

Fiction Craft Seminar Summer 2021

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Office hours: by appointment

I. Course Description

This class will explore the intersection of three concepts: how to tell the stories we must, as abundantly and generously as we can, with as much truth as they deserve; it will explore that intersection by looking at the work of others. In this course, students will critically read a range of contemporary fiction, learn to ask better questions about character motivations and plot development, and explore effective ways to critique fiction. While most of the class time will be devoted to writing or discussing assigned readings, we'll also talk frankly about the more practical aspects of writing — setting up a routine, navigating the publishing process, dealing with distractions. For each class, students will be asked to produce short assignments of reflective or creative prose, to get thinking about how style functions in one's own creative work, and to give opportunities to practice the techniques we'll discuss in class.

II. Requirements

- Students are expected to have read the stories that are in workshop each week, as well as the assigned reading. You will hand in a short reflection each class, as well as a longer essay at the end of the semester. In addition, you will be asked to give a thirty-minute presentation (i.e. lead the discussion) on the assigned reading once during the semester.

III. Grading

Attendance and Discussion: 35%

Every class will begin with a free-writing prompt. Students must attend all classes and arrive punctually. Absences are only accepted with a medical note or dean's excuse. Students must arrive in class having read the assigned material and ready to provide feedback. Your responses should be articulate, thoughtful and constructive.

Active participation by all students is vital to the course objectives. The format of the class is such that much of the learning will occur in dialogue among the students. Students are invited to submit questions or comments to me (anonymously if they'd like, by dropping it off in my mailbox) that they may not feel comfortable openly sharing in class. Please note that these questions/comments will be shared in class to further the growth and learning of all students.

We will, on occasion, discuss issues that are controversial or emotionally charged. Some of the sources we discuss may include profanity and other mature content. In engaging in these activities or in reactions to materials and discussions, you may experience various levels of discomfort. Such reactions are normal and—to a certain extent—necessary for learning about diversity issues. That

being said, the collective goal for the class is to create a safe space that is conducive to growth and learning. I would like to ask that, even in disagreement, we all make an effort to treat each other with respect, dignity, and support.

Written Responses: 15%

Work should be submitted on time and must be proofread. Spelling and grammatical errors will distract your readers, and will diminish the quality of the feedback you receive. There is a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism. Any instances of plagiarism will result in failure and academic discipline. Every class, you will be expected to bring in a two paragraph response to each story. The first paragraph is to be a general critique, the second paragraph focusing on a specific craft element.

Presentations: 25%

Each day someone new will be assigned to lead the discussion about the week's assigned reading. You should prepare several talking points, as well as questions to facilitate the conversation and engage your classmates. Due to the class size, there will be a mix of individually- and dyad-led discussions.

Final Paper: 25%

On the last day of class, students will hand in a final paper, examining – on a craft level – two or more of the published works discussed in class. This will differ from a standard lit class final paper in that the students will address a nuts-and-bolts storytelling technique ("How Lorrie Moore and Jhumpa Lahiri differ in their approach to building character," for example.) This paper will be from 5 to 10 pages long

CLASS SCHEDULE

Date	Topic & Readings
Class 1 June 1	Introduction to course requirements; review of syllabus; writing prompt; sign up for presentation dates
Class 2 June 3	Free-writing prompt (nostalgia in cities) Class reading: “Found Objects” by Jennifer Egan: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/12/10/found-objects Student-led discussion
Class 3 June 8	Free-writing prompt (a NYC place) Class reading: excerpt from <i>Sweetbitter</i> by Stephanie Danler https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/252465/sweetbitter-by-stephanie-danler/9781101911860/excerpt Student-led discussion
Class 4 June 10	Free-writing prompt (POV) Class reading: “How to Be an Other Woman” by Lorrie Moore http://pioneer.netserv.chula.ac.th/~tpuckpan/moore-howtobeotherwoman.pdf Student-led discussion
Class 5 June 15	Free-writing prompt (protagonist in evolution) Class reading: “Sexy” by Jhumpa Lahiri https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/12/28/sexy Student-led discussion
Class 6 June 17	Free-writing prompt (writing the past/memory) Class reading: “Why Were They Throwing Bricks” by Jenny Zhang https://nplusonemag.com/issue-28/fiction-drama/why-were-they-throwing-bricks/ Student-led discussion
Class 7 June 22	Free-writing prompt (crucial dialogue) Class reading: “Miss Adele Amidst the Corsets” by Zadie Smith

	https://ciervoblanco.club/miss-adele-amidst-the-corsets-by-zadie-smith/ Student-led discussion
Class 8 June 24	Free-writing prompt (realistic characters) Class reading: “The Bereavers at the Crying Competition” by Randa Jarrar: https://catapult.co/stories/the-bereavers-at-the-crying-competition Student-led discussion
Class 9 June 29	Free-writing prompt (younger protagonist) Class reading: “Any Further West” by Kali Fajardo-Anstine http://bostonreview.net/fiction/kali-fajardo-anstine-any-further-west Student-led discussion