Welcome to Intro to Creative Writing!

Over the course of this semester, we will plunge together into the vitality and versatility of written creative expression. Exploration is the name of the game: we’ll be diving into several kinds of forms—and forms-within-forms—as we stretch ourselves to uncover as many new shapes, new textures, new means, and new metaphors as our imaginations will lead us toward. Our roadmaps will be the poems, novels, and short stories we will read and discuss to guide us into our weekly themes; those, and the philosophies, emotions, and personal histories that construct the people we are and the art we make.

To this end, we will be examining not just what writing can mean, but what writing means to us individually; not just what feelings a text can arise in us, but what elements of a text create and communicate this feeling; not just whether or not we like something we read, but why, and what might that say about what we want to write, and how we could write it—among many other questions to be discovered along the way.

The major components of this course will be workshop, readings, class discussions, your attention journal, and the writing practice you develop outside of the classroom. With the exception of the latter (those rules are yours to make), the guidelines we will follow for these throughout the semester are outlined in the paragraphs below.

Workshop

The goal of workshop is for students to receive constructive criticism on their writings that can later be put towards revision. Constructive criticism, however, is not altogether “critical”—writers also need to know what is functioning in their work. Workshop will begin first with descriptions of what we understand / aspects of the writing we find worthy of praise; then we will move forward into parts of the poem we believe could be improved for the next edit. In this workshop, the person being workshopped is permitted to speak if information needs clarified.

In workshop—as in all of our interactions—it is important to treat our classmates with kindness and respect, and to reflect on one’s words before using them. The edits we make do not signify that something is “wrong” or “bad,” but rather that there are aspects of the poem that, as a result of our own individual subjective opinions on writing, we would like to put forth that the other could look at differently. Artmaking is an intensely vulnerable experience—it is an act of courage to put something on the page, and doubly so to place that work in front of others. I ask that you all keep this in mind whether you are workshopper or workshopped.
You will be required to submit first drafts of four poems, a set of at least three vignettes, and one short story (developed over several weeks) by the end of the semester, in addition to your revised final portfolio. If Group 1 meets on Monday, please have all work emailed to the group by **5pm Saturday** (though only Group 1’s work will need to be reviewed by Monday morning). If Group 1 meets on a Wednesday, please have all work emailed by **9pm Monday**.

Please make one copy of your notes to give to the student and one copy of your notes to give to me.

**Readings and Discussion**

We will be looking at essays, poetry, novels, and short stories throughout our time together. Please note that the approach here will be slightly different than what you may be used to in most English literature classes! We will be reading with an eye towards **craft**, not simply analysis: what are we feeling as we read this? what aspects of this work’s construction are creating that feeling? what of those aspects could we learn to incorporate into our own artistic approaches?

On days we will be discussing readings, it is imperative that you come to class not only having done the readings, but also **prepared with comments**—whether those be questions or remarks. On certain days I will ask that you pay attention to specific aspects of the writing (i.e., one day we may focus on line breaks in the poems) to open our discussions. A few students will be assigned each week to lead that day’s discussion, but I emphasize that everyone is required to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

**Attention Journal**

The goal is for this to be a sort of lyric diary full of meditations on the world around you. Each week, I want you to come in with at least one paragraph written on anything you’ve seen, smelled, touched, tasted, experienced, enjoyed…during that week. There doesn’t have to be a narrative; in fact, ideally, it is to be pure description given as detailed and concretely as possible. Write about the sounds of pigeons, the feeling of the trains humming beneath you, a certain remarkable slant of sunlight—anything that strikes your interest! We’ll take a few minutes to share them in class on non-workshop days, for those who’d wish to.

**Office Hours**

Office hours are by appointment. Please contact me at mbd386@nyu.edu to schedule. You are required to meet with me at least once per semester.

**Final Portfolio**

As there will not be a sit-down final for this class, your portfolio will be due during finals week. This is to give you ample time to revise and edit your works once classes end. Please submit a revised version of two of the poems, two of the vignettes, and the short story. You are meant to be revising throughout the semester—don’t save your early semester poems until the very end when you’ll need that time to revise your story! Please include in your portfolio a one-page (min.) artistic statement discussing your themes, style, and approach. We will discuss this more in detail as it approaches.
**Attendance**

Attendance is necessary for the workshop model to function and for everyone to get the most they can out of this course. At the same time, I understand that sometimes unexpected situations arise, or that some of us may struggle with illnesses, whether acute or chronic, that do not allow us to always work as we would like to. If you believe you will not be present in class one day, I ask that you email me at least an hour ahead of time to make me aware. If you are in a special situation and find yourself having to take several days off, I ask that you please communicate with me about that situation. Otherwise, my policy is that two absences are allowed before points are docked from your final grade.

**Grading**

Attendance and Participation: 40%
Workshop Notes: 30%
Final Portfolio: 15%
Discussion Leading: 10%
Attention Journal: 5%

**Required Readings:**

To purchase:

*Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo (2019)

The rest will be provided in Handouts/PDFs:

Poems from various sources; sources will be provided with the poems

Short stories from (if it interests you!):

*The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* by Lydia Davis (2009)
*Collected Stories* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (2008)
*Thus Were Their Faces* by Silvina Ocampo, trans. Daniel Balderston (2015)

**Week 1**

Wednesday: Discuss syllabus // Introductions // What is a poem?

**Week 2**

Monday: What is poetry for?

“Poetry is Not a Luxury” by Audre Lorde
“Damage” by Wendell Berry
“The Laugh of the Medusa” by Hélène Cixous (excerpts)

Wednesday: Metaphor and Attention.

“Theory and Play of the Duende” by Federico Garcia Lorca

Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke (excerpts)

Poem packet incl. Nikky Finney, Joy Harjo, Khaled Mattawa, Li-Young Li, Louise Glück, Kaveh Akbar

Week 3

Monday: workshop group 1

Wednesday: workshop group 2

Week 4

Monday: Poetry and place

Poem packet incl. Yusef Komunyakaa, Aracelis Girmay, Wendell Berry, Eileen Myles, Ocean Vuong, Ilya Kaminsky

Wednesday: workshop group 1

Week 5

Monday: workshop group 2

Wednesday: Odes, Homages, and Praisesongs

Poem packet incl. Sharon Olds, Pablo Neruda, Natalie Diaz, Elizabeth Alexander, Fatimah Asghar

Week 6

Monday: workshop group 1

Wednesday: workshop group 2

Week 7

Monday: The persona poem

Poem packet incl. Louise Glück, Marie Howe, Patricia Smith, Lucille Clifton, Sally Wen Mao

Wednesday: workshop group 1

Week 8

Monday: workshop group 2

Wednesday: Vignettes and microfiction
*The White Book* by Han Kang, selected Lydia Davis works

Week 9

Monday: workshop group 1

Wednesday: workshop group 2

Week 10

Monday: Developing characters

*The Hour of the Star* by Clarice Lispector (excerpt)

*Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo (first 100 pages)

*Attention journal: This week, I want you to play the spy. Listen for interesting conversations as you move through your daily life. Later that evening, try to recreate it as a scene of dialogue in your journal.*

Wednesday: workshop group 1 (Nothing new due: send in a revision of something you’ve written so far)

Week 11

Monday: workshop group 2 (Nothing new due: send in a revision of something you’ve written so far)

Wednesday: Melding character with plot

*Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo (all the rest)

Week 12

Monday: workshop group 1

Wednesday: workshop group 2

Week 13

Monday: Story and suspense

Stories by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Silvina Ocampo, and Helen Oyeyemi

Wednesday: workshop group 1

Week 14

Monday: workshop group 2

Wednesday: Class reading

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17th: FINAL PORTFIOLOS DUE BY EMAIL BEFORE 11:59PM