

## **Creative Writing: Introduction to Poetry & Prose**

**Course #**

**Meeting Time - tbd**

**Location - tbd**

**Instructor:** Cai Rodrigues-Sherley

**Email:** cs6245@nyu.edu

**Office Hours:** By Appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

In this class students will be introduced to reading and writing poetry & prose in new and weird ways. We will get to better understand our own creativity through exploring the creativity of poets and prose writers whose work we will discuss and draw inspiration from.

### **TEXTS**

**Gay, Ross** – *The Book of Delights*

\*all other readings will be posted on NYU Classes unless otherwise noted.

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **Mondays – Craft**

*“Reading is important – read between the lines. Don’t swallow everything.”*

– *Gwendolyn Brooks*

On Mondays we will be focusing on Craft, discussing the required readings and focusing on a different theme or genre within Prose and Poetry each week. These classes will be heavily discussion based, and time permitting we will close out each session with a writing exercise. Expect the occasional PowerPoint or whiteboard conspiracy theory from me, but we will all take turns at the wheel. Each week a student will be responsible for guiding our exploration of the required reading. More on this to come.

#### **Wednesdays - Workshop**

*“You write in order to change the world... if you alter, even by a milliliter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it.”* – **James Baldwin**

Over the course of the semester each of you will have the opportunity to workshop 2 prose pieces (5-15 pages, double spaced, 12pt. Font) and 3 poems (any length of poem). Poems will be due the Monday before, and we will create the workshop rotation together. This semester we will also be exploring the art of revision, as your final assignment will be a revised portfolio. You are

expected to come to workshops prepared with constructive feedback for each of the writers being workshopped that week. More on this to come.

### **Attendance**

Because this class is focused on reading and discussing the work of your peers as well as that of the authors we are studying, your presence is essential. Students are afforded two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. After that, every missed class will result in a grade deduction (e.g. “B+” becomes “B”). Additionally, please avoid being late, especially on workshop days. Our time together is limited, and we want all the writers in the room.

### **Technology**

Our work requires us to pay attention – to the readings, to writing, and to each other. During class I expect all unnecessary devices & electronics tucked away out of sight. In this hybrid world, some technology may be necessary to get our groove on, and any/all accessibility accommodations a student may need will be honored on a person-to-person basis. You will however need to have something to write with at all times, so I suggest a hefty notebook and a pen you can count on.

### **Disability Disclosure Statement**

I am committed to building a learning environment that is universally accessible, one that ensures the full participation of each student. 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.

**Should anything come up before or during the semester, regardless of your registration status, please let me know.**

### **GRADING**

**Writing Assignments (25%)** - This grade is simply based off handing in your assignments completed and on time, and some level of critique from me. I will not be grading based off “talent”, but rather your individual strengths, style, and storytelling.

**Peer Critiques (10%)** - every week you will be required to offer your peers constructive feedback on their writing, including reflections on both what’s working and what could be improved. We will discuss different formats for written critiques in class. If in-person, you will need to bring in 2 copies of your critique, one for your classmate and one for me. I am only grading based on completion. If virtual, send a copy to your classmate and CC me on the email.

**Final Portfolio (35%)** - The final portfolio will include one revised story and all 3 revised poems, as well as a brief reflection on your own growth/experience during the semester. I am not grading based on “talent” so to speak, but rather evidence that revisions have been made with effort and intention to improve on the first draft. This will differ for everyone. Again, more to come.

**Participation (30%)** - Everyone shows up in different ways. Participation is based on attendance and some display of engagement with the text and class discussions. At the

beginning of the semester everyone will sign up for a day during which they are required to actively participate in our discussion. This does not mean you are not expected to participate on the other days, but rather that this is an opportunity for more introverted students to highlight their engaging with the texts.

**\*Extra Credit** – I will be alerting you to different readings and craft talks being held at NYU throughout the semester. Attending an event and writing a brief reflection will be worth **1 additional point to your final participation grade per event.**

### **Note on Plagiarism**

Just don't. There is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy in this course, and all instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department. I have no problem snitching on you. You came here to write, so let's write without fear and *in our own words*. If you are struggling to submit an assignment on time, talk to me in advance and we can work something out.

### **CREATING A COMMUNITY OF WRITERS**

By virtue of signing up for this course you are saying yes to the title of writer, and to becoming a part of a community of writers. Together we will explore how this community functions, but there are some basic workshopping/community ground rules I want to lay:

- Do not assume the speaker – regardless of how autobiographical in nature, when we discuss the work of others, we do so with the understanding that the speaker and the author are not the same person.
- Critique the writing, not the writer– when we read the work of our peers, our job is focus on their words, their form, their style, and how the work makes us feel. Criticizing the personal experiences, identity, or character of a writer in our community during workshop is not the vibe.
- Be present – you give what you get. Give each other your attention, your thoughts, and your respect.
- Brave space, not safe space– no space is truly 'safe'. I can't promise that nothing/no one (including myself) in this class will ever cause harm, trigger someone, or rattle our flow. We can only commit ourselves to building a space where accountability, empathy, respect, and dialogue take precedent. There will be *no holleration, hateration in this dancierie*. People are trying to dance!

We are here in service to and in search of the written word, and in community with each other. More to come.

## SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1 – Introduction

**M 9/6** – NO CLASS, Labor Day

**W 9/8** – Darin Strauss "Notes on Narrative"

## **PART 1 ~ PROSE**

### WEEK 2 – Narrator

**M 9/13** – Susan Sontag "On Style"

J.D. Salinger, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"

Toni Cade Bambara, "The Lesson"

**W 9/15** – Mark Twain, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It"

Mark Twain, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"

**Discussion Topic: Death of the Author**

***Tiny Mini Mock Prose Workshop***

### WEEK 3 – Arc

**M 9/20** – Neil Gaiman, "Sunbird"

Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery"

John Steinbeck, "Breakfast"

**W 9/22** *Workshop Prose #1*

### WEEK 4 – Time

**M 9/27** – Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek"

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

**W 9/29** *Workshop Prose #1*

### WEEK 5 – Magical Realism

**M 10/4** – Nnedi Okorafor, "Biafra"

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"

Ted Chiang, "Story of Your Life"

**W 10/6** *Workshop Prose #1*

### WEEK 6 – It's Personal

**T 10/12** – Theodor W. Adorno - "The Essay as Form"

Dagmawi Woubshet, "New World Alphabet"

Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman"

**W 10/13** Workshop Prose #2

**WEEK 7 – The Book of Delights**

**M 10/18** – Ross Gay, *The Book of Delights*

**W 10/20** Workshop Prose #2

**PART 2 ~ POETRY**

**WEEK 8 – Classic Forms I Learned About in English Class**

**M 10/25** – Edward Hirsch: *How to Read A Poem* (Chapters 1&2)

Reading Packet: **William Shakespeare** "Sonnet 18"; **Edna St. Vincent Millay** "The courage that my mother had"; **Sappho** "Ode to Aphrodite"; **Pablo Neruda** "Ode to My Socks"; **Dorothy Parker** "Rondeau Redoublé (and Scarcely Worth the Trouble, at That)"; **Paul Laurence Dunbar** "We Wear the Mask"; **Matsuo Bashō** "[The cry of the cicada]"; **Sonia Sanchez** "Blues Haiku [let me be yo wil]"

**W 10/27** Workshop Prose #2

**WEEK 9 – Setting Form on Fire**

**M 11/1** – Reading Packet: **Emily Dickinson** "Because I could not stop for Death" (479); **Jericho Brown** "Duplex"; **Terrence Hayes** "The Golden Shovel"; **Ocean Vuong** "Seventh Circle of Earth"; **Charles Jensen** "Poem in Which Words Have Been Left Out"

***Tiny Mini Mock Poetry Workshop***

**W 11/3** Workshop Poem #1

**WEEK 10 – Imagery & Sensation**

**M 11/8** – Gertrude Stein "Poetry and Grammar"

Reading Packet: **Joy Harjo** "The Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window"; **William Carlos Williams** "This Is Just To Say"; **Layli Long Soldier** "Talent"; **Mary Oliver** "Wild Geese"; **Danez Smith** "Dinosaurs in the Hood"

**W 11/10** Workshop Poem #1

**WEEK 11 – Persona**

**M 11/15** – Reading Packet: **Lucille Clifton** "brothers"; **Patricia Smith** *Blood Dazzler* (excerpt); **Sylvia Plath** "Lady Lazareth"; **Langston Hughes** "Mother to Son"

**W 11/27** Workshop Poem #2

**WEEK 12 – Sign of the Times**

**M 11/22** – Reading Packet: **Allen Ginsberg** *HOWL* (excerpt); **Joe Brainard** *I Remember* (excerpt); **June Jordan** "On the loss of Energy (and Other Things)"; **Tiana Clark** "Broken Ghazal for Walter"

Scott"; Elizabeth Alexander "Apollo"

**W 11/24** *Workshop Poem #2*

**WEEK 13 – Mourning & Family**

**M 11/29** – Reading Packet: **Chen Chen** "Poem in Noisy Mouthfuls"; **Safia Elhillo** "Ode to Gossips"; **Sharon Olds** "How It Felt"; **Ada Limón** "The Vulture & the Body"; **Kimiko Hahn** "Foreign Body"; **Miles A.M. Collins-Sibley** "Interlude in Mama's Mouth"

**W 12/1** *Workshop Poem #3*

**WEEK 14 – Love & Desire**

**M 12/6** – Reading Packet: **Pablo Neruda** (selected poems); **Xandria Phillips** "Want Could Kill Me"; **Nikky Finney** "Cattails"; **Frank O'Hara** "Having a Coke with You"; **Alison Townsend** "Radio Love Poem"; **Jericho Brown** "After Essex Hemphill"

**W 12/8** *Workshop Poem #3*

**PART 3 ~ THE GRAND FINALE**

**WEEK 15 – Celebration!**

**M 12/13** – Bring in your favorite poem!

**Final Portfolios Due**