

Introduction to Poetry & Prose | Spring 2024

Tues/Thurs 11am-12:15pm

CRWRI-UA.815.019

Instructor: Zoe Briscoe

zwb208@nyu.edu

Introduction to Prose and Poetry

Course Overview:

We all have our favorite short stories, poems, books, TV shows, movies, and other media—but do we know what actually makes them tick? Do we understand why we love characters and hate others, rewatch storylines and give up on others, laugh at references and roll our eyes at others? Most times, it comes down to the *writing*. Our objective for this course is *understand* how stories and poems create these effects by breaking down the elements that compose them (form, structure, point-of-view, character, dialogue, etc.) and then *apply* these lessons to our own poems and stories, which we will workshop (or give feedback on) in class.

Methodologically, our craft classes will be about *close reading*. We will read shorter texts, and the tradeoff is that we will investigate each reading very deeply, even line-by-line in order to fully understand *what* each writer is doing and *how* they're doing it. Each craft class will be themed by the particular element we'll be searching for in that day's reading. For poetry, the elements will mainly relate to structure and form. For prose, the elements will also include character, voice, genre, etc. After we gain an understanding of these different elements, we will then turn our attention to how writers *break* these very elements later in the semester. These elements will be marked in our syllabus beforehand to guide you as you read, and we will discuss your findings during our class time. We will also do short writing exercises in-class on our craft days to start applying these elements to our own work!

For each of our workshop classes (which will start during the 3rd week of the semester), we will discuss the stories/poems of **two students** – half of the class time for each student. I will provide a guide for how to give feedback but very broadly, we will come together and identify the strengths of

the piece and highlight places that may have been unclear or that you wanted more information about. The purpose of these workshops is to help you **learn by doing**—it's one thing to *know* all of the elements that make up stories and poems but writing them yourself is another story. These workshops are a space for you to freely write the stories and poems you want, and as a class, our job is to help **you** accomplish your artistic goals by helping you see what's working and what may not be coming across as clearly right now.

By the end of this course, you will gain a much fuller understanding of how stories and poems operate, and how writers can amplify certain elements to make readers feel happy, sad, frustrated, mind-blown, etc. Through our workshops you will also gain a much fuller understanding of *your* own writing, as you discover what you like and don't like to write, as well as what you want to work on for the future!

Readings:

All readings listed on this syllabus will be provided by me. Note that when readings are listed under a particular class date, that means you will read those pieces *before* our class time so we can discuss them together. The exceptions to this will be when we view TV and films later in the semester, as we will view those during our class time, so you don't need to watch them beforehand (unless you want to!).

Attendance:

Attendance in a workshop-style class is very important because (as you will soon see) writing and improving your craft truly is a collaborative effort, and we want to be able to give the same level of quality and commentary to every person who submits their work. If only a few people show up, it impacts the writer who is being workshopped. So, in the interest of respecting every writer's passion, hard work, and vulnerability, do your best to show up to every class and on time. With that being said—life happens. So, you will all get **three free absences**. If you're sick, if there's a family emergency, or if you just need a mental health day—no problem, just shoot me an email in advance. If you show up to class more than ten minutes late, that will count as a **half-absence**. Exceeding three absences will automatically result in a half-letter grade deduction. If you know there are extenuating circumstances that might result in you missing more than three classes, please schedule office hours with me beforehand so we can discuss how to best approach the situation.

Grading Breakdown:**Workshop Submissions: 30%****Written Feedback: 10%****Final Revision / Portfolio: 20%****Participation: 40%****Workshop Submissions (30%):****Prose: 1-15 pages.****Poetry: 1-10 pages.**

You will turn in your piece for workshop **the Tuesday before your workshop date (which will always be a Thursday) at 11:59pm**. You will be graded based on completeness and effort—did you tell a whole story/poem or are you still missing three pages that wrap it all up? Did you write your piece in a hurry, or did you spend a little more time with it? Along with the submission, you will also submit a short note (can be a paragraph or one full page) about the context of the piece—what inspired you to write it, what mood or idea or atmosphere were you going for, etc.—because this will help tailor our workshops to **you**. It's your story, so having that context will help us all give you feedback to help you achieve the goals that you want.

***Content Note:** In the interest of maintaining a safe and comfortable atmosphere to share our writing, we will use part of our first class to collectively discuss boundaries for the content in our stories. Will we be okay with just having content warnings for potentially triggering topics, or are there some subjects we would rather not see altogether? The one exception to this content discussion that will absolutely not be tolerated is **writing that depicts your current classmates and your professors**. Otherwise, we can absolutely discuss how we approach potentially triggering subject matter.

Written Feedback (10%):

This is separate from participation (which will also be elaborated on). Every time we workshop someone's writing, we will write our own letters (1-2 pages) to the author talking about what was effective about their piece and what can be made even stronger in future drafts. You will submit one copy of this letter to the author and one copy of this letter to me.

Final Revision / Portfolio (20%):

For the end of the semester, you have the option of submitting a revision of one of the stories we workshopped during the semester or turning in 1-2 new stories or poems. This final project will similarly be graded based on completeness and effort. For revisions, this means that your new version will have addressed a substantial number of questions and comments given by me and your classmates. This can look like: adding or removing scenes/lines, changing up language, adding more details of the scenery, fixing grammar and syntax, etc. For the portfolio, you can submit a mini-short story or poem collection, or an entirely new piece. Maybe you want to experiment with genres and forms now that you have a better understanding of poetry and prose—anything goes. This revision/portfolio will be due on **April 30th, 2024, at 11:59pm.**

Participation (40%):

Participation is critical in a workshop environment so that we can give each writer the attention and quality feedback they deserve for their hard work. However, I do also understand that participation can be a very stressful requirement especially for those who are more introverted, those who struggle with anxiety, or even those who just are afraid of public speaking in general. I will do my best to ensure that we create an environment where everyone feels safe enough to speak up, but if you feel that you still might struggle with this, you can also earn participation points by attending office hours with me. Good class attendance itself will also count toward your participation grade. So don't be overwhelmed by the percentage and just do your best!

Office Hours: Time TBD. The best way to schedule office hours is by email.

Academic Integrity: There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism of any kind in this course. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the university. Consequences are severe. Please refer to NYU's policy here: <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>.

Disability Disclosure Statement & Resources: Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Please register with the Moses 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

Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Student Wellness Policies & Resources: Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop 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.

Counseling Services: 726 Broadway New York, NY 10003 (212) 998-4780

Wellness Center: 24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999, email: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

Spring 2024 Schedule

Week 1

TUESDAY 1/23

Welcome – Introductions – Review Syllabus – Assign Workshops

THURSDAY 1/25

Craft Day 1: What is a story? What is a poem? We will identify the writing elements that *make* stories and poems what they are, starting by looking at how even the shortest versions of each form achieve this.

Readings:

- “Give It Up” by Franz Kafka (short story)
- “A White City” by James Schuyler (poem)
- “Carpathia” by Jesse Lee Kercheval (short story)

Week 2

TUESDAY 1/30

Craft Day 2 (Prose): Character & Dialogue

Readings:

- “A Temporary Matter” by Jhumpa Lahiri

THURSDAY 2/1**Craft Day 3 (Poetry): Sonnets**

Readings:

- Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare
- Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley
- To Time by Sylvia Plath
- Leda and the Swan by William Butler Yeats

Week 3**TUESDAY 2/6****Craft Day 4 (Prose): Voice**

- “Gorilla, My Love” by Toni Cade Bambara

THURSDAY 2/8**Workshop Day****Week 4****TUESDAY 2/13****Craft Day 5 (Poetry): Ekphrastic**

- “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats
- “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning
- “Musée des Beaux Arts” by W.H. Auden
- “The Starry Night” by Anne Sexton

THURSDAY 2/15**Workshop Day****Week 5****TUESDAY 2/20****Craft Day 6 (Prose): Point-of-View**

- “Girls, At Play” by Celeste Ng
- “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid

THURSDAY 2/22

Workshop Day

Week 6

TUESDAY 2/27

Craft Day 7 (Poetry): Villanelle

- “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” by Dylan Thomas
- “Merciless Beauty” by Geoffrey Chaucer
- “One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop
- “The Difference Between Lack and Absence” by Annie Diamond

THURSDAY 2/29

Workshop Day

Week 7

TUESDAY 3/5

Craft Day 8 (Prose): Framing

- “The Fourth State of Matter” by Jo Ann Beard

THURSDAY 3/7

Workshop Day

Week 8

TUESDAY 3/12:

Craft Day 9 (Poetry): Meta-Poems

- “Essay on Craft” by Ocean Vuong
- “On Silence” by Jorie Graham
- “Large Red Man Reading” by Wallace Stevens

THURSDAY 3/14

Workshop Day

Week 9**SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS ON 3/19 OR 3/21**Week 10**TUESDAY 3/26****Craft Day 10 (Prose):** Non-Linearity

- Chapter 1 of *Chronicle of A Death Foretold* by Gabriel Garcia Márquez

THURSDAY 3/28**Workshop Day**Week 11**TUESDAY 4/2****Craft Day 11 (Poetry):** Visual Poetry

- “The Skies Don’t Understand” by Hua Xi
- “Sonnet in the Shape of a Potted Christmas Tree” by George Starbuck
- “Easter Wings” by George Herbert
-

THURSDAY 4/4**Workshop Day**Week 12**TUESDAY 4/9****Craft Day 12 (Prose):** Worldbuilding/Genre

- “Story of Your Life” by Ted Chiang

THURSDAY 4/11**Workshop Day**Week 13

TUESDAY 4/16**Craft Day (Poetry):** Genre-Mixing

- “The Glass Essay” by Anne Carson

THURSDAY 4/18**Craft Day:** Genre-Mixing

- *Parasite* (in class)

Week 14**TUESDAY 4/23****Craft Day:** Genre-Mixing

- *Parasite* (in class)

THURSDAY 4/25**Craft Day:** Longform Story Arcs

- *Andor* (in class)

Week 15**TUESDAY 4/30 – Final Portfolio / Revision Due****Craft Day:** Longform Story Arcs

- *Andor* (in class)

THURSDAY 5/2 – Last Class**Craft Day:** Longform Story Arcs

- *Andor* (in class)