“The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it.”
Flannery O’Connor

“People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.”
James Baldwin

Purpose:
As an artistic form, writing is quite minimal; Words on pages and not much else. Rather than asking how we derive meaning from such a form, it may be more advantageous for you as writers to ask, how do writers make meaning in their work? And so, in this introductory creative writing class, we will explore the art of storytelling and poetry through the ways in which language, voice, characterization, structure, rhythm, and themes are employed by writers to “create meaning”. At the end of it all, we will have gained a more profound insight into the art of writing.

Course Structure:
September and October we will primarily focus on fiction craft and fiction workshops. November and December will be dedicated to poetry craft and poetry workshops.

Our primary objectives in the craft discussions will be to share observations about the specific decisions and techniques authors have made and used, and to explore how these elements inform our encounter with their work. We will end our discussions with in-class writing exercises as a creative response to the readings. You will submit six of these responses over the course of the semester, three for fiction, three for poetry.

Workshops will begin in the fourth week of class. You will be divided into groups for workshop and each Wednesday the groups will alternate. Everyone will submit one poem and one story.

- Short stories should be 7-10 pages
- Poetry should not exceed 10 pages

Pieces for workshop must be uploaded to the class Google Drive one week in advance so that I and your fellow classmates have enough time to read and respond thoughtfully. You will also write a response letter for each submission.
Readings:
You will find the list and schedule of required readings at the end of this syllabus. You must read each assigned story or poem prior to each class, as the bulk of all craft lessons will be focused on discussing and analyzing the readings in detail. The majority of our prose readings will be short stories, and I will provide photocopies or free digital links for those as well as the poems a week ahead of time.

You will also each read one novel in the second half of the semester as part of your final project and portfolio. This novel will be selected by you from a pre-determined list.

Submissions:
All craft responses, writing exercises, workshop submissions, final essays, and portfolios must be turned in on the assigned deadlines. It is your responsibility to upload your workshop piece to the class Google Drive one week preceding your workshop. Email submissions are highly discouraged and will only be accepted in the event of an emergency. All submissions must be typed in a standard print font (no comic sans please). All prose submissions (including stories, essays, responses, etc) must be double-spaced. Spacing in your poetry submissions is up to you.

Final Portfolio:
At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio containing revised editions of the story and poem you workshoped in class. You will also submit a 1-2 page letter outlining the changes you made, why you made them, and which critiques from your workshop you found helpful in revising your work.

You will also submit a 1000-1500 word essay as part of your final portfolio on the novel that you are assigned earlier in the semester. Details of the project will be discussed in class.

Extra Credit:
You’re in NYC, the literary capital of the world. While in-person literary events might unfortunately be on hold for a little while yet, there are plenty of virtual ones. Go to a virtual reading, panel discussion, or book launch, and then write a page-long response about your experience.

Grading:
Participation – 40%
Writing Assignments – 40%
Final Portfolio – 20%
Extra Credit – 5% (added to final grade)
**Attendance:**
Attendance is expected at every class meeting. The reason is simple; it’s near impossible to thoroughly workshop each other’s work if people don’t attend. Each unexplained absence will result in a 5% decrease to your total grade. Two or more instances in which you are late to class will count as an absence. You will have a five-minute grace period after the start of class in which to join without penalty (this includes students taking the class remotely). Absences or lateness owing to a medical or other emergency circumstance must be accompanied by a doctor’s (or other official) note.

If you have an emergency and cannot attend class, nor obtain a note, it will be necessary to contact me and explain the absence. I’ll judge whether or not the explanation is considered sufficient enough to waive the penalty. Students who are absent the day of their workshop will not receive a make-up workshop, whether the absence is excused or not. Students who are late for their workshop will go last and only for as long as time allows.

**Plagiarism:**
The sole purpose of this class is reading and writing creative, original pieces. It should then (hopefully) come as no surprise to you that there is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy in effect. You will fail the class and all instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department, without exception. There is no justifiable excuse. Don’t do it.

**Electronics:**
Typically, I would have required all electronic devices to be silent and out of sight during class. However, since we’re running a “hybrid” model class this semester, and some of you will be taking the class remotely, it seems silly to ask you to stick to pen and paper. You are free to take notes on laptops/tablets during our craft lessons, and for workshop you’ll obviously need a device to access the class drive when we have discussions about each submission. Of course, please keep in mind I expect you not to be goofing off online regardless.

**Office Hours:**
You must meet with me at least once during the semester, but personally, I’d recommend meeting at least twice. You are also free to schedule additional meetings if you like. **I’ll be available for both in-person and Zoom meetings.** In these sessions, we can discuss what you are working on, what you are reading, your goals for your writing, and any other topic that you think would be valuable to discuss with me.

**Contact:**
Feel free to email me any questions and concerns you have, and I’ll do my best to respond to you within 24 hours. I’ve provided my phone number in case you need to contact me **urgently.** For the most part, I’d rather we communicate through email.
Health & Wellness:
If you lived in NYC in the spring or early summer, you know how bad it was here. The city’s come far from when the pandemic first hit, and it's in all of our best interests to keep it going that way. Many of the university’s new guidelines are strict, but do take care to follow them for your own safety and the safety of others. If we keep things going well as an academic community and as a city, I imagine in Spring 2021 we’ll be in far better shape than many other parts of the country.

With that said, take your physical and mental health seriously, especially during these particular times. NYU offers many (free) services to support you, including the Wellness Exchange. The Wellness Exchange is your key to accessing the University's extensive health and mental health resources designed to address your needs. You can call a private hotline (212-443-9999), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which will put you in touch with a professional who can help to address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns. These might include: medical issues, academic stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, alcohol and other drug dependence, sexually transmitted infections, eating disorders, etc. The hotline is also available if you just need to talk or want to call about a friend.

You can also email them: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

On Difficult Materials in Class:
This is a class about art, and art may (and often does) deal with difficult and disturbing themes. The prose and poetry written by your classmates may include difficult subject matter; the readings that I assign you will. I want you to be prepared for this in general, but I also want you to know that should you feel uncomfortable with certain class material, you are always welcome to speak to me privately. I cannot promise how class discussions will go, either during craft or workshop classes, but I will do my best to guide these discussions in an open and respectful manner.

Furthermore, as this is a creative writing course, unless there is explicit evidence to suggest otherwise, I will assume all speakers, characters, and events in your submissions are fictional. However, if there are concerning themes (murder, suicide, rape, etc.) or it seems like a cry for help, I will reach out to you via email to check in. If I am still concerned, or I don’t hear back from you, I will reach out on your behalf to the Wellness Center and/or your advisor. This will be done with the utmost respect and privacy and only out of my concern for your health and safety. If you are struggling, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can help guide you to the available resources.
Workshop Procedure and Etiquette:
Workshopping is an exciting way to engage with literary craft and to move your own writing forward. Whether you’re the one being workshopped or you’re doing the workshopping, the issues that come up in discussion open new avenues of exploration and discovery for your work. Here are some guidelines to maximize the benefit for everyone:

Writers
- Submit pieces that you have worked on intensively, not something you slapped together the night before. On the other hand, make sure it’s a fresh piece, one you genuinely want feedback on. Don’t bring in a story or poem you wrote two years ago and are finished with.
- Don’t get defensive. It’s easy to feel threatened by criticism of creative work, since its sources are often deeply personal. But the workshop process is designed to help you develop as a writer, and that requires focusing a critical eye on your own work.
- **Think carefully before bringing autobiographical material to class.** Make sure it’s something you’re comfortable submitting to the workshop process.
- Silence is the best response as your work is being critiqued. This keeps you from feeling you have to explain or defend your work and leaves you free to listen. When asked a direct question, it’s up to you whether you want to respond or respectfully decline. When the critique is over, you’ll have a chance to ask your own questions and clarify comments made by me and your peers.
- Finally, remember that you are the sole author of your work. One of the skills of workshopping is the ability to sift through a range of critiques and pick out what’s most useful to you.

Readers
- Read each piece twice. On the first read, simply absorb the story/poem. Sit with it for a moment. On the second read, begin your critical analysis.
- You should make line notes on the digital document. See a great line? Note it. See a typo or grammatical error? Note it. Something not working as well as it could? Note it. Once you complete your line notes, write a response letter to the writer, telling them in greater detail what you enjoyed about their piece and what you think could be improved. Always start with what you like before moving onto questions, suggestions, and criticisms. Be both honest and respectful.
- Keep in mind that your first duty is to understand what the writer is trying to do and to help them do it better. Be open to the writer’s unique vision and respectful of their struggle to put that vision on paper. **Don’t assume that what the writer is trying to do has no value because it’s not to your taste, and don’t try to rewrite a writer’s work to reflect your own preferences or style.**
Provisional Reading and Workshop Schedule

FICTION aka GOOD LYING

Class 1 – Wednesday September 2nd
Welcome!
First Day Introductions and Jubilations
Discuss Submission Schedule / Create Workshop Groups

Class 2 – Wednesday September 9th
Darin Strauss – Notes on Narrative (essay)
Lesley Nneka Arimah – Who Will Greet You at Home?

Class 3 – Monday September 14th
Mock Fiction Workshop
Donald Barthelme – The School
George Saunders – The Perfect Gerbil (essay)

Class 4 – Wednesday September 16th
Mock Fiction Workshop
Lorrie Moore – How to Become a Writer
Zadie Smith – In Defense of Fiction (essay)

ON NARRATIVE

Class 5 – Monday September 21st
John Cheever – Reunion
Denis Johnson – Emergency
Tobias Wolff – Bullet in the Brain

Class 6 – Wednesday September 23rd
Workshop A Stories Due
Etgar Keret – One Gram Short
Ernest Hemingway – Hills Like White Elephants
Jamil Jan Kochai – Playing MG5V: The Phantom Pain

ON ATMOSPHERE

Class 7 – Monday September 28th
First Fiction Craft Response Due
Shirley Jackson – The Possibility of Evil
Raymond Carver – Tell the Women We’re Going
Class 8 – Wednesday September 30th
Workshop Group A
Workshop B Stories Due

ON CHARACTER

Class 9 – Monday October 5th
Second Fiction Craft Response Due
Jamaica Kincaid – Girl
Anton Chekov – The Lady with the Dog
Alain Mabanckou – Robinette (excerpt from Broken Glass)

Class 10 – Wednesday October 7th
Workshop Group B
Workshop C Stories Due

Class 11 – Monday October 12th
Alice Munro – Boys and Girls
James Baldwin – Sonny’s Blues
Ottessa Moshfegh – An Honest Woman
Charlotte Perkins Gilman – The Yellow Wallpaper

Class 12 – Wednesday October 14th
Workshop Group C
Workshop D Stories Due

ON the SPECULATIVE

Class 13 – Monday October 19th
Third Fiction Craft Response Due
Ursula Vernon – Jackalope Wives
Amal El-Mohtar – Seasons of Glass and Iron
George Saunders – Escape from Spiderhead
John Chu – The Water that Falls on You from Nowhere

Class 14 – Wednesday October 21st
Workshop Group D
POETIC ReBEGINNINGS

Class 15 – Monday October 26th
Discussion of your Portfolios
Individual Novel Assignments
Allen Ginsberg – *Howl / Wichita Vortex Sutra* (with composition by Phillip Glass)

Class 16 – Wednesday October 28th
Mock Poetry Workshop
Terrance Hayes – *American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin*
Frank O’Hara – *Rhapsody / Ave Maria / [“Khrushchev is coming on the right day!”]*

ON FORM

Class 17 – Monday November 2nd
Jericho Brown – *Host / Hustle / Duplex*
Hasan Namir – *The Worst / How to Kill Homosexuals*
E.E. Cummings – *[as freedom is a breakfastfood] / [“kitty”. sixteen,5’1”,white,prostitute]*

Class 18 – Wednesday November 4th
Workshop A Poems Due
Tommy Pico – Poems from *Junk* and *Feed*
Pablo Neruda – *The Men / Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market*
Ocean Vuong – *Aubade with Burning City / On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*

Class 19 – Monday November 9th
Langston Hughes – *Theme for English B / If-ing / Let America be America Again*
Danez Smith – *Dinosaurs in the Hood / dream where every black person is standing by the ocean*

Class 20 – Wednesday November 11th
Workshop Group A
Workshop B Poems Due

Class 21 – Monday November 16th
First Poetry Craft Response Due
Anne Carson – *The Glass Essay*
Basho, Buson, and Issa – Various *Haikus*
Toi Derricotte – *Abuse / Poem for My Father*

Class 22 – Wednesday November 18th
Workshop Group B
Workshop C Poems Due
ON POETIC NARRATIVE

Class 23 – Monday November 23rd
Second Poetry Craft Responses Due
Rachel Zucker – Poem / Soundmachine
Sharon Olds – Saturn / The Task of Naming Me
Brenda Shaughnessy – Liquid Flesh / Why I Stayed, 1997-2001
Sally Wen Mao – The Toll of the Sea / Anna May Wong Stars as Cyborg #86

Class 24 – Wednesday November 25th
Workshop Group C
Workshop D Poems Due

Class 25 – Monday November 30th
Third Poetry Response Due
Claude McKay – The Lynching
Nicole Sealey – Even the Gods / Clue
Robert Hayden – The Ballad of Nat Turner
Natalie Diaz – It was the Animals / My Brother My Wound

Class 26 – Wednesday December 2nd
Workshop Group D

FINALE

Class 27 – Monday December 7th
General End-of-the-Semester Discussion
What makes stories and poems “good?”
Flannery O’Connor – Good Country People
Ilya Kaminsky – Poems from Deaf Republic / We Lived Happily During the War

Class 28 – Wednesday December 9th
End of Class Party
Class Readings

Friday December 11th
Portfolio and Final Project Due
Save your portfolio and final essay as one PDF and email it to me