

English 105X: Creative Writing for Non-Majors

Fall 2019

Section: 32822R

Instructor: Dexter L. Booth

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Location: Social Sciences Building B51

Meeting Time: Tuesdays 2:00-4:20pm

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-2p.m. and by appointment

DESCRIPTION

What is the difference between Poetry and Fiction? What about between Fiction and Non-fiction? More and more often, authors in all genres are taking ideas and practices from outside of their field, and in some cases, outside of the genre of writing entirely. As we move deeper into a more digitally connected world, intertextuality (the relationship between seemingly disparate genres of art) is becoming a key component in how we communicate, and it is shaping the future of literature. Poems no longer need to rhyme, nor do they require the “traditional” structure of line breaks. Books of essays now include lines of poetry, as well as photography. Yet, there are still delineations.

In this class, we will not be discussing the canonical texts you likely are familiar with--you will certainly encounter those in other classes. Here, we will be reading works that challenge, skirt, or outright reject the expected structure of Poetry, Non-Fiction, and Fiction. The writers we encounter in this course represent often disenfranchised voices in society, voices whose stories do not fit the models usually depicted in libraries. These are stories and poems that take on subjects not historically given the spotlight they deserve, voices that address life events that are becoming more common, but are absent in the confines of the literary canon; voices that reckon with the numerous experiences that make up life in a 21st Century America.

Each week we will read assigned texts and discuss the impact they have on you as a reader and, just as importantly, you as a *person*. We will discuss in-depth the nuances in genre and how each author we read uses the genre to its full benefit to express their ideas. Through these conversations, you will gather tools with which to approach your own original pieces of short writing for the class. More than just writing, you will be expected to revise with the help of your peers in workshop, using tactics we will discuss at length. By the end of the semester, you will have a portfolio of edited work to present as your final project.

*NOTE: Aside from the assigned full-length texts, all other reading assignments will be provided by me via photocopy or PDF.

Required Books—we will be reading from these texts throughout the class as prompts and models, so please bring hard copies, so you can pencil notes on the work

1. *Beastgirl & Other Origin Myths* by Elizabeth Acevedo (YesYes Books)
2. *When My Brother Was An Aztec* by Natalie Diaz (Copper Canyon Press)
3. *Friday Black* by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah (Mariner Books)
4. *Heavy: An American Memoir* by Kiese Laymon (Scribner)

EXPECTATIONS:

Since we meet only once a week (for a total of thirteen class sessions), it is expected that you will attend all sessions. You should arrive to class having done all assigned text reading, as well as having read and commented on the work of your peers. I expect that you will each arrive with something to contribute to the day's conversation and your grade will be heavily dependent upon this.

If you are absent you can neither contribute to the discussion of the day's text, nor participate in the week's workshop. Your learning in this course will depend in large part upon your peers' generous and considerate participation, just as their learning depends upon yours. During discussions and workshops you are expected to intellectually engaged and "present." For this to work, I am asking that you do not use **phones or laptops** during class time. Please take all notes by hand. Every session will begin with free-writing based on a prompt from either a text we've read or an idea we've discussed, or a spontaneous prompt. You will keep these free-writings in your journal, to be turned in with a portfolio of writings. Please date all entries in your journal.

RESPONSES AND CREATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

In this class you will have three creative written assignments (one in each genre), in-class prompts related to the generation of new writing, and typed responses to your classmates' works. All assignments, including response notes and creative work, must be typed and printed out before class, in 12 point Times New Roman with one-inch margins. Each assignment must have numbered pages, your name, a staple (if necessary), and a title (even if it's a tentative title). Please do not exceed 3-5 pages.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

As the final assignment for this class, you will turn in a portfolio of your creative writing from this semester. The portfolio should include include your journal, the collected feedback from your peers, as well as both the original pieces you turn in for workshop and their final iteration after editing. This is predominantly graded on the amount of revision you have done based on the feedback given by myself and your peers during workshop.

GRADING

Your grade in the course is based on a holistic assessment of your revisions and your participation in the class. The approximate breakdown of grades is such:

final portfolio - 30%

class participation, preparation, - 50%

workshop responses - 20%

WORKSHOP GUIDELINES

The poet Ross Gay recently stated in an interview, “If critique does not emerge from love, then I’m probably not interested in it. Meaning the critique has a kind of vision for transformation that emerges because we love one another. Let’s just figure out how to celebrate and make.” Please take up Gay’s idea of approaching the workshop with kindness rather than consider it an invitation for locating error. Let’s celebrate and make, and celebrate the made.

Readers must write a 250-500 word response to each workshop piece that discusses both good points and potential areas for improvement. You should not simply write that a piece is “good” or “bad”—you’ll find that to be extremely unhelpful both to you and the person experiencing workshop. In your responses, attempt to explain *why* you like something, or *how* a particular line or scene makes it difficult to follow as a reader. The thoughtful articulation of your reading experience will help your own critical thinking, but it will also assist your peers in considering the impact of their writing on an audience as they revise. All of your well-considered feedback is valuable. Remember: our goal is to have the author leave workshop armed with new ideas and the motivation to continue working and improving their writing.

Keep in mind that everything brought to the table is a work-in-progress. Before you react to a new piece of writing in class, take a moment to gather your thoughts. Remember that praise helps guide the author’s revision decisions, too. Celebrate the made. find something you like about every piece. also find something you think is worth changing. You may or may not yet have the vocabulary to talk about writing, but that is okay. It is something you will learn with time and practice.

I have little interest in policing you as students, people, or artists. That said, there are a few workshop guidelines to which I hope you will seriously consider adhering in order to cultivate trust and respect with your peers:

1. Writing with gratuitous violence and hateful language is dangerous territory and generally unwelcome in our workshop. That said, even the more dangerous topics or modes of expression can be done intelligently and with purpose. If you have such a piece and are uncertain, please do contact me about it before turning it in for workshop, as we want to be respectful to everyone the course.
2. Please do not write about other members in the class (veiled or explicit). Doing so without the other person’s consent is wholly inappropriate.

3. Please avoid bringing pieces to workshop that feel polished or “finished”—note that on the calendar I state you are handing out “drafts.” You are all here as students and this class is set up to help you explore your writing. A “finished” piece typically doesn’t benefit from workshop.
4. Please do not share the work of your peers in any format without their consent (this includes digital and physical copying, and distributing of any kind).

COMMUNICATIONS:

If you have a question about any of the assignments or have an issue that will affect your ability to complete any assignment, please contact me ASAP. I do not provide extensions save for extreme circumstances. The easiest way to reach me is after class or via email. If you do send an email, note that I will respond within 24 hours, so please do not wait until the day before class to send me your questions. Also, please refrain from sending me any rough draft work unless I request it.

UNIVERSITY INFORMATION:

Academic Conduct

- Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems

- Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call. Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline — 1-800-273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
- Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call. Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>
- Sexual Assault Resource Center For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>
- Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>
- Bias Assessment Response and Support Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>
- Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic.

<https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

- Diversity at USC – <https://diversity.usc.edu/> Tabs for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students.
- The Office of Disability Services and Programs — <http://dsp.usc.edu> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations.
- The Writing Center — 213-740-3691 Offers one-on-one support for academic writing. Appointments for individual consultations can be made online. <https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/> Students whose primary language is not English may also check with the American Language Institute <http://ali.usc.edu>,
- If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which

WORKSHOP AND READING CALENDAR

Week One, August 27th:

- Introductions
- Workshopping expectations
- **Watch/Discuss:** “Why I Write?” by Karl Ove Knausgaard ([HTTP://LITHUB.COM/KARL-OVE-VIDEO/](http://lithub.com/karl-ove-video/))
- **EXERCISE:** Why Write? “Who am I and what is my relationship to the world?” What are the tools? The techniques? How? Setting the stage. Dreams, memories, reflections: you will need to buy a three sectioned notebook; or have three slim ones 8 by 5”
- Read/Discuss: “The Creative Process” by James Baldwin

Homework:

- Group 1 Prepares for first workshop. Handouts next week. Please have your submission emailed to me on Monday so that I can make copies for the class.
- Read: *Beastgirl & Other Origin Myths* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- Exercise: First job poems

Week Two, September 3rd: Poetry

- Discuss: *Beastgirl & Other Origin Myths* by Elizabeth Acevedo

- Discuss: Workshop
- Begin: In-class workshopping
- GROUP 1 HANDS OUT DRAFTS

Homework:

- Group One Comments
- Start Reading: *When my Brother was an Aztec* by Natalie Diaz

Week Three, September 10th: Poetry

- Start Discussion: *When my Brother was an Aztec* by Natalie Diaz
- WORKSHOP GROUP 1
- GROUP 2 HANDS OUT DRAFTS
- Begin: In-class workshopping

Homework:

- Group Two Comments
- Finish Reading: *When my Brother was an Aztec* by Natalie Diaz

Week Four, September 17th: Poetry

- Finish Discussion: *When my Brother was an Aztec* by Natalie Diaz
- GROUP 2 WORKSHOP

Homework:

- Flash Fiction Reading

Week Five, September 24th: Fiction

- Discuss: Flash Fiction (Thread Count)
- Read/Discuss: I Am Going To Cook a Quiche in My Easy-Bake Oven and You Are Going to Like It by Roxane Gay
- Discuss Fiction as a genre
- Start Flash Fiction in-class

Homework:

- Finish Flash Fiction writing
- Begin Reading: *Friday Black* by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah (Mariner Books)

Week Six, October 1st: Fiction

- Discuss: *Friday Black*
- GROUP 1 HANDS OUT DRAFTS
- Begin: In-class workshopping

Homework:

- Finish Flash Fiction Workshopping
- Finish Reading: *Friday Black*

Week Seven, October 8th: Fiction

- Finish Discussing: *Friday Black*
- GROUP 1 WORKSHOP
- Begin: In-class workshopping of Group 2
- GROUP 2 HANDS OUT DRAFTS

Homework:

- Finish Flash Fiction Workshopping for Group 2
- Read: “The Husband Stitch” by Carmen Maria Machado

Week Eight, October 15th: FICTION

- Discuss: “The Husband Stitch”
- GROUP 2 WORKSHOP
- Discuss: Genre differences

Homework:

- Start Reading: “Letter to my Son” by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Week Nine, October 22nd: Non-fiction

- Discuss: “Letter to my Son”
- Discuss: Non-fiction as genre
- Exercise: Start your own letter assignment (3 pgs max)

Homework:

- Finish Letter assignment
- Start Reading: *Heavy* (first 80 pgs.)

Week Ten, October 29th: NON-FICTION

- Begin Discussing: *Heavy*
- GROUP 1 HANDS OUT DRAFTS
- In-class workshoping for Group 1

Homework:

- Finish Workshoping Group 1
- Continue Reading: *Heavy* (pgs. 80-110)

Week Eleven, November 5th: NON-FICTION

- Continue Discussing: *Heavy* (pgs. 80-110)
- WORKSHOP GROUP 1
- GROUP 2 HANDS OUT DRAFTS
- In-class workshoping of Group 2

Homework:

- Finish Workshoping Group 2
- Continue Reading: *Heavy* (pgs. 110-140)

Week Twelve, November 12th: NON-FICTION

- Continue discussing: *Heavy* (pgs. 110-140)
- Portfolio Expectations
- GROUP 2 WORKSHOP

Homework:

- Continue reading: *Heavy* (pgs. 140-170)
- Revision/Portfolio work

Week Thirteen, November 19th: NON-FICTION

- Continue Discussing: *Heavy* (pgs. 140-170)
- Portfolio Expectations
- Reflection Letter on each unit

Homework:

- Finish *Heavy*
- Revision/Portfolio work

Week Fourteen, November 26th:

- **NO CLASS!! ENJOY YOUR THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY!**

Homework:

- o Finish *Heavy*
- o Revision/Portfolio work

Week Fifteen, December 3rd:

- Finish Discussion on *Heavy*
- Turn in portfolio
- Revision Reading