Introduction to Prose & Poetry: Writing as Hunting & Gathering
CRWRI-UA.815.005

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Class: Mon / Wed, 2:00pm - 3:15pm
Office Hours: By appointment

We tell ourselves stories in order to live.
Joan Didion

Overview
Storytelling is an intrinsic aspect of the human experience. We are communal creatures and we are, undeniably, storytellers. When we start writing, these instincts kick in and we use those skills naturally, but, in this class, we will develop our craft and technique in order to make intentional, impactful choices in our writing. In this class, we will gather the snippets that feed our writing — dialogue we overhear on the subway, a line from a bird identification manual, a weird fact we learn from a documentary — and hunt for skills by finding new texts, breaking down how they work, and taking what we need. This is a place to get messy, to try new things. We will do writing prompts and exercises to employ our new skills and move us towards compiling a healthy portfolio of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and hybrid works.

Structure
Mondays will be dedicated to craft and technique. We will review the assigned texts, analyze how these stories/poems are in conversation with each other, and discuss how these methods can inform our own writing. If time allows, we will also do some prompts on Mondays. On Wednesdays, we workshop! You can read more about that process below.

Responsibilities

**Weekly Observations – due Sunday nights**

Throughout the week, you are encouraged to keep an eye and ear open to the world around you. Jot down your observations: snippets of overheard conversations, bits you remember from your dreams, particularly striking images you stumble upon. At the end of every week, on Sundays, you will email ten of these observations to me. This type of observation can be really generative and it’s a wonderful habit to develop.

**Found Texts – due before class on Mondays**

At the start of each craft class, a student will bring in a book they like and read a page to the class. You may bring any book of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry and read any selection that you enjoy. If you want to read a page of lyrics, go for it. If you want to read a page of a newspaper article, you’re more than welcome. This process will help you identify what you like, find your sensibilities, and always be on the lookout for new material.

**Weekly Readings – due before class on Mondays**
On craft days, you must read the assigned pieces for that day—typically two short prose pieces or about 3 poems. These readings will be available on NYU Classes; other texts may be distributed in person for in-class or take-home exercises. For readings uploaded to our site, which will be the majority of the texts, print out the pieces and mark them up—active reading is important, and you will need to refer to your hard copy during class discussion. For each reading, you will also need to write up 3-5 bullet points for our discussion and one writing prompt based on the text. The readings are subject to change throughout the semester.

**Reading Workshop Pieces – due before class on Thursdays**

You should be as thorough reading your peers’ writing as you are reading our discussion pieces. When reading others' submissions, please handwrite notes and line edits on your copy of the story, which you will hand back to the author at the end of class.

**Comments & Critiques – due before class on Thursdays**

As part of workshopping your peers' writing, you must write a roughly 1-page (approx. 300 words) critique letter on each submission. We’ll discuss workshop etiquette more in class, but broadly: be kind, and don’t focus on what you “like” or “don’t like”—give feedback on what is or isn’t working in literary terms, and suggest potential ways to improve weaker points. Our discussions and your reading responses will help you learn what makes effective writing in terms of structure, language, character, plot, etc., and these are the elements you should focus on. You may use these during workshop to guide discussion, but you must turn in two hard copies—one to me, and one to the recipient—at the end of class. The feedback you give is equally as important to your classmates’ development and your own.

**Workshop Submissions – due a week before your workshop date**

Short prose should be 5-15 pages double-spaced in Garamond font, size 12, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Poetry submissions should include 3 poems at a time. Make sure to include a header or footer with your name and page numbers. You should submit your pages one week before your workshop by bringing 13 hard copies to class. It’s crucial that you submit your work on time.

Within the span of the semester, you must submit poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. We will have opportunities in our in-class writing exercises to explore other media, and you are welcome to bring in a different kind of piece (like a short play, part of a graphic novel, or comic) for your fourth workshopping session, if you would like. This is not mandatory – if you prefer to stick to poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, that is fine! But you are welcome to explore other genres and forms of writing for the portfolio. If you do choose to explore other genres for the final portfolio, please discuss this with me at least ONE WEEK before your final workshop so that I can help guide you regarding page limits for workshop, etc.

**Portfolio – due final day of classes**
As this is an introduction to both poetry and prose, your final portfolio must contain work across genres, though the split is up to you. As long as you include at least one poem, one fictional story, and one nonfiction essay, you have free reign on the other pieces. If you’d like to include one short story, one micro-essay, and 8 poems, or a longer story, an essay, and one poem, you may do so. Your portfolio must contain work written over the course of the semester. Although the inclusion of new work is encouraged, at least two pieces in the portfolio are required to be revisions of past workshop submissions.

Office Hours

By appointment. You are required to meet with me at least once during the semester, but I encourage you to do so as often as you like. Please schedule via email. Don’t be shy! If you have any concerns about the class, please don’t hesitate to reach out. If something is bothering you about the class, I want us to be able to work it out together.

Grading

Attendance (10%)

Come to class! And contribute!

Workshop (50%)

Attendance is especially crucial on workshop days, when your classmates have spent their personal time reading your work.

Reading Responses (10%)

This incorporates both your responses to your peers’ work as well as our assigned readings.

Prompts, Observation, and Miscellaneous Writings (10%)

A bit of a catch-all here for the wonderful writing and gathering you’ll be doing throughout the semester.

Portfolio (20%)

Your portfolio is a tangible takeaway from this course and is, accordingly, very important.

Extra Credit (up to 5%)

Attending virtual readings and writing a short response, attending office hours (a second time) with real questions about writing in general or about revising your stories and poems, submitting your work to magazines.

Policies
**Plagiarism**

Don’t do it. The work you generate for this class will not be graded on how talented you are, but rather how you engage and promote dialogue with texts, including your own. The pressure’s off, so please don’t steal someone else’s work. The university’s plagiarism policy is quite clear, and the consequences are severe. If you’re struggling with any assignments, come talk to me during office hours.

**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](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

**Attendance**

Two unexcused absences will be allowed. After two unexcused absences, your grade will drop by a half letter for each subsequent absence. Don’t be late. If you’re more than twenty minutes late, you’ll be considered absent. Any planned absences (religious holidays or celebration) must be communicated to me via email weeks in advance.

Also, to avoid a situation that arises with absences, I am allowing you one “personal health” day; meaning, if you were not able to do the work for the class, and would otherwise not show up, I’d rather you come to class, and say to me (or email me beforehand) that you’ll be using your personal day for this session). If you are having multiple days like this, come see me during office hours so we can chat and make a plan.
Schedule

Week 1: An Auspicious Start

Mon, Jan 25

Nonfiction: “On Keeping a Notebook” by Joan Didion

Fiction: “Symbols and Signs” by Vladimir Nabokov

Poetry: “The Writing” by Margaret E. Sangster, “Thoughts While Packing a Trunk” by Christopher Morley, “Marginalia” by Billy Collins

Wed, Jan 27

Nonfiction: “Dance Lessons for Writers” by Zadie Smith

Fiction: “The Great Silence” by Ted Chiang


Week 2

Mon, Feb 1

Nonfiction: “What About ‘The Breakfast Club’?” by Molly Ringwald

Fiction: “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin


Wed, Feb 3

Nonfiction: “Buying Myself Back” by Emily Ratajowski

Fiction: “The Cube” by Noor Qasim


Group 1 submission
Week 3

Mon, Feb 8

Nonfiction: “A Witness to Survival” by Hannah Sassoon

Fiction: “Train” by Alice Munro

Poetry: “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” by Gil Scott Heron, “Vines” by Kaveh Akbar, “Today Is a Photograph” by Hafizah Geter

Wed, Feb 10

Group 1 Workshop

Group 2 Submission

Week 4

Mon, Feb 15

NO CLASS

Wed, Feb 17

Group 2 Workshop

Group 3 Submission

Week 5

Mon, Feb 22

Nonfiction: “Love Craft and Me” by Kieran Setiya

Fiction: “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula K LeGuin

Poetry: “Meanwhile”, “Letters to My Mother”, and “The Incomplete World” by Irene Gruss

Wed, Feb 24

Group 3 Workshop
Group 1 Submission

Week 6
Mon, Mar 1

Nonfiction: “Seven Theses on the Open-Closed Theaters” by Feisal G. Mohamed

Fiction: “In the Penal Colony” by Franz Kafka

Poetry: “blessing the boats” by Lucille Clifton, “Malcom X’s House Elmhurst [sic], New York” by Mariana Goycoechea

Wed, Mar 3

Group 1 Workshop

Group 2 Submission

Week 7
Mon, Mar 8

Nonfiction: “Under the Weather” by Ash Sanders

Fiction: “The Veldt” by Ray Bradbury

Poetry: “Self Portrait in Suspension” and “The Year of the Horse” by Kathleen Graber

Wed, Mar 10

Group 2 Workshop

Group 3 Submission

Week 8
Mon, Mar 15

Nonfiction: “What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of them” by Gertrude Stein
Fiction: “Destinations of Self Delusion” from *The Lost Traveler’s Tour Guide* by Alexander Weinstein

Poetry: “About Staircases” by Dana Levin, “Delivery by Mouth” by Lara Egger, “Naked Barbie Tableau” by Anna Journey

Wed, Mar 17

Group 3 Workshop

Group 1 Submission

**Week 9**

Mon, Mar 22

Nonfiction: “The Marginal World” by Rachel Carson

Fiction: “Bridge” by Daniel J. O’Malley

Poetry: “Five Landscapes” by Diana Khoi Nguyen

Wed, Mar 24

Group 1 Workshop

Group 2 Submission

**Week 10**

Mon, Mar 29

Nonfiction: “Notes on ‘Camp’” by Susan Sontag

Fiction: “Pat + Sam” by Lisa Ko


Wed, Mar 31

Group 2 Workshop
Group 3 Submission

Week 11
Mon, April 5

Nonfiction: “A Drugstore in Winter” by Cynthia Ozick

Fiction: “On This Side” by Yuko Sakata

Poetry: “At the Ohio School for the Deaf” and “Ohio Cento” by Maggie Smith, “from cento for the night i said, ‘i love you’” by nicole sealey

Wed, April 7

Group 3 Workshop

Group 1 Submission

Week 12
Mon, April 12

Nonfiction: “Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood” by Richard Rodriguez

Fiction: “Ravalushan” from Bomb by Mohammed Naseehu Ali


Wed, April 14

Group 1 Workshop

Group 2 Submission

Week 13
Mon, April 19

Poems and prose from Running in the Family by Michael Ondaatje
Wed, April 21

Group 2 Workshop

Group 3 Submission

**Week 14**

Mon, April 26

Excerpts from *Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston

Wed, April 28

Group 3 Workshop

**Week 15**

Mon, May 3

“Maine Hours and Days” by Vincent Katz

“Nacres: A Notebook” by Hélène Cixous

“Something in the Belly” by Deena Metzger

Wed, May 5

Final Portfolio Conferences

**Week 16: A Bittersweet Farewell**

Mon, May 10 – LAST DAY OF CLASSES

Reading and celebration

SUBMIT FINAL PORTFOLIO