INTRODUCTION TO PROSE + POETRY
CWRI-UA.815.011 (ONLINE)
SPRING 2021

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Class meetings: Mon / Wed 12:30-1:45
Office hours: Wed 10:30-12 + by appointment

“We often tell our students, ‘The future’s in your hands.’ But I think the future is actually in your mouth. You have to articulate the world you want to live in first.”
—Ocean Vuong

DESCRIPTION

A resonant piece of writing makes us feel as though we’re recognizing some part of our own identity or experience in another. Sharing stories opens the points of connection between us, deepens our understanding of our own identities and others. This new insight can be transformative, showing us something we couldn’t see before, changing what’s possible for our ways of being in the world together.

In this course, we’ll strive for this expansion of the self, learning to read across differences as we study texts by other writers with an attention towards how they’re crafted. Alongside our reading, we’ll develop ways to articulate and share our own stories using prose, poetry, and hybrid forms.

While generating writing will be central to the coursework, our focus will be on process rather than product. Our time together is an opportunity to experiment—to extend ourselves—and to cultivate a writing discipline as we do. Embrace hybridity. Play with language and structure and perspective. These are our tools. Through reading and sharing work together, my hope is that we’ll build a class culture that encourages intellectual exploration and creative risk-taking.

STRUCTURE

The class has two main strands.

Mondays will focus on craft. We’ll go over the assigned readings, discussing not only the content of pieces, but their construction and how they work. We’ll learn to read as writers—identifying
techniques and tools that we can use in our own writing. We’ll read a mix of prose, poetry, and hybrid forms, reading across genres and putting them in conversation with one another.

In addition to reading every week, you’ll be writing throughout the semester. Wednesdays will be devoted to workshop. We’ll read each other’s creative work and offer thoughtful responses and critique during in-class discussion together. More on workshop feedback below.

COURSEWORK

Weekly readings
Due by class on Mondays

“Reading, real reading, is a strenuous and pleasurable contact sport.”
– Maureen Howard

In this class, reading is about more than passively flipping through pages. All of our readings will relatively brief and available as PDFs on our course site. I encourage you to print out hard copies and read with a pen in hand. Underline or mark striking passages, words and phrases you’re drawn to. Are there places in the text where you agree or disagree? Note both. Ask questions in the margins. Write down what you notice. Everything should be annotated in a way that makes sense to you—doing so brings you into conversation with the text. Come to class prepared with notes and any questions about the reading.

Some of our readings may include:

- Elizabeth Alexander, selected poems
- Hilton Als, excerpt from *White Girls*
- Kaveh Akbar, selected poems
- Gloria Anzaldúa, excerpt from “How to Tame a Wild Tongue”
- Fatimah Asghar, selected poems
- James Baldwin, “Notes of a Native Son” + “Sonny’s Blues”
- John Berger, excerpt from *Ways of Seeing*
- Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, selected poems
- Eula Biss, excerpts from *Notes from No Man’s Land: American Essays*
- Jericho Brown, selected poems
- Anelise Chen, excerpt from *So Many Olympic Exertions*
- Teju Cole, “Far Away From Here” + excerpt from *Blind Spot*
- Melissa Febos, excerpt from *Abandon Me*
- Nikki Giovanni, selected poems
- Joy Harjo, selected poems
Terrance Hayes, selected poems
Leslie Jamison, “The Empathy Exams”
June Jordan, selected poems
Ilya Kaminsky, excerpt from *Deaf Republic*
Kim Hyesoon, selected poems
Jordan Kisner, “Thin Places”
Ada Limón, excerpt from *Bright Dead Things*
Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” and selected poems
John McPhee, “The Search for Marvin Gardens”
Claudia Rankine, excerpt from *Citizen: An American Lyric*
Adrienne Rich, selected poems
Richard Rodriguez, “Late Victorians”
Danez Smith, selected poems
Zadie Smith, excerpt from *Feel Free: Essays*
Natasha Trethewey, selected poems
Ocean Vuong, excerpt from *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* + selected poems
Jesmyn Ward, excerpt from *Sing, Unburied, Sing*
Jenny Xie, excerpt from *Eye Level*

**Writing**

*Due by Wednesday at midnight (unless otherwise noted)*

Everyone will be assigned to a workshop group. You’ll submit at least three times and have the opportunity for revision around midterm. We’ll go over possible prompts and frameworks in class together to get started, but ultimately what you write about for your submissions is up to you in terms of form and content. Again, this is a place to play and take risks—and possibly fail. This is how we learn. You’re not writing to impress others in the class, but to try new techniques, pursue inquiries, and go on a journey of self-discovery.

**Reader responses**

*Due by class on Wednesday*

You’ll read your peers’ submissions in advance of Wednesday workshops. Again, I encourage you to print these out and mark up the hard copies as you go. Read your peers’ work with the same thoughtfulness and intention you want your own writing to receive. Once you’ve finished reading, write a single-page response (300-word minimum) offering feedback to the writer. It’s not enough to say *I liked it* or *I didn’t like it*—be specific. Quote the text. What lines / sections stood out to you and why? Describe your experience reading. What was working? What
questions do you still have? Email a doc or PDF with your response to the writer (and copy me) ahead of each workshop.

Field notes
Throughout the semester, you’ll keep a running record of field notes: images you’ve seen, questions you’re pondering, quotes you’ve overheard, etc. These can be handwritten or digital. All entries should be dated. Beyond that, the form your field notes take are up to you. These notes aren’t about polish and curation, but rather a record of your thinking and creative attention over time. Notice what you notice. We’ll check in about these a few times during the semester.

Final Portfolio + Letter
At the end of the semester, you’ll compile a portfolio of revised work and submit it along with a reflective letter. (We’ll discuss this more later on.)

POLICIES

Come to class on time and prepared. Though we'll be meeting online, refrain from using laptops and other devices for anything other than what’s needed to be present in our class. Participation is an essential component of the course, so show up ready to contribute to our discussions. Everyone’s voice shapes the culture of our class—we won’t be the same without yours. Submit assignments on time.

If for some reason you need to miss class, email to notify me as soon as possible. If you’re struggling to make it to class or hand in work by the assigned deadlines, be in touch so that we can discuss together and come up with a plan for next steps.

I understand the need for flexibility and understanding given the circumstances we’re living through—my goal is to identify ways to support rather than penalize. That said, repeated absences and missing / late assignments without any communication will significantly drop your overall grade for the course.

Workshop etiquette
Treat your peers with courtesy and care: do not share anyone’s work or discuss the content of their writing outside of class. It is my full expectation that we are all capable of balancing rigor with respect when we discuss each other’s work.

Academic integrity
You are expected to do and submit your own honest, original work. There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism in this class. Any instance of plagiarism will be reported directly to the
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
Website: http://www.nyu.edu/csd

Student Wellness Policy
Students will be writing and sharing pieces of nonfiction, some of which may contain personal information and/or personal history. In other submissions, 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 prompt my attention. For any work that may be interpreted as such, please send an email putting it in context before submitting, especially for workshop. 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.

CONFERENCE + OFFICE HOURS
I strongly encourage you to meet with me for individual conference at least once during the semester. Weekly office hours will be held on Wednesdays before class from 10:30am-12pm. Additional hours are also available by appointment. During these hours you’ll be able to ask questions about the course and assignments, but our conversations will also be an opportunity for more in-depth discussion about your own writing process and creative work throughout the semester. Please don’t hesitate to ask about setting up meetings.

GRADING
Everyone begins with an A. Your grade will be based on your writing and participation, including attendance, discussion, and in-class work. My intention is not to grade you on the
perceived quality of your writing, but on your effort and engagement throughout the semester. What’s most important is that you show up and keep showing up—both in your own work as well as your responses to the weekly readings and your peers’ pieces. Breakdown below:

- Participation – 40% (includes attendance, reading + discussion, field notes)
- Writing submissions – 20%
- Reader responses – 20%
- Final portfolio + letter – 20%

Late assignments will lose points (-5%) for each day they’re overdue, except in the case of emergencies. There’s opportunity to earn extra credit (up to +5%) by attending a reading or other literary event and writing a brief response.

CLASS SCHEDULE
(Reading schedule TBA + subject to change)

WEEK 1

Monday, February 1

First class: welcome + intros

Wednesday, February 3

Vivian Gornick, selections from *The Situation and the Story*
Audre Lorde, “Poetry is Not a Luxury”

WEEK 2

Monday, February 8

*Readings TBA*

Wednesday, February 10

*Readings TBA*
*Group 1 submissions due*
Monday, February 15 – *(No class)*

Wednesday, February 17

  Workshop Group 1.1  
  *Reader responses for Group 1 due*  
  *Group 2 submissions due*

  **WEEK 4**

Monday, February 22

  *Readings TBA*

Wednesday, February 24

  Workshop Group 2.1  
  *Reader responses for Group 2 due*  
  *Group 3 submissions due*

  **WEEK 5**

Monday, March 1

  *Readings TBA*

Wednesday, March 3

  Workshop Group 3.1  
  *Reader responses for Group 3 due*  
  *Group 1 submissions due*

  **WEEK 6**

Monday, March 8

  *Readings TBA*
Wednesday, March 10

Workshop Group 1.2
Reader responses for Group 1 due
Group 2 submissions due

WEEK 7

Monday, March 15

Readings TBA

Wednesday, March 17

Workshop Group 2.2
Reader responses for Group 2 due
Group 3 submissions due

WEEK 8

Monday, March 22

Special class – no reading due today
Field notes check-in

Wednesday, March 24

Workshop Group 3.2
Reader responses for Group 3 due

WEEK 9

Monday, March 29

Readings TBA

Wednesday, March 31

Group 1 revisions due
WEEK 10

Monday, April 5

*Readings TBA*

Wednesday, April 7

Special class – *TBD*

*Group 2 revisions due*

WEEK 11

Monday, April 12

*Readings TBA*

Wednesday, April 14

*Group 3 revisions due*

*Group 1 submissions due*

WEEK 12

Monday, April 19 – *University Holiday (No class)*

Wednesday, April 21

Workshop Group 1.3

*Reader responses for Group 1 due*

*Group 2 submissions due*

WEEK 13

Monday, April 26

*Readings TBA*
Wednesday, April 28

Workshop Group 2.3
Reader responses for Group 2 due
Group 3 submissions due

WEEK 14

Monday, May 3

Readings TBA

Wednesday, May 5

Workshop Group 3.3
Reader responses for Group 3 due

Thursday, May 6 – University Legislative Day (Classes on Mon schedule)

We’ll discuss what to do with this curious scheduling set-up when we get there.

WEEK 15

Monday, May 10

Final class: reading + celebration
Field notes / Final portfolio + reflection letter due