

CREATIVE WRITING: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION & POETRY

CRWRI-UA.815.018

FALL 2019

Instructor: Janelle Tan

Meeting Times: MW 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM

Email: jt3538@nyu.edu

Office hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome! I'm so happy to meet you and become acquainted with your work. Over this semester, we will focus on telling stories and how to tell those stories in an emotionally convincing, articulate, and carefully crafted manner.

To build your awareness of craft, we will typically read 3-5 poems and one short story a week over the course of the semester. This will teach you how to read a work of literature and take apart the seams of its construction. This class also focuses on contemporary writers of color, queer, and marginalized voices writing under sociopolitical pressure.

STRUCTURE

- **Mondays** are craft classes. We will discuss the assigned reading, and students are expected to come to class prepared to participate in discussion.

In addition to reading the text, please come to class with a hard copy of a 2-paragraph response to the week's reading. It can be anything: your impressions of the texts, questions or difficulties, writing prompts you'd like to explore, and what the texts taught you on a craft level. Be prepared to fold these thoughts into our discussion. We will conclude every craft session with a writing exercise drawn from the assigned reading.

- **Wednesdays** are workshop. You will be divided into three groups (A, B, C) on the first day of class. If your work is to be workshopped on a given Wednesday, please email us all a poem or an 8-12 page (double-spaced) fiction piece by the preceding Sunday at 8pm. Print out all your classmates' work every week and bring it to class with your annotations and notes. Mark anything that strikes you, or that you think could be pushed harder.

I will mark all late assignments as missing.

Workshop Etiquette

When being workshopped, you are not allowed to explain or defend your piece. After everyone has offered critique, you are allowed to ask up to two questions about parts of the piece that could be improved.

REQUIRED TEXTS

I will provide all the materials we'll be covering in class, either online or photocopies. Check NYU Classes and your syllabus. Come to class prepared.

OFFICE HOURS

Students are expected to meet with me **at least one time** during the semester. You are encouraged to come as many as you'd like to discuss your writing, workshop submissions, or the reading – but come at least once.

GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS

Participation and attendance (20%)

In the act of writing, we make ourselves vulnerable. We are making a space for ourselves, and this involves deep attention, care, and participation. It is essential that you read all the assigned materials before class and be prepared.

Participation is the most fundamental requirement of this project. It is crucial that you talk in class and make valuable contributions during craft and workshop sessions. Out of respect for the space we are creating together, you are only permitted two unexcused absences. Punctuality, showing up for your peers, and giving your full, undivided attention in class are foundational for the work we will do this semester.

Workshop responses (30%)

Each week of workshop, you will be required to print out, read, and annotate the work of your classmates. Use your observations to write a short response letter (250-500 words) to each piece being workshopped. Please highlight two elements of the work you thought were working, and two elements that could be pushed harder or improved, along with reasons for each. Provide other suggestions for improvement, but be careful not to assert your own voice onto someone else's work. Print out two copies of your response letters, one for your classmate and one copy for me.

Reading responses (30%)

For every craft class, you will be required to write a short response to one or several of your assigned reading. You may focus on the craft of the piece – what moves you observe the poet making, what the poem's "thesis statement" might be, and what craft elements you can use in your own work. In the weeks you are not being workshopped, you may also turn in a poem that uses certain craft techniques from the assigned reading. Print a copy of your responses every week, and turn it in to me.

Final portfolio (20%)

At the end of the semester, in lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a final portfolio consisting of:

- A 2-3 page (double-spaced) "Poetic Statement" on your relationship to writing, how you feel your writing has changed over the semester, and how you'd define your work. What do you write about? What are some defining traits of your work? Which of the reading had the most impact on your work?
- Revised work: Two poems and one short story, or two short stories, or three poems. Whatever you choose.
- Copies of the original drafts of your chosen work submitted during the semester. I will grade your portfolio based on the amount of effort you put into your revisions.

Extra credit

You live in NYC. There are an abundant number of readings, master classes, and workshops happening every week. Attending literary readings is a great way to expose yourself to work and immerse yourself in the literary community. For extra credit, attend a reading anywhere in the city and write a page-long report on it. You may do this for up to three readings.

POLICIES

Attendance

You are expected to attend every class; however, I understand if things come up. You must be present if you are being workshopped, otherwise you forfeit your chance. The most important part of any workshop is collaboration; it is imperative that you participate as actively as possible and show up. No matter the circumstances, please email me as soon as you feel like you will not be able to make it to class. You are allowed to miss up to two classes without penalty. Each following absence will result in a 10% drop to your grade.

Plagiarism

This is a creative writing class, with an emphasis on "creative". Don't do it. I will know. If you plagiarize something and try to bring it to class, I will have to give you a failing grade and report it to NYU.

Food

Because this is a morning class, I will allow light snacks and beverages as long as you are unobtrusive and stay focused. On the first day, we will report our allergies so as to not get anyone sick. Please do not eat while your peers are reading work.

Technology

Cellphone and laptop use is not permitted.

Safe Space

This is a safe space. I will not tolerate any bullying, continuous interruption or talking down of another person. No triggering language. If you bring in content with distressing material to class that might seem to be a possible cry for help, I will send you an email to check in. Please reach out to me if you need to talk.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 4

Introduction

We will introduce ourselves, set house rules, go over expectations and the syllabus.

Craft essay: Anne Lamott, Shitty First Drafts

Craft essay: Brenda Hillman, Cracks in the Oracle Bone

Writing exercise

Monday, September 9

Craft Class: Sentences & Poetic Line

Craft essay: Rebecca Hazelton, Learning the Poetic Line

Kristin Chang, Self-help for immigrant women

Gwendolyn Brooks, We Real Cool

Deb Olin Unferth, Likable

Sofia Samatar, The Huntress

Assignment for next week: For the whole week, observe 10 things every day. You're not allowed to use a metaphor, simile, or make any other type of comparison. Just write 10 observations every day exactly as you see them.

Wednesday, September 11

Workshop (Group A)

Monday, September 16

Craft Class: Lyricism and Attention

Craft essay: Mary Ruefle, On Secrets (from Madness, Rack and Honey)

Marie Howe, What the Living Do (poem)

Denise Duhamel, Ode to Your Eyebrows

Meg Day, Sit on the Floor with Me

Amy Bloom, Silver Water

Wednesday, September 18

Workshop (Group B)

Monday, September 23

Craft Class: Metaphor

Jessica Jacobs, What I Didn't Say Those Years You'd Swore I'd Forgotten You
Danez Smith, & even the black guy's profile reads "sorry, no black guys"
Zadie Smith, The Lazy River

Wednesday, September 25

Workshop (Group C)

Monday, September 30

Craft Class: Narrative Arcs

Frank Bidart, Half-Light (poem)
Richard Siken, A Primer for the Small Weird Loves
Sharon Olds, I Go Back to May 1937
Franny Choi, Introduction to Quantum Theory
Jennifer Egan, Found Objects OR Karen Russell, Reeling for the Empire

Wednesday, October 2

Workshop (Group A)

Monday, October 7

Craft Class: Voice and Writing the Self

Ocean Vuong, Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong
Frank O'Hara, Katy and Meditations in an Emergency
Chen Chen, Self-Portrait as So Much Potential

Jamaica Kincaid, Girl

Wednesday, October 9

Workshop (Group B)

Monday, October 14 & Wednesday, October 16: *Fall Break*

Monday, October 21

Craft Class: Rendering Scene

Ocean Vuong, To Junior, After A Middle School Fist Fight

Javier Zamora, Second Attempt Crossing

Amanda Lee Koe

Wednesday, October 23

Workshop (Group C)

Monday, October 28

Craft Class: Writing Place

Jenny Xie, Chinatown Diptych

George Abraham, Ode to Mennel Ibtissam Singing Hallelujah on the Voice
(France) in Arabic

Someone writing about the South

Kristin Chang, Yilan

NoViolet Bulawayo, Hitting Budapest

Wednesday, October 30

Workshop (Group A)

Monday, November 4

Craft Class: Repetition

Lucie Brock-Broido, A Girl Ago

Kaveh Akbar, Orchids Are Blooming From The Floorboards

Ada Limón, The Conditional

Morgan Parker, If You Are Over Staying Woke

Miranda July, This Person

Wednesday, November 6

Workshop (Group B)

Monday, November 11

Craft Class: Argument

Emily Jungmin Yoon, Bell Theory

Max Ritvo

Anne Carson, The Glass Essay

Wednesday, November 13

Workshop (Group C)

Monday, November 18

Craft Class: Language of Desire & Eros

Ada Limón, State Bird

Adrienne Rich, Twenty-one Love Poems, XVII and XVIII

Nicole Sealey, Object Permanence

Chen Chen, Winter

Jenny Zhang, I Would Have No Pubes If I Were Truly In Love

Wednesday, November 20

Workshop (Group A)

Monday, November 25

Craft Class: Making the Personal Political

Terrance Hayes, American Sonnet for my Past and Future Assassin

Natalie Diaz, American Arithmetic

Marwa Helal, poem for brad who wants me to write about the pyramids

Franny Choi, To the Man Who Shouted "I Like Pork Fried Rice" at Me on the Street

Carmen Maria Machado, The Husband Stitch

Wednesday, November 27: *Thanksgiving Break*

Monday, December 2

Craft Class: Hybrid Forms

excerpt from Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*

excerpt from Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*

Lydia Davis, *Five Poems*

Mary Ruefle, *Monument*

Wednesday, December 4

Workshop (Group B)

Monday, December 9

Workshop (Group C)

Wednesday, December 11

Your portfolio is due at the beginning of class.

Reading of student work. Snacks. End of the semester!