

Introduction to Prose and Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.025

Spring 2022, W&F 7:45-9:00 PM

Location TBD

Instructor: Jessica Williams

Email: jkw365@nyu.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

“This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.”

-Toni Morrison

“You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read.”

-James Baldwin

“We have poetry / So we do not die of history.”

-Meena Alexander

Course Description & Objectives:

Welcome to Introduction to Prose and Poetry! In this class we'll read short stories and poems and try to understand how each piece of writing achieves its lasting effects. Good writing isn't magic—it's just that the gears are all hidden under the hood. To build a frame of reference you can use to think critically about craft elements, you have to do a good deal of reading. Some weeks will be dedicated to reading and others to workshopping your peers' writing and your own. By the end of the semester, you'll have a final portfolio of creative writings and a renewed appreciation for storytelling as an art form.

Course Structure:

Class conversation will be based on assigned readings in weeks 1-4 and 8-11, so please come having read closely. In general, we will discuss poetry on Wednesdays and prose on Fridays. On these days you will complete a brief in-class writing exercise based on a prompt I'll provide. The exercises are meant to help you generate new work.

In weeks 5-7 and 12-14, we'll read and discuss (ie, workshop) your own short stories and poems. You are welcome to develop your writings from in-class exercises, but it's not required. Your first and third submissions will be a short story of between 8-12 double-spaced pages. Your second and fourth submission will be three poems of a decent length (there should be enough content for us to discuss in class).

In addition, you will prepare a thoughtful written critique of at least 300 words for each piece submitted by your peers. We'll go over best practices for giving gentle but useful feedback to your peers before our first workshop 😊

SUBMISSIONS

Short stories should be between 8-12 pages, double-spaced with size 12 font, Times New Roman. (Approximately 300 words per page.) Poetry submissions should be 3 poems at a time. Please mark each page with page numbers and your last name.

The deadline for submissions is seven days prior to your workshop. It's crucial that you submit your work on time so that others can adequately read and respond. Your submissions can be uploaded via NYU Classes. **Submit workshop pieces via NYU Classes seven days prior to the class you are to be workshopped in.**

READING RESPONSES

You will complete three 500-word reading responses, due on the Wednesdays of weeks 3, 8, and 11. In these responses, choose either a short story or two poems from the syllabus that we've covered in class and write about an element of its craft. You might choose to talk about how the author develops a main character so that they seem to us like a real person, or why a story's dialogue is particularly effective, or how the details in a poem manage to be at once specific and universal. **Submit reading responses via NYU Classes before class begins on the Wednesday they are due.**

CRITIQUES

You are responsible for writing a 300-word critique for each of your peers' submissions. This should be a typed, one-page letter in which you clearly outline what's working and what isn't working in the piece. Aim to be as specific as possible. What do you like about it? A certain image? The point of view? The protagonist or one of the side characters? What suggestions do you have for ways the writer can improve their work? **Submit critiques to me via email at least 24 hours prior to class.** I will combine and share the critiques with each writer after their workshop.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

At the end of the semester, you will submit a final portfolio. This will include all your workshop submissions, the feedback I have given you, and revised drafts. Your portfolio should include a 1-2-page letter about your revisions.

EXTRA CREDIT

You can earn extra credit (up to 10% added to your grade) by attending a virtual reading at NYU or any other venue in NYC and writing a 500-word response about the most interesting things you heard or learned. I encourage you to ask the author a craft question during the Q&A portion of the event.

GRADING

Participation: 25%
Reading Responses: 15%
Workshop Submissions: 20%
Critiques: 20%
Revised Portfolio: 20%

ATTENDANCE

Your attendance is important, and so is your punctuality. Please arrive/log in on time. You are permitted one unexcused absence. Beyond that, I ask that you communicate with me if circumstances are such that you need to miss class. **Each unexcused absence after the first one may lower your grade by five percent.**

You will be considered tardy if you arrive to class more than 15 minutes late. Two instances of tardiness will equal one unexcused absence.

CELL PHONES/ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Devices are permitted for in-class use.

OFFICE HOURS

You are not required to attend office hours, but I encourage you to schedule an appointment with me, especially after your first workshop. Please email me to schedule.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is strictly forbidden. Don't do it. You'll fail this course and be reported to the University.

DISABILITY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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 register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, or at 726 Broadway (2nd floor) or at www.nyu.edu/csd.

STUDENT WELLNESS POLICY

Creative writing is a space to explore things that often go left unsaid. It can and should be used to talk about universal fears and experiences. However, if I suspect that you are unwell or that the piece you've submitted is a cry for help, it will be my responsibility to alert the University. If you feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, you can feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

SCHEDULE

Please complete the assigned reading *before* the date where the readings are listed.

Week One

Wednesday, Feb 3rd

First day of class/Introduction

Louise Erdrich, "[Advice to Myself](#)"; LitHub, "[You Don't Know Anything and Other Writing Advice from Toni Morrison](#)"; [What makes a poem ... a poem? - Melissa Kovacs](#) (Youtube video)

Writing Prompt

Friday, Feb 5th

Fiction: The Late-Stage Reveal

Jhumpa Lahiri, "A Temporary Matter" and Octavia Butler, "Speech Sounds"

Writing Prompt

Week Two

Wednesday, Feb 10th

Poetry: Channeling Outrage

Langston Hughes, "I, Too"; Claude McKay, "If We Must Die"; Afaa Michael Weaver, "American Income"; Terrance Hayes, "George Floyd" and "American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin [Why are you bugging me you stank minuscule husk]"; Danez Smith, "not an elegy for Mike Brown"; Reginald Dwayne Betts, "When I Think of Tamir Rice While Driving"; Audre Lord, "Power"; Aracelis Girmay, "From the Black Maria"

Writing Prompt

Friday, Feb 12th

Fiction: Imagining the Lives of Others

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Conduction" and Zadie Smith, "Crazy They Call Me"

Writing Prompt

Week Three

Wednesday, Feb 17th

Poetry: Remembering

Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Bean Eaters"; Cortney Lamar Charleston, "When I Grow Up I Want to Be a Martyr"; Joy Harjo, "Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings"; Aracelis Girmay, "& When We Woke"; Ocean Vuong, "Audobade with Burning City" and "Not Even This"; Sally Wen Mao, "Close Encounters of the Liminal Kind"; Kristiana Rae Colón, "a remix for remembrance"

Writing Prompt

First reading response due

Friday, Feb 19th

Fiction: Conversational Dialogue

Jamel Brinkley, "A Lucky Man"; Anthony Veasna So, "Three Women of Chuck's Doughnuts"; New Yorker, "Anthony Veasna So on the Alienation and Comfort of Doughnut Shops"

Writing Prompt

Week Four

Wednesday, Feb 24th

Poetry: Beholding the Self

Lucille Clifton, "homage to my hips" and "poem to my uterus"; Sharon Olds, "Ode to My Whiteness" and "Ode to the Hymen"; Yusef Komunyakaa, "Anondyne"; Dorothy Chain, "Ode to Chinese Superstitions, Haircuts, and Being a Girl"; Lucille Clifton, "won't you celebrate with me"; Marissa Davis, "In the Beginning Was"

Special Guest: Marissa Davis

Writing Prompt

Friday, Feb 26th

Fiction: Retrospective

Toni Morrison, Recitatif; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Apollo” and “Notes on Grief”

Writing Prompt

Week Five

Wednesday, March 3rd

Fiction Workshop 1 (Group A)

Friday, March 5th

Fiction Workshop 2 (Group B)

Week Six

Wednesday, March 10th

Fiction Workshop 3 (Group C)

Friday, March 12th

Poetry Workshop 1 (Group A)

Week Seven

Wednesday, March 17th

Poetry Workshop 2 (Group B)

Friday, March 19th

Poetry Workshop 3 (Group C)

Week Eight

Wednesday, March 24th

Poetry: Acknowledging Influence

Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool”; Terrance Hayes, “The Golden Shovel”; Joy Harjo, “An American Sunrise”; Nicole Sealey, “Object Permanence”; Danez Smith, “My Bitch!”; EJ Koh, “Beyonce’s Quadruple Platinum Single – An English to English Translation”

Writing Prompt

Second reading response due

Friday, March 26th

Fiction: Suspending the Moment // Second Person POV

Edwidge Danticat, “Without Inspection”; Lesley Nneka Arimah, “The Future Looks Good”; Jamil Jan Kochai “Playing Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain”

Writing Prompt

Week Nine

Wednesday, March 31st

Poetry: Dream Worlds/Narrative Space

Ishion Hutchinson, "[Black Space](#)"; Aracelis Girmay, "[The Dream](#)"; Natalie Diaz, "[My Brother My Wound](#)," "[No More Cake Here](#)," and "[Dome Riddle](#)"; Sherwin Bitsui, "[From Dissolve](#)" and "[River](#)"; Terrance Hayes, "[American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin](#) [["I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison"](#)]" ; Poetry Foundation Editors' Discussion of "American Sonnet..." – [Listen Here](#)

Writing Prompt

Friday, April 2nd

Fiction:

Weike Wang, "[Omakase](#)"; New Yorker, "[Weike Wang on the Privilege of Not Having to Think About Race](#)"; Susan Choi, "[Flashlight](#)"; New Yorker, "[Susan Choi On How Much She Can Leave Out](#)"

Writing Prompt

Week Ten

Wednesday, April 7th

Poetry: National Identity

Li-Young Lee, "[The Cleaving](#)" and "[Immigrant Blues](#)"; Marilyn Chin, "[Little Box Opens Up](#)"; Sally Wen Mao, "[Resurrection](#)"; Emily Jungmin Yun, "[American Dream](#)", "[Bell Theory](#)", and "[An Ordinary Misfortune](#)"; José Olivarez, "[Ars Poetica](#)"; Javier Zamora, "[Looking at a Coyote](#)"; Franny Choi, "[Split Mouth](#)" (YouTube video)

Writing Prompt

Friday, April 9th

Fiction: A Child's Point of View

ZZ Packer, "[Brownies](#)"; Toni Cade Bambara, "[Gorilla, My Love](#)"; Jamaica Kincaid, "[Girl](#)"

Writing Prompt

Week Eleven

Wednesday, April 14th

Poetry: Colloquial Language/Performance

José Olivarez, "[wherever i'm at that land is Chicago](#)", "[despecho hour at the casa azul restaurante y cantina](#)"; Hanif Abdurraqib, "[It Is Maybe Time to Admit That Michael Jordan Definitely Pushed Off](#)" and "[Ode to Biggie](#)" (Youtube video); Danez Smith, "[Dinosaurs in the Hood](#)" (watch [here](#)) and "[dogs!](#)" (watch [here](#)); Nas breaks down, "It Ain't Hard to Tell" with Harvard Poetry Prof. Elisa New (Youtube video); Listen: [Hip Hop Poetics: A Classroom Playlist](#); Selection from Zadie Smith's "On Beauty"

Writing Prompt

Third reading response due

Friday, April 16th

Fiction: Inanimate Objects

Louise Erdrich, “The Stone”; New Yorker, “Louise Erdrich on the Power of Stones”; Carmen Maria Machado, “The Husband Stitch”

Writing Prompt

Week Twelve

Wednesday, April 21st

Fiction Workshop 4 (Group A)

Friday, April 23rd

Fiction Workshop 5 (Group B)

Week Thirteen

Wednesday, April 28th

Fiction Workshop 6 (Group C)

Friday, April 30th

Poetry Workshop 4 (Group A)

Week Fourteen

Wednesday, May 5th

Poetry Workshop 5 (Group B)

Friday, May 7th

Poetry Workshop 6 (Group C)

Your final portfolio is due at midnight on (scheduled exam day).