

## **Introduction to Creative Writing: a discussion and workshop space**

Instructor: Yi Wei

Class time: Tuesdays and Thursdays / 8:00am to 9:15am

Office hours: TBD

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“I think the duty of the writer is to remind us that we will die. And that we aren’t dead yet.”  
–Solmaz Sharif

“I want to consume the whole world, devour it, chew it to pieces, and spit it out again—fresh, terrible, beautiful, alive in all its parts, alive and singing.” –Anaïs Nin

“You have to reimagine yourself in this american landscape in order to stay alive. What is your plan [in the revolution]? How do you save your life?” –Sonia Sanchez

“when i stand around among poets / i am embarrassed mostly, / their long white heads, / the great bulge in their pants, / their certainties. / i don’t know how to do / what i do in the way / that i do it. it happens / despite me and i pretend / to deserve it.” –Lucille Clifton

### **Course Objectives**

We are all trying to figure out and make sense of things in this world. To do this, we make things—conclusions, ideas, opinions, emotional reactions, conversations. Over the course of this semester, we will get to know writers who do this for a living. I hope for us to arrive, differently but together, to the conclusion that it is possible to read and write versions of the world, of people, of ourselves that we have already imagined, spoken, felt, understood.

### **Class Structure**

This class will be run as a collaborative lab. This means that while there is an intentional structure to both the breakdown of the readings and progression of writing workshops, there will be opportunities to check in on the structure of the syllabus and its efficacy in our collective work. We will be building independent processes of writing, reading, and revision together. This workshop is grounded in generative and active engagement. I ask that you treat your peers with kindness, generosity, and open communication. We will talk more about this in class.

Over the course of the semester, we will move into different writing workshop modes to provide feedback for others’ writing and revise our own writing. From **week one to week four**, our Thursday classes will be dedicated to collective writing workshops where we will actively write

in class, discuss our process, and work through revision practices. From **week five to week six**, I'll divide the class into two groups for classwide feedback in Thursday workshops. From **week six to week 16**, we will have autonomous writing workshop groups where you will discuss and provide feedback for each other's writing every other Thursday. In this way, I hope for us to become more comfortable engaging with both our own and each other's writing.

## **Grading Breakdown**

### **25% Attendance / Participation**

*Attendance*—Everyone is allowed two excused absences this semester. After that, students will be expected to schedule office hours so we can talk about the nature of any continued absences, and how we might work together to create a plan moving forward.

*Participation*—Are you engaging thoughtfully in the space and with your peers? This could look like actively listening to those sharing, taking notes, and contributing at least once a week to discussion. *You will also be asked to schedule office hours appointments at least twice this semester—once in the first half of the semester, once in the second half of the semester—to talk about the trajectory of your time in class and writing, how everything is going, and anything else that interests you related to the class and its readings / discussions.*

### **25% Active Semester Writing**

You will be writing (at least) seven times this semester. Twice through a collective class writing workshop, and five times on your own to either the class or, later in the semester, your groups. This is a check in that you are writing each of these times.

### **25% Group Work**

As we move into different workshop modes over the course of the semester, please be thoughtful, intentional, and vocal with your feedback as we read and revise each other's writing.

### **25% Final Portfolio**

This is a portfolio of at least four pieces that you have written and revised over the course of the semester. I will be grading on completeness and how you write about the arc or process of your writing over the course of the semester, not the subjective quality of your work.

## **Class Texts**

We will talk about this more in class on Tuesday, but we are reading from many books this semester, mostly selections and chapters. While the syllabus is still subject to review, the only books we are reading in their totality are *Dictee* by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and *Whereas* by Layli Long Soldier, which I urge you to borrow copies of from the library or buy at a local bookstore. As the class continues, you may also find that you want to buy a novel or collection in its entirety upon reading and discussing their selections.

## **Plagiarism**

Don't do it. Plagiarized work results in an automatic fail. People put themselves in their work and you're basically body snatching—I'm more interested in your words anyway.

## **Disability Disclosure Statement**

Academic accommodations are available to any student with chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the 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  
Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

## **Student Wellness Policy**

Unless we see explicit evidence 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 the instructor's 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.

## Class Schedule

### Week 1

#### 9/1 Invitations / Introductions

- “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde
- “Why I Write,” Joan Didion
- “WRITE LIKE A MOTHERFUCKER,” Cheryl Strayed

*Everyone is invited to bring in a favorite line of a poem, a book, an essay, a news article. We will share these in the beginning of class as the first words that we read and think about together as a class. This is an opportunity to introduce yourself, please be thoughtful and intentional.*

### Week 2

#### 9/6 Definitions: Craft, Taste, Style

- “That Crafty Feeling,” Zadie Smith
- “On Style,” Susan Sontag
- “THE CREATIVE PROCESS,” James Baldwin

#### 9/8 Collective writing workshop

- We will write something together. It may be a thoughtful conversational / letter response to something we’ve read in class, a journal entry, an expansion of an observation or opinion you had this week, or the classics—poem, essay, short story. We will, of course, be delving into these forms as the workshop continues.

### Week 3

#### 9/13 Big Feelings

- Selections from *Crush*, Richard Siken
- Selections from *Pilgrim Bell*, Kaveh Akbar
- Selections from *Ghost Of*, Diana Khoi Nguyen
- Selections from *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*, Ross Gay

#### 9/15 Collective writing workshop

- It’s a feelings class. Consider the feeling, pin it, and write it down—place it in a narrative memory or imagining, dedicate it to a person or thing, metaphorize it, use image or shape to capture what feels inarticulable. When in doubt, write a letter.

## Week 4

9/20 The Stakes

- Selections from *Revolutionary Letters*, Diane DiPrima
- Selections from *Cruel Fiction*, Wendy Trevino

9/22 Collective writing workshop

- How do we read and revise with care? Today, we'll be discussing the art of revision, both for our own and others' work. We will revise a poem and a short story together and start thinking about our own revision practices.

*Group A, please email the class your piece by Monday at 5:00pm.*

## Week 5

9/26 The Stakes cont.

- Selections from *SOS*, Amiri Baraka
- Selections from *AZADI: Freedom, Facism, Fiction*, Arundhati Roy

9/29 Collective writing workshop, Group A

*Group B, please email the class your piece by Monday at 5:00pm.*

## Week 6

10/4 The Stakes cont.

- Selections from *how to carry water*, Lucille Clifton
- Selections from *Passion*, June Jordan

10/6 Collective writing workshop, Group B

*Please email your five group member preferences by Sunday night.*

## Week 7

10/11 Legislative Monday, Tuesday off

10/13 A simply delicious moment as story

- Selections from *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Betty Smith
- Selections from *Afterparties*, Anthony Veasna So

- Selections from *Her Body and Other Parties*, Carmen Maria Machado

*Writing workshop groups are assigned. Please email your group (and cc me) your first piece by Monday at 5:00pm.*

### Week 8

10/18 A simply delicious moment as poem

- Selections from *The Carrying*, Ada Limón
- Selections from *Latitude*, Natasha Rao
- Selections from *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*, Chen Chen

10/20 Writing workshop—groups meet and discuss each other's work.

### Week 9

10/25 Documentary / archival work as story

- Selections from *The Love Songs of W. E. B. Dubois*, Honoreé Fannone Jeffers
- Selections from *The Body Papers*, Grace Talusan
- Selections from *Citizen 13660*, Miné Okubo

10/27 Documentary / archival work as poem

- Selections from *DMZ Colony*, Don Mee Choi
- Selections from *OLIO*, Tyehimba Jess
- Selections from *A Cruelty Special to Our Species*, Emily Jungmin Yoon

*Please email your group (and cc me) your second piece by Monday at 5:00pm.*

### Week 10

11/1 Documentary / archival work discussion cont.

11/3 Writing workshop—groups meet and discuss each other's work.

### Week 11

11/8 Language as target practice

- *Dictee*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

11/10 Language as target practice

- *Whereas*, Layli Long Soldier

Please email your group (**and cc me**) your third piece by Monday at 5:00pm.

### Week 12

11/15 Language as target practice discussion cont.

11/17 Writing workshop—groups meet and discuss each other's work.

### Week 13

11/22 Individual and collective voices in poems

- ["Speculations About 'I'."](#) Toi Derricotte
- More Lucille Clifton
- Selections from *Lunch Poems*, Frank O'Hara
- Selections from *Rose*, Li Young Lee

11/24 Thanksgiving Break

Please email your group (**and cc me**) your final piece by Monday at 5:00pm.

### Week 14

11/29 Individual and collective voices in stories

- Selections from *A Private Life*, Chen Ran
- Selections from *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi
- Selections from *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, Mohsin Hamid
- Selections from *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ruth Ozeki

12/1 Writing workshop—groups meet and discuss each other's work.

### Week 15

\*This week, we will either focus on two more classes of reading or have two final class workshops in Group A and Group B format. Below are the readings for the week, but we'll touch base as a class, as we have toggled between reader and writer focused weeks.

12/6 Love stories

- *The Handmaiden*, Park Chan-Wook

- Selections from *Diary of Anaïs Nin*, Anaïs Nin
- “The Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde

*12/8* Love poems

- Selections from *Postcolonial Love Poem*, Natalie Diaz
- Selections from *The Tradition*, Jericho Brown
- Selections from *Like the singing coming off the drums*, Sonia Sanchez

Final Class!

*12/13* Reading! Celebration! Goodbyes!