

**Writers in New York**  
Fiction Craft Seminar  
Tuesday & Thursday  
Time: 2 – 4:30 p.m.  
Location TBD

Professor: Maria Venegas  
Office Hours: By Appointment

**Overview**

Immigrants, musicians, street preachers, artists and mobsters all grace the pages of works by authors who have long been inspired by New York City. Through their narratives we will travel to the dimly lit corners of Brooklyn during The Great Depression and walk along the cobblestone streets of Greenwich Village where jazz and cigarette smoke emanate from dark doorways. We will hear the fog horns of ships anchoring at New York Harbor with souls aboard seeking a new life, and we'll encounter unforgettable characters such as Lucia Santa—the real-life inspiration for the most iconic mobster ever created. In this summer intensive we will analyze mostly New York centric works of fiction with the goal of identifying the crafting techniques each author used in bringing their prose to life.

Writing prompts inspired by the reading assignments will be given at the end of each class. These in-class writing exercises are aimed to generate new material and to allow students ample time to experiment with a variety of crafting techniques. These include narrative movement, presentation of backstory, building tension, commitment to point of view, use of imagery, and dialogue. The final two sessions will be devoted to discussing how these techniques can be employed in constructing the short story and the novel.

Authors to be discussed include Zadie Smith, Colm Toibin, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Saïd Sayrafiezadeh, Elizabeth Strout, James Baldwin, Junot Diaz, and others.

**Assignments and Expectations**

Since we will be “reading like writers” all assigned material will be approached with an eye for craft. Students are expected to come to class prepared to point out at least three crafting techniques that each author has employed to make their narrative more compelling. For example: How is sensory detail used to bring the prose to life? How does the author keep the narrative moving forward, while filling in the backstory? How is dialogue used to flesh out a character? How is it used to speed up, or slow down, the pacing? What is the author doing to create tension/build suspense? In what point of view is the story written, and why? Is it in past or present tense,

and why? These are all questions you should be asking yourselves while reading and annotating your hard copy. Written craft responses must be emailed prior to each class.

Each student will also keep a draft journal where they will put to practice the specific craft techniques discussed each day. Writing prompts inspired by the reading will be given at the end of class to help initiate the drafting process. Journals will be collected at the end of the term.

Additionally, each student will select one draft from their journal to polish and turn in at the end of the term as their final craft paper.

There will be a ten-minute break during each class. Please refrain from leaving the classroom during class discussions. Cell phone/computer usage during class is prohibited.

### **Attendance & Grading**

Attendance is not only mandatory but crucial as participation in class discussion will count as 50% of your overall grade. It is imperative you come to class on time and be prepared to discuss all reading assignments. Students are allowed one emergency/excused absence. Each absence beyond that drops your grade a full letter. Chronic tardiness will also significantly affect your grade. If you are late for class (or from break) three or more times this will count as one absence.

The other 50% of your grade will be broken down as follows:

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Craft Responses:   | 30% |
| Drafting Journal:  | 10% |
| Final Craft Paper: | 10% |

Your creative work will be graded on how well you use the tools discussed in class and by the degree of effort you've put into your writing process.

### **Required Texts**

All reading material is in the course packet.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE JUNE 2023

### MAY

Tuesday 30      Student introductions  
Review syllabus  
Discuss “reading like writers” handout  
Discuss *That Crafty Feeling* by Zadie Smith  
In class reading/writing assignment  
Discuss drafting/composting process and journals

### JUNE

Thursday 1      Craft focus: Second Person POV, Imagery, Tone, Structure  
Discuss *Try an Outline* by Elissa Schappell

Tuesday 6      Craft focus: Third Person POV, Backstory, Dialogue  
Discuss *A Temporary Matter* by Jhumpa Lahiri

Thursday 8      Craft focus: Third Person Cont’d, Backstory Cont’d, Pace  
Discuss *Faultlines* by Amy Bloom  
Discuss *Fortunate Pilgrim* by Mario Puzo

Tuesday 13      Craft focus: First Person POV, Backstory, Dialogue, Imagery  
Discuss *Sonny’s Blues* by James Baldwin

Thursday 15      Craft focus: First Person Cont’d, Building suspense/tension  
Discuss *Among the Missing* by Dan Chaon

Tuesday 20      Craft focus: The short story  
Discuss *Audition* by Saïd Sayrafiezadeh  
Discuss *Security* by Elizabeth Strout  
\*JOURNALS DUE

Thursday 22      Craft focus: The Novel  
Discuss *Brooklyn* by Colm Toibin  
Discuss *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

\*DISCUSS REVISION PROCESS AND PUBLISHING  
\*FINAL CRAFT PAPER DUE