eight: Spring Break!

M: Mar. 16 -- NO CLASS - Spring Recess

W: Mar. 18 -- NO CLASS - Spring Recess

Week Nine: *Beasts of No Nation* (On Violence)

M: Mar. 23 -- “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien, “Two Men Arrive in a Village” by Zadie Smith, “We Lived Happily During the War” by Ilya Kaminsky, “Wildpeace” by Yehuda Amichai

W: Mar. 25 -- Fiction Workshop (Group C)

Week Ten: *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* (On Expectations)

M: Mar. 30 -- “A Temporary Matter” by Jhumpa Lahiri, “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, “Pluto Shits on the Universe” by Fatimah Asghar

W: Mar. 31 -- Poetry Workshop (Group A)

Week Eleven: *Moonlight* (On Gender & Sexuality)

M: Apr. 6 -- “Waugh” by Bryan Washington, “Dressing Down” by Kamilah Aisha Moon, “On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous” and “Seventh Circle of Heaven” by Ocean Vuong

W: Apr. 8 -- Poetry Workshop (Group B)

Week Twelve: *You* (On Second Person Narratives)

M: Apr. 13 -- “Orientation” by Daniel Orozco, “How to Become a Writer” Laurie Moore, “If You Are Over Staying Woke” by Morgan Parker

W: Apr. 15 -- Poetry Workshop (Group C)

Week Thirteen: *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* (On Conflict & Familial Narratives)

M: Apr. 20 -- “The Suitcase” by Meron Hadero, “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden, “brothers” by Lucille Clifton

W: Apr. 22 -- Poetry Workshop (Group A)

Week Fourteen: *Groundhog Day* (On Repetition)

M: Apr. 27 -- “ghazal for white hen pantry” by Jamila Woods, “hip-hop ghazal” by Patricia Smith, “ghazal” by Reginald Dwayne Betts

W: Apr. 29 -- Poetry Workshop (Group B)

Week Fifteen: *To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before* (On the Epistolary Form)

M: May 4 -- “Letter to My Nephew” by James Baldwin, “Concerning the Necropolitical Landscape” by Christopher Soto, In-Class Exercise

W: May 6 -- Poetry Workshop (Group C)

Week Sixteen: Finals Week

M: May 11 -- **Final Portfolios Due.** Final In-Class Exercise & Round-Up.

***some readings are subject to change**