

Introduction to Creative Writing
CRWRI-UA.815.001
Spring 2020
Mon / Wed, 12:15pm - 1:45pm

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Office hours: TBD

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”
— Maya Angelou

“My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to... put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit.”
— Gloria E. Anzaldúa

“Language is a physical act — something that
involves yr whole bod.
Write with yr whole bod.
Read with yr whole bod.
Wake up.”

— Suzan-Lori Parks

Welcome to Introduction to Creative Writing!

This course is designed to present an intensive dive into literature, into writing, and into selfhood. In this class, we will be workshoping our own work and analyzing key poetic and fictional texts to uncover the craft of writing.

So many writers have characterized writing as a physical, painful, and healing act, and one that excavates or calls into question the very idea of the self. These writers seem to be asking, how do we reckon with ourselves? Why are we here? These are some of the questions we will be exploring in our class this semester.

Class Structure

This class has two critical components: workshop and craft. We will spend Monday classes discussing works of poetry and fiction that will help us learn the craft of writing (and help us in the pursuit of those central questions that we find most important). We'll spend every Wednesday class workshoping your work.

This is NOT a class about grading work on its subjective “quality.” Rather, we want to explore this craft together. You will receive a good grade if you respectfully participate and submit assignments on time.

We will also start off each class with an exercise to allow us to settle into our selves, our class, and our work for the day. These exercises are required and are meant for you to get the pen moving.

(**Note:** I reserve the right to alter this syllabus and reading schedule at any point during the semester.)

Workshop Guidelines

We will have five workshop groups of about three people each. Each group will have one opportunity to workshop their poetry, one opportunity to workshop their fiction, and one additional opportunity to workshop any work going towards the portfolio at the end of the semester (for this last opportunity, the work can be in any genre).

When it is your day to submit work, please bring in 16 printed copies of your work to class. We will all have one week to read your work before we go over it together.

When your work is being workshopped, I will ask you not to say anything until we have had a chance to hear from your classmates. You will then be able to ask any remaining questions that you might find useful when you go back to revise your work. You are not defending your work, nor (in most cases) explaining it. Rather, you should receive the responses from your peers as guiding questions to help you further revise.

We will go over workshop etiquette at length as a class. We are NOT judging work on personal taste, and we are NOT here to comment on what is “good” or “bad.” We are all engaging in the craft of writing together, collectively, and everyone has their own unique project and voice. We want to uncover *how* each of us do it, how we all uniquely approach the work.

In general, we are trying to analyze the way a piece is working: Is the character driving the plot, or the situation? Is this poem glued together by its meter, by its visual or aural aesthetic, or both, and how does that contribute to its content? By talking about what is working in the piece and analyzing how it is functioning, we will help the author further shape the piece.

What Will You Write? — Guidelines on the work you submit

While I believe that the line between fiction, poetry, and other genres is a blurred one, we will be focusing on fiction and poetry as a foundation to other creative ventures. That being said, you are welcome to bring in prose poems, flash fiction, or other “unconventional” pieces.

You will be responsible for these types of writing for the class:

1. Poetry

For poetry submissions, please bring in 3-6 pages of poetry. It should be in a readable font (Times New Roman, 12-point preferred). It does not have to be double-spaced (unless that is part of the craft of the poem). Let the poem fill the page as it wants to. Bring 16 hard copies to class on the day you are assigned to submit them.

2. Fiction

For fiction submissions, please bring in a short story that is 10-15 pages. Fiction submissions should be double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman. Bring 16 hard copies to class on the day you are assigned to submit them.

3. Other (?)

Throughout our class, we will be reading more unconventional types of media, and we will be exploring one play and one graphic novel at the end of the semester. While you will be required to submit fiction and poetry accordingly, we will have opportunities in our in-class writing exercises to explore other media, and you are welcome to bring in a different kind of piece (like a short play, part of a graphic novel, or comic) for your final workshopping session, if you would like. This is not mandatory – if you prefer to stick to poetry and fiction, that is fine! But you are welcome to explore other genres and forms of writing for the portfolio.

If you do choose to explore other genres for the final portfolio, please discuss this with me at least ONE WEEK before your final workshop so that I can help guide you regarding page limits for workshop, etc.

4. Short Talks

Short Talks are our weekly reading responses (due every Monday). They should be no more than one page, double spaced, 12pt. Times New Roman. Bring **one** hard copy to class every MONDAY.

5. Workshop Responses

Your responses to your classmates' work. They should be typed, at least one page in length, double spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman. Bring **two** hard copies two class every WEDNESDAY.

Grading Breakdown

Participation: 40%

Short Talks: 10%

Workshop Responses: 10%

Final Portfolio: 30%

Participation (40%)

Every student is required to be in class and participating in the class discussion. Two unexcused absences will automatically result in a half-letter deduction in your grade.

Our class is discussion-based. It is absolutely mandatory that you participate, not only to achieve the grade that you want, but to explore the craft of writing! I want to know what you think of the works we are reading, especially if it is different from my own reading of the work — and your perspective is valuable to the whole class. Failure to participate on a regular basis will result in a lower grade.

It is also your responsibility to bring in a piece when your assigned group is scheduled to bring in work. Any failure to bring in work on your assigned workshop day will result in a deduction from your participation grade. Failure to bring in work two or more times on your assigned day will automatically result in a half-letter deduction from your grade.

Short Talks (10%)

Every Monday we will be discussing the assigned poetry or fiction reading. For each of these Monday craft classes, you will be required to bring one written response in the form of a “short talk,” as modeled by the work of Anne Carson. Please bring in **one hard copy** for class every Monday.

These written pieces should be creative: they can be more narrative, more poetic, or a hybrid of the two. They should be thoughtful and analytical; they can respond to the work as a whole or a particular element of it. I will be grading these not only for completion, but also for how deeply you read and analyze the text. We will be reading some of Anne Carson’s *Short Talks* to get a better sense of what these creative responses can look like, and you can see one example below:

Every day he poured his question into her,
as you pour water from one vessel into another,
and it poured back. Don’t tell me he was painting his mother, lust, etc. There is a moment when the water is not in one vessel nor in the other—what a thirst it was,
and he supposed that when the canvas became completely empty he would stop. But women are strong. She knew vessels, she knew water, she knew mortal thirst.

-- Anne Carson, “Short Talk on the Mona Lisa”

Workshop Responses (20%)

Each group will bring in their work one week before they are being workshopped. Before each Wednesday, you are responsible for:

1. Annotating the work being discussed in class. You must bring a copy for them to have in class, and also make a copy of the work with your annotations and bring it in for me.
2. Write a typed, 12-point, double-spaced response of at least one page in length for each piece. Please bring in **two hard copies** of this response. for the person who is being workshopped. In this response, you should be focusing on commenting on what is working for the piece, what are the mechanisms at play, what is its motor or engine. You should point out key questions that the piece is trying to ask. You can also feel free to ask

any questions that you have — where is the language confusing, and *why* is it confusing you? Are there any consistencies, and if so why are they inconsistent?

Final Portfolio (30%)

Your final portfolio is an accumulation of several *revised* pieces from your semester. It will not be graded on subjective quality of the work, but rather on how much effort you put into editing the pieces based on in-class feedback. The portfolio will contain the following:

1. Two revised poems
2. One revised short story
3. One artistic statement (double spaced, three pages, Times New Roman 12pt) that describes your artistic process and serves as either an introduction or an endnote to your pieces.

Required Materials

I will provide pdfs of all of our short fiction assignments, as well as of other readings about craft.

For the poetry books, you are responsible for purchasing or finding your own copies. Please find copies of the books either on Amazon, at the library, or in a local bookstore. If you have trouble securing any of the following materials, please do not hesitate to reach out:

The Same-Different by Hannah Sanghee Park

Open Interval by Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon

The Carrying by Ada Limón

Deaf Republic by Ilya Kaminsky

There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé by Morgan Parker

Topdog/Underdog by Suzan-Lori Parks**

Maus I: My Father Bleeds History by Art Spiegelman**

Office Hours

Everyone is required to come to office hours at least once in the first few weeks of the semester, so that I can get to know you and your interests in writing.

Of course, you are more than welcome (and **strongly encouraged**) to come more than once! If you have work you'd like someone to look at that we can't get to in class, or any thoughts or questions regarding the material that you'd like to discuss, use office hours for that. If you can't make it to office hours because of a scheduling conflict, please let me know and we can schedule a time to meet.

Finally, if you have any concerns about the class, please don't hesitate to reach out. If something is bothering you about the class, I want us to be able to work it out together.

Plagiarism

I have zero tolerance for plagiarism in this class. Plagiarism of any kind will be reported to the university and result in a failing grade.

Technology

Given the immense amount of focus that we want to curate in our class, I will not allow any technology (including phones, laptops, or tablets) to be used in class. If you have an accessibility concern or need, please let me know and I will be sure to accommodate for any modifications you may require (and please also refer to the accessibility statement below).

Accessibility / Disability Disclosure Statement

I respect and uphold all accommodations for students with disabilities. 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
Web site: <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 my 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.

Reading Schedule

(The day listed for the reading is the day that it's DUE.)

Week 1: Poetry

Mon., 1/27: "Self-Portrait" by Adam Zagajewski;
"canvas and mirror" by Evie Shockley

Wed. 1/29: *Short Talks* by Anne Carson (selections from packet)
"Projective Verse" essay and poems by Charles Olson (selections in packet)

Workshop Group 1 brings fiction

Week 2: Fiction

Mon. 2/3: "Perkus Tooth" by Jonathan Lethem
"Cathedral" by Raymond Carver

Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 2/5: Workshop Group 1's fiction

Submit: Response to Group 1's Fiction

Workshop Group 2 brings poetry

Week 3: Poetry

Mon. 2/10: *The Same-Different* by Hannah Sanghee Park
"Sprung Rhythm" essay and poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 2/12: Workshop Group 2's poetry

Submit: Response to Group 2's poetry

Workshop Group 3 brings fiction

Week 4: Fiction

Mon. 2/17: NO CLASS

Wed. 2/19: "Bullet in the Brain" by Tobias Wolff; Workshop Group 3's fiction

Submit: Response to Group 3's fiction and Short Talks

Workshop Group 4 brings poetry

Week 5: Poetry

Mon. 2/24: *Open Interval* by Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon

Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 2/26: Workshop Group 4's poetry

Submit: Response to Group 4's poetry

Workshop Group 5 brings fiction

Week 6: Fiction

Mon. 3/2: "Rope" by Katherine Anne Porter

"Araby" by James Joyce

"The Dead" by James Joyce

Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 3/4: Workshop Group 5's fiction
Submit: Response to Group 5's fiction
Workshop Group 1 brings poetry

Week 7: Poetry

Mon. 3/9: *The Carrying* by Ada Limón
Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 3/11: Workshop Group 1's poetry
Submit: Response to Group 1's poetry
Workshop Group 2 brings fiction

Mon. 3/16 & Wed. 3/18: NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 8: Fiction

Mon. 3/23: “Good Country People” by Flannery O’Connor
 Selections from *What is Yours is Not Yours* by Helen Oyeyemi
Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 3/25: Workshop Group 2's fiction
Submit: Response to Group 2's fiction
Workshop Group 3 brings poetry

Week 9: Poetry

Mon. 3/30: *Deaf Republic* by Ilya Kaminsky
Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 4/1: Workshop Group 3's poetry
Submit: Response to Group 3's poetry
Workshop Group 4 brings fiction

Week 10: Fiction

Mon. 4/6: “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin
 “Brownies” by ZZ Packer
 “After the Ball” by Leo Tolstoy
Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 4/8: Workshop Group 4's fiction
Submit: Response to Group 4's fiction
Workshop Group 5 brings poetry

Week 11: Poetry

Mon. 4/13: *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé* by Morgan Parker
Submit: Short Talks

Wed. 4/15: Workshop Group 5's poetry
Submit: Response to Group 5's poetry
Workshop Group 1 brings anything for Wednesday 4/22

Week 12: Fiction

Mon. 4/20: “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” by Joyce Carol Oates

Selections from *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado

Submit: Short Talks

Workshop Group 2 brings anything for Monday 4/27

Wed. 4/22: Workshop Group 1

Submit: Response to Group 1's work

Workshop Group 3 brings anything for Wednesday 4/29

Week 13: Drama

Mon. 4/27: "Elements of Style" by Suzan-Lori Parks

Topdog/Underdog by Suzan-Lori Parks

Workshop Group 2

Submit: Short Talks; Response to Group 2's work

Workshop Group 4 brings anything for Monday 5/4

Wed. 4/29: *Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan-Lori Parks

Workshop Group 3

Submit: Response to Group 3's work

Workshop Group 5 brings anything for Wednesday 5/6

Week 14: Graphic Novel

Mon. 5/4: *Maus* by Art Spiegelman; Workshop Group 4

Submit: Short Talks; Response to Group 4's work

Wed. 5/6: *Maus* by Art Spiegelman; Workshop Group 5

Submit: Response to Group 5's work

Week 15: Last Day of Classes -

Mon. 5/11: Reading & Celebration

Submit: Final Portfolio