

ENGL 105, Creative Writing for Non-Majors

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Genre on the Edge

COURSE DESCRIPTION

English 105 is characterized in the course catalogue as a workshop in poetry, short fiction and non-fiction. Instead of hitting each of these genres literally, we are going to spend part of the semester considering what genre means for imaginative writing and part of the semester considering what it is to write across or outside of genre. The course is sequenced so we begin with genres closest to the oral tradition and advance 'technologically' to contemporary forms. We'll mostly be using a particular workshop method called 'the Asking,' but we'll also pursue more traditional workshop methods and values such as 'craft' and 'voice' while considering the universality of those values. Once we establish what we like about the rules and what we like about breaking them, we can write for the 'love of the written word.'

COURSE TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

Readings: in addition to the readings uploaded to blackboard, please purchase copies of the following:
Dürrenmatt, Friedrich. *The Pledge*. Trans Joel Agee. University of Chicago Press, 2006. 978-0226174372
Rankine, Claudia. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. Graywolf Press, 2004. 978-1555974077
Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. Graywolf Press, 2016. 978-1555977351

Printing:

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Portfolio (50%): This is ten prompted works, two works of your own devising and one revision.

Approximately 40-50 pages.

Critique (20%): This is written feedback on your peer's work that you will provide to me in good faith as well.

Participation (30%): This is active daily participation

EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

Attendance

Your presence in every session is important to me, to your classmates, and to your own writing process. Be here. You'll miss a lot when you're not. The attendance policy is not intended to be punitive; the class is a community, one that can't function without the trust and generosity of the participants.

That said, I recognize that life happens. You may miss **one class meeting** over the course of the semester with *no penalty*. You won't need to provide a justification for your absence. For the first two absences, there is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences.

More than two weeks of absences will result in a zeroing out your participation grade for the course. Beyond that number of absences, with or without legitimate excuse, your absences may become grounds for failure. We only have 15 meetings so each is vital to the progression of the class and each student's opportunity to present their work for consideration.

Lateness is distracting and disrespectful to our classroom community. Two (2) lates are disruptive but I will overlook them. After that point, two (2) lates will equal one (1) absence. Students who arrive later than 20 minutes after the start of class will be marked absent, but will be allowed to remain for the session to avoid missing relevant information and exchanges.

Assignments

Students are required to complete all the assignments for the course and upload them to blackboard. For the first several weeks we'll discuss work on a volunteer basis (if there aren't enough volunteers, I'll change this policy to require work be discussed at regular intervals, but I've never had this problem and I find the volunteer format helpful as everyone gets to know one another). Volunteers will upload their work to a public folder while other assignments will only be viewed by me. After 5 weeks we will have assigned workshop participants, and all students will be expected to provide feedback to those writers on the day they are workshopped. If you provide comments digitally, please submit your comments to me on blackboard. If you make them on a hard copy, please furnish me with a copy (you can use your phone, try Adobe Scan).

Readings and exercises follow a kind of teleology of genre as a technology, beginning with forms associated with oral traditions and preceding to the present day. I'll explain my thinking, and I hope you'll challenge me on it.

Conferences and Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours for 1 hour before class. I'd like to meet with all of you individually during my office hour in the first several weeks of class for 15 minutes or so, to get a sense of what you'd like from the course. I'll have you sign up, if there is a conflict we can work to find another time.

Email

I will use email and other electronic communication a lot throughout the course. Please check your email and read any emails from me carefully – they will contain important course information.

I will answer your email(s) within 48 hours (Monday-Thursday) or 60 hours (Friday-Sunday). If you do not receive an email response from me within those parameters, it means I did not receive your email.

NOTE: I don't provide additional critique of creative work over email. I'm happy to look at and discuss anything within the confines of office hours.

Laptops/Cell Phones

I favor a paperless classroom as much as possible. I think handling submissions and feedback can be much cleaner through the medium of blackboard and Microsoft word track changes. That said, if the temptation to multitask becomes too strong for our group and begins to harm the class conversation I reserve the right to revert to a paper-based class where printing of all class materials

will fall on the reader (as opposed to the writer) and failure to print will negatively impact critique/participation grades.

Week	Due	In Class
1/15		Introductions and collective definitions, stories from the hat.
1/22	Fairytale reading (Link, "The Hortlark"; Carter, "The Werewolf"; Russell, "Orange World"; optional Thompson, "Motif Index of Folk Literature"; Bernheimer "Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale") and tale assignment	Tale as genre, volunteer workshops
1/29	Poetry in form reading (Berrigan, "Sonnets"; Hayes, "American Sonnets to my Once and Future Assassin." Brown, "Duplex"; Mullen, "Sleeping with the Dictionary"; Donnelly, "The Cloud Corporation"; optional Donnelly "Patriot Act Assignment") and form assignment	Poetry in form and other formally constrained writing, volunteer workshop
2/5	Horrorish reading (Adjei-Brenyah, "The Era"; Nguyen, "Black Eyed Woman"; Butler "Bloodchild," Machado "The Husband Stitch," optional Fisher "It's easier to imagine...") and plot: elephant assignment	Plot and the control of information, volunteer workshop
2/12	Essays of place and practice reading (Didion, "Los Angeles Notebook"; Jamison "Empathy Exams"; D'Agata "What Happens There"; Bliss, "Time and Distance Overcome" optional Didon "Goodbye to All that"; Biss "Goodbye to all that"; Biss "In the Syntax") and setting/object assignment	Subject writing, setting as character, object lessons. volunteer workshop
2/19	Detective fiction reading (Dürrenmatt, <i>The Pledge</i>) and possibility assignment	Realism and Genre. Workshop 6
2/26	Literary fiction reading (O'Connor "A Good Man is Hard to Find"; Carver "What We Talk about"; Diaz, "Wildwood"; Gordon, "letter to Flannery O'Connor"; Gordon Lish edits of "What We Talk about..." optional: Lucarelli	Craft, is there such a thing? Workshop 6

	"The Consecution of Gordon Lish") and craft/tricks assignment	
3/4	Autofiction reading (Cusk, "Freedom"; Lerner "Park Slope Food Coop "; Knausgaard "At the Writing Academy"; Morrison "Black Matters" optional Jackson "Re-Vision") and isolation assignment	Life studies. Workshop 6
3/11	Lyric essay (Rankine, <i>Don't Let Me Be Lonely</i>) and pop culture assignment	pop culture as critique. Workshop 6
3/18	Spring Break	No Class
3/25	Lyric essay as autoficiton or the end of genre (Nelson, <i>The Argonauts</i>) and pop culture philosophy life writing assignment. Also 6 students first unprompted work.	pop culture as critique. Workshop 6
4/1	6 students first unprompted work	Workshop first 6
4/8	6 students second unprompted work	Workshop second 6
4/15	6 students second unprompted work	Workshop first 6
4/22		Workshop second 6
4/29		Portfolios Due