Introduction to Creative Writing – Prose & Poetry – CRWRIUA.815

Instructor: Madeline McFarland (she/her/hers)
Time: Tuesday/Thursday, 6:00 – 9:10 PM
Session: Summer I, May 23–July 3
Location: TBD
Email: mam10078@nyu.edu / mamcfarland23@gmail.com
Office Hours: By appointment

“There’s a kind of poetic mind that sees connections between things. I think that ability to make connections is part of the open secret of what a writer does,”
Paula Fox, Paris Review No. 170

“None of my stories really happened, of course. But there’s always something, some element, something said to me that I witnessed, that may be the starting place,”
Raymond Carver, Paris Review No. 88

“From tiny experiences we build cathedrals,”
Orhan Pamuk, Paris Review No. 175

Course Description

This course is designed to teach you how to tell the stories (as fiction, as poetry, as both) that you want to tell. It is an introduction and entry point for students of creative writing, and should hopefully accommodate lifelong and brand-new writers and readers alike.

My goal is that by the end of the course, you will feel empowered and excited to continue to write your own work, with practice identifying and including formal craft elements, as well as producing, accepting, and incorporating feedback on creative writing.

Class Structure

We will meet twice a week for 190 minutes (three hours, ten minutes). The structure of the course is split by both genre, and class type.

The first three weeks (five classes) will introduce the class and then focus on craft elements: how good, effective writing accomplishes what it sets out to do. About half of these classes (three) will study fiction, and half of these classes (two) will study poetry.

The last three weeks (six classes) will be entirely student workshops, the collaborative practice of creative writing, with rotating groups of student work submitted, read, edited, responded to, and discussed by the members of the class. One workshop will be in fiction, and one workshop will be in poetry for each student.

For each craft class, students will submit a brief response to one of the assigned readings for that day. Each student will later be workshopped by the class twice, and will provide
written feedback to peers for every timely submission. At the end of the course, students will submit a final written portfolio.

**Grading Policies**

Final grades will be determined by:

- **25% Attendance and Participation**

  This is a discussion-based course, and participation is incredibly important. As outlined below, attendance is a key component of being able to actively participate in class, and every unexcused absence beyond the first will affect your final grade. Thoughtful and responsive in-class discussion will make the class livelier and better, and will make everyone learn more. Please talk!

- **25% Workshop Submissions**

  Send your workshop submissions in one week before the date of your workshop in an email to the entire class. Please contact me if you are having trouble meeting that deadline, but it’s important to give the rest of the class time to read your submissions, especially given how many pieces we will workshop each class.

  For *fiction* workshops: Please turn in a submission of between 5 and 15 pages. Use a 12-point font, and double space and number your pages. Please title your submissions and include your name at the top of the document. Your submission can be a short story, a novel excerpt, or a series of flash fiction pieces. If it is a novel excerpt, please also provide a quick overview of what the rest of the novel is about to orient the class and help with feedback.

  For *poetry* workshops: Please turn in up to 6 pages of poems. Use a 12-point font, title your submissions and include your name at the top of the document. You can turn in one longer form poem or a series of short poems.

- **25% Reading Responses, Workshop Edits, and Feedback Letters**

  For *craft* classes: please turn in a one-page double-spaced reading response to one of the assigned stories or poems.

  For *workshop* classes: Please make edits to each workshop submission (printed and marked by hand, or edited with tracked changes in Microsoft Word), as well as turn in a one-page letter to each student who has submitted for workshop that week.

  In your edits, address any grammatical errors you see, as well as make suggestions for language or content changes or ideas (insertions, deletions, movements, etc.) at the line, paragraph, or page level.
Bring two copies of your feedback letter, one for the student and one for me, or, if sending by email, copy me on the email to that student. In your letter, discuss what you feel worked well about the piece, as well as suggestions you have for improvement.

- 25% Final Portfolio

Students will submit a final portfolio of work at the very end of the semester. The final portfolio can be in fiction or in poetry. The portfolio should be between 5 and 15 pages for fiction, and up to 6 pages for poetry. At least some component of the portfolio should be a significant revision of a previous workshop submission for class based on student and teacher feedback on your pieces.

Attendance Policy

We will only meet for eleven classes, so attendance of all classes will be crucial to your learning. More than one unexcused absence will drop your letter grade by a half-letter for each absence at the end of the semester (i.e. A to A-, etc.)

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is, of course, unacceptable. The consequences of plagiarism are outlined here, on NYU’s Academic Integrity pages: https://cas.nyu.edu/academic-integrity.html. If you are struggling or having trouble meeting the deadline for an assignment, please reach out to me.

Electronics Policy

Please only use laptops or tablets for taking notes or reviewing documents. Phones are not permitted in class.

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 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 Policy

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.

**Workshop Etiquette**

Workshop can be a vulnerable space. Please be empathetic and respectful of other students’ work, and treat their writing with the care you would hope your own work to be handled with.

It can be useful, when in workshop, to not think in terms of liking or disliking a piece of work, but to discuss what makes that piece successful or less successful, or what parts of the piece excited and pulled in readers versus parts that confused readers or raised questions. If you don’t know where to begin, think about what parts you remember most clearly, and why that is.

Try to approach someone’s work by thinking about what they are trying to do, explore, or accomplish with their pieces. Taste and aesthetics are subjective, and it’s not useful to give feedback to a story or a poem based on the way you would have written it. The best way to give feedback is to aim to meet the writer where they are, and help them get to where it seems they want to be.

**Book List**

*Unaccustomed Earth*, Jhumpa Lahiri  
*Grand Union*, Zadie Smith  
*Dear Life*, Alice Munro  
*Good Poems*, selected by Garrison Keiller

**Schedule (Classes & Assignments, Subject to Change)**

**Tuesday, May 23:** Introduction/Craft of Fiction: Plot, Structure, Scene, Summary  
No homework for class

**Thursday, May 25:** Craft of Fiction: Setting, Time, POV  
**Homework for Class:** “To Reach Japan,” Alice Munro (*Dear Life*); “Only Goodness,” Jhumpa Lahiri (*Unaccustomed Earth*); “Blocked,” Zadie Smith (*Grand Union*); “The Lazy River,” Zadie Smith (*Grand Union*)  
**Assignment Due:** Reading Response

**Tuesday, May 30:** Craft of Fiction: Character, Voice, Dialogue
Homework for Class: “Amundsen,” Alice Munro (*Dear Life*); “Hell-Heaven,” Jhumpa Lahiri (*Unaccustomed Earth*); “Miss Adele Amidst the Corsets,” Zadie Smith (*Grand Union*)

**Assignment Due:** Reading Response

Thursday, June 1: Craft of Poetry: Language, Style, Lines


**Assignment Due:** Reading Response; Workshop Submissions for Students A, B, C, D, and E

Tuesday, June 6: Craft of Poetry: Image, Metaphor, Moment, Experience


**Assignment Due:** Reading Response; Workshop Submissions for Students A, B, C, D, and E

Thursday, June 8: Craft of Poetry: Rhythm, Rhyme, Meter


**Assignment Due:** Reading Response; Workshop Submissions for Students F, G, H, I, and J

Tuesday, June 13: Fiction Workshop Group I

**Homework for Class:** Read & Edit Submissions of Students A, B, C, D, and E

**Assignment Due:** Feedback Notes & Letters; Workshop Submissions for Students K, L, M, N, and O

Thursday, June 15: Fiction Workshop Group II

**Homework for Class:** Read & Edit Submissions of Students F, G, H, I, and J

**Assignment Due:** Feedback Notes & Letters; Workshop Submissions for Students A, B, C, D, and E

Tuesday, June 20: Fiction Workshop Group III

**Homework for Class:** Read & Edit Submissions of Students K, L, M, N, and O

**Assignment Due:** Feedback Notes & Letters; Workshop Submissions for Students F, G, H, I, and J
Thursday, June 22: Poetry Workshop Group I  
**Homework for Class:** Read & Edit Submissions of Students A, B, C, D, and E  
**Assignment Due:** Feedback Notes & Letters; Workshop Submissions for Students K, L, M, N, and O

Tuesday, June 27: Poetry Workshop Group II  
**Homework for Class:** Read & Edit Submissions of Students F, G, H, I, and J  
**Assignment Due:** Feedback Notes & Letters

Thursday, June 29: Poetry Workshop Group III/Course Wrap-up  
**Homework for Class:** Read & Edit Submissions of Students K, L, M, N, and O  
**Assignment Due:** Feedback Notes & Letters

Monday, July 3: **Final Portfolios Due by Midnight**