

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction & Poetry CRWRI-UA 815 Section 018  
Monday and Wednesday 4:55pm – 6:10pm  
Bobst LL (Lower level) Room 140

Instructor: Ashley Lane  
Email: [all447@nyu.edu](mailto:all447@nyu.edu)  
Office Hours: By appointment

**Course overview and objectives**

In this course, students will

- a) Learn and develop a vocabulary to discuss fiction and poetry
- b) Learn and develop narrative and form to craft compelling poems and stories
- c) Respond to weekly readings and/or prompts
- d) Create, edit, and submit a portfolio of twelve pieces of work comprised of a mix of poems and stories

**Class Structure**

We will discuss poetry and fiction simultaneously.

Every Monday we will discuss readings and/or prompts from the course assignments. Please come to class prepared to share thoughts and pose questions about the readings. At the beginning of each class on Monday, one student will present on a poem or short story that is particularly interesting or moving for them. The goal is to discover what we can learn from that particular work and/or its author. Presentations will be low key but informative, and between five and seven minutes.

Every Wednesday we will workshop a different group (assignments to be made on the first day of class). **If you are up for workshop**, please post your poem or story to the Google group by **noon** on the Saturday before your workshop. If you miss this deadline, you will bring in a copy of your poem or story on the day of your workshop for a cold read. Cold reads will be allowed once over the semester. **If you are not up for workshop**, you will send me a poem or story from the prompts provided in class. Feedback will be provided either via a written note or discussion during conference.

**Readings and Prompts**

All required readings and prompts will be provided through our Google group. The syllabus serves as a roadmap to direct our attention and conversation over the course of the semester. Our conversations and the materials we review will be dynamic; we may add or delete material depending on what we, as a class, want to focus on. Lesson plans for craft class will be provided a week in advance and will detail which specific poems and stories we will discuss. Readings may include

- a) the poetry of

Robert Hass   Sylvia Plath   Sterling A. Brown   Ocean Vuong   Robin Coste Lewis   Stephen Dunn  
Yusef Komunyakaa   Sonia Sanchez   Louise Gluck   Carl Phillips   Robert Hayden   Elizabeth Bishop  
amongst others

b) the stories of

Haruki Murakami Franz Kafka Muriel Rukeyser Grace Paley John Cheever Tim O'Brien  
Flannery O'Connor Clarice Lispector Jamaica Kincaid Anton Chekhov Louise Erdrich  
amongst others

c) excerpts from

A Poetry Handbook by Mary Oliver

The Discovery of Poetry: A Field Guide to Reading and Writing Poems by Frances Mayes

The Story and Its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction by Ann Charters

The Art of Fiction by John Gardner

### **Office Hours**

I will be available for office hours by appointment. Please set up office hours with me at least twice over the course of the semester.

### **Assignments and Grading**

1. Writing exercises (30%): Weekly prompts will assist students in utilizing craft techniques to explore new or different ways of writing. We will write self-portraits, experiment with the line, rhyme and meter, try different forms such as sonnets or haikus or villanelles, explore flash fiction, and consider other tools to stretch ourselves and have fun with our writing. Please write either a poem or short story (fewer than three pages) and email it to me by **noon** on Saturday. Each student will submit six prompt responses – at least two poems and two stories. Two may be in any genre of your choice.
2. Workshop submissions (30%): Each student will be workshopped six times over the semester. Each student will write two poems, two stories, and two in any genre. Stories for workshop should be between three and six pages double spaced.
3. Writing reflection (5%): Please submit a one page double-spaced paper by 3/1 regarding your perspective of the progression of your own work. Please note any issues you are struggling with, any areas you want to work on more, any material you would like discussed more in class, and what you would like to accomplish before the end of the semester.
4. General class engagement (15%): Written feedback and verbal participation are important tools to facilitate growth as writers and editors of each others' work. Please carefully read your peers' poems and stories, offering helpful feedback on what is working, what is not, and perhaps suggestions for changes. Please remember to be supportive, generous, and invested in each person's work. Please type your responses to each writer being workshopped and bring two copies – one for the writer and one for me.
5. Final portfolio (20%): Please submit a final portfolio of 12 edited poems and stories from prompts and workshop. Please include two new pieces (two poems, two short stories, or one of each).
6. Extra credit (5%): Attend a reading or literary event and send me a one-page overview of your experience or key takeaways.

## **Policies**

1. Attendance: This is a discussion-based class. Please arrive on time and ready to begin at 4:55pm. Two unexcused absences are permitted. More than two will lower your final grade by one point. Significant lateness will be considered an absence. If you have any scheduling issues that may result in frequent lateness, please let me know.
2. Plagiarism: Please write and submit your own work. Any academic dishonesty will be reported to the department and lead to a failing grade in this class.
3. Electronics: Laptops, phones, and any other non-medical electronic devices should be turned off and put away before class. Please use a paper notebook (and not an electronic device) to record any notes.
4. Workshop form: Please be prepared to discuss your peers' work. We will begin our feedback with what is working in the poem or story (what excites or moves you) and move on to questions and suggestions. Please print a copy of your peer's work, record your feedback on the poem or story (in addition to your typed responses), and share all documents with the writer at the end of their workshop.
6. Food: Please enjoy your meals or snacks before or after class, but not during. Drinks (coffee/tea/water/juice etc) can be enjoyed during class.

## **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.

## **Course Schedule**

We will follow a working syllabus for the semester and topics and readings may be subject to change. One class may be held offsite (tbd by class) to explore writing in different spaces.

### **Session #1 – Introduction, reflection, rapport**

Who are you as a person and a writer? What are your goals for the semester? How do you want to engage with your reader? What does your writing practice look and feel like? What are you good at now and how did you become good at it? How do you encounter words? What tools do you currently use? What topics do you want to touch?

We will also discuss logistics for the class, such as how participants prefer to receive feedback, how we will address triggering language or subject matter, and how we can best support each other. Consistently helpful, honest, and encouraging feedback will be our goal for the class. We will create a safe, supportive, and trust-based environment together.

### **Sessions #2 – Vocabulary of the fundamentals of poetry and fiction**

Narrative vs lyrical, form vs structure, arc vs plot, character, and other key vocabulary

### **Session #3 - The power of the sentence**

How can we play with line length, line breaks, punctuation, rhyme, and repetition? What spaces can we create both within and outside of a sentence? We will discuss syntax, diction, parataxis and hypotaxis, among other fundamentals of sentence structuring.

### **Session #4 - Writing across perspectives**

What beliefs do we hold and how do they work their way into our writing? How do we challenge ourselves to write from different perspectives or voices? We will discuss the use of metaphor, symbolism, and imagism to tell a story in different ways.

### **Session #5 - Writing across forms**

Novel vs essay vs memoir vs poem. When, why, and how can we use different forms? How do we become dexterous in code-switching to assist with movement in the story? We will discuss sample works of prosaic poetry and lyrical prose. We will try our hands at using the musical density and lyricism of poetry to enhance prose writing, and incorporate plot, arc, and character/narrator development and other fundamentals of fiction writing to enhance poems. We will discuss compression and expansion to develop narrative, and how different forms can help us stay curious and excited about our writing.

### **Session #6 – Atmosphere and precision in translation**

How is the essence of an experience, a place, a memory, captured and precisely translated onto the page? How can we interrogate language so that the writer's intention is communicated efficiently and effectively to the reader? We will discuss how we articulate ourselves and move our readers psychologically and emotionally by playing with mood, emotion, energy, and tone. We will discuss how to disrupt and reimagine language.

### **Session #7 – Heroes and villains – character development, plot, arc**

“Prosecute heroes, defend villains”. How do we create complex and interesting characters to reflect their humanity? We will interrogate our characters and discuss opportunities to bring them alive in authentic ways on the page.

### **Session #8 - Conscious backpackers**

How do the experiences we carry with us affect how we think of social issues? Is there space to address this in our writing in engaging and curious ways? How do we carry the weight of meaning in our writing? What values are reflected in our writing? We will discuss the role of writing in activism, in journalism, in documentation of world events. We will also discuss erasure and whose stories have been left out

### **Session #9 – Cliches and tropes vs details and the unfamiliar**

How do we engage our readers without saying what has already been said? How do we keep language fresh and unusual? We will discuss the use of swerves, swivel lines, braiding, and shifts, to enhance narration and include nuance and novelty in our writing. How can our experience of the earth, of strange animals, unexpected sounds, or sensations, enliven our writing?

### **Session #10 – Love, loss, laughter**

How do we think about and share grief? How does it move through our bodies, our writing, and interact with readers? How do we hurt, both ourselves and others? We will discuss how we approach suffering and loss, and continue to challenge ourselves to write bravely, authentically, and empathetically. We will discuss how humour can be used for both levity and poignancy, and how loneliness can be expressed. We will continue to challenge ourselves to express love and intimacy in surprising ways.

### **Session #11 – Lyricism and music (guest instructor)**

How do we allow music to travel through our writing, moving from one sentence to the next, letting the language sing from the page? We will discuss assonance and consonance, rhyme and repetition, meter, prosody, and the sonorous potential of the language we use

### **Session #12 – Writer as anthropologist**

How can we capture the essence of the landscape (both internal and external), of rituals, of social behaviour, of language? How do we get the reader to bend down in the soil and feel it with us? What birdsong can we help them hear? We will explore how details can assist us in telling visceral stories about place and people