



“A poem is a private story, no matter how apparently public.”—Jorie Graham

“Poetry exists to find words for what resists easy naming.”—Mark Doty

## **English 299: Introduction to the Genre of Poetry (32670 GE/B: Humanities) Spring 2024**

**Lecture:** Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:50pm THH 102

Dr. Chris Freeman (cefreema@usc.edu) Office hours: T/Th 8:15-9:15, Tuesdays 2-3:15, and by appointment, THH 410

### **Discussion Sections:**

**Mondays:** Alexandria Hall 10-10:50 (32761; DMC 255) and 11-11:50 (32672; THH 117)

**Wednesdays:** Erin Lynch 10-10:50 (32673; MRF 206) and 11-11:50 (32674; DMC 108)

**Fridays:** Thomas Renjilian 10-10:50 (32675; THH 115) and 11-11:50 (32676; THH 113)

**Note:** *you are required to attend BOTH lecture and section each week in person. This is not a “drop in” class. Excessive absences and failure to participate will severely impact your grade.*

## ABOUT THE COURSE

Poetry requires that we slow down. It wants us to pay attention to the words on the page, the white space, the images—and to the world that the poems come from. What can we learn **from** poetry as we learn **about** it? That will be the motivating question of this course. Over two hundred years ago, William Wordsworth warned his readers: “The world is too much with us; late and soon,/Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:/Little we see in Nature that is ours”—these lines are from the early years of industrialization and urbanization, two centuries before the Internet, and now we lament the time we spend distracted, the shorthand of text messaging and tweeting. In this course, we have the privilege and pleasure of savoring poetry, contemplating it, discovering it anew.

We will do all we can to make this class a conversation about poetry—how it works, how its forms have changed, how to read it, how to write it and how to write about it. In lecture, we will cover important poets, movements, forms, theories, and larger questions about poetry’s relevance, its connections to and comments about the world. Our job is to get you more interested in what poetry is and what it does; your job, in the words of the contemporary American poet Mary Oliver, “is to pay attention, . . . our endless and proper work.” We will ask for your engagement; you need to read the material carefully, to think about it, and to come to lecture and section prepared to discuss it, to read it out loud, and to try to interpret it. **We don’t “read into” poetry; we read out from it.** Poetry is beautiful; it can be disturbing; it is almost always instructive. This course will help you understand it more fully and with more depth and, maybe, passion.

In your discussion sections, your instructors will elaborate on lecture material, and they will also pursue some of their own passions about poetry. Each of them has chosen one collection of poetry which you’ll be working on for the first two-thirds of the term; then we will all work together on poetry by Amorak Huey and Kate Daniels to wrap up the course. You will also have ample opportunity to write poems in section and as part of your essays.

*TRIGGER WARNING: As the poet Lucille Clifton once said in an interview, “You cannot play for safety and make art.” As you know, poetry often confronts complex, deeply personal issues. Please be aware that you should SKIP any poem and step away from any discussion as needed this semester, in lecture or section, no questions asked. We can’t always give the TW in advance as it’s impossible to know what might trigger someone, but we will make every effort to give a general sense of what’s coming on these issues.*

**We expect each of you to attend and to engage with the lectures and the discussion sections fully. Attendance is mandatory; our expectation is for attendance. If you are symptomatic of COVID, do not come; let us know. If we decide to use Zoom, you should ONLY attend via Zoom if you are ill. If possible and if it’s available, watch the recordings of class before the next meeting and send your TA a paragraph or so about what you missed.**

**EXPECTATIONS AND WORKLOAD:** You are expected to attend lectures and discussion sections; to participate by reading, commenting, and asking questions; and

you will of course do a reasonable amount of reading and writing. Likely assignments/responsibilities: write short to medium length essays about poetry (analysis); do some creative writing and reflection; complete a take-home final exam assignment; attend at least one poetry reading event, and write a short response paper (this will take the place of one section of your final exam); and do your part to participate in discussion, both in section and in lecture

Regarding CHAT GPT/AI, etc: from Dean Richard Fliegel: *The use of AI is on everyone's mind, and there are several ongoing discussions about what to allow or prohibit. Two important ideas should be made explicit on the syllabus or the first day. Using an AI generator when it is not explicitly permitted should count as plagiarism; and students are responsible for whatever they turn in, including AI's false citations. From us: do not turn in work using these tools, period. They violate the intellectual integrity of our classroom and its goals/intentions.*

**If applicable: ZOOM Recordings Intellectual Property and Privacy Ownership: SCampus Section 11.12(B), as applicable**

***Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).***

**GE CATEGORY B/HUMANITIES LEARNING GOALS:** You will leave this course having confronted complex literary texts which deal with many important and controversial issues of our times; you will have participated in discussions about those texts; you will have written about them, honing your skills as a critical thinker and writer. Your professor and teaching assistant will work in conjunction to ensure that the wide range of readings and topics introduce you to the art and craft of poetry and to the ways in which poetic narratives help shape our world and our understanding of it.

**HOT SEAT:** There are six discussion sections which are part of this course. Beginning week three, individual sections will be in the hot seat. Each group will be in the Hot Seat five or six times. Lecture will begin each day with a focus on conversation with the students in the hot seat; once we have established that they've done their work and made substantial contributions, the conversation will open up to everyone else. If you miss a hot seat day, you should coordinate with your TA to sit in on another day. Your participation in hot seat will make up a significant part of your class participation grade; your active attendance in lecture and section will also factor heavily into that part of your final grade. Hot Seat groups will sit in front and center in our lecture hall.

**LITERARY EVENT:** If you attend an approved literary event (virtual or in person) and write a 500-750 word response to it (within a week or two of attending/watching), you'll

receive full credit for one part of the final exam. We will announce events from time to time in lecture and section. In addition to USC sponsored events, you can also check ALOUD LA, the downtown public library event series, and local bookstores (Skylight Books in Los Feliz; Book Soup in West Hollywood; Vroman's in Pasadena; The Last Bookstore in Downtown LA). In April, near the end of the term, USC will host the *LA Times* Festival of Books; it will be filled with poets! Ask your TA for event approval if you have any doubt about whether it will count. Virtual events can be worldwide; let's share information on options.

## **ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING**

Essay one: "getting to know you" essay (500-750 words; due week three or four): 10%

Essay two (1000-1200 words; due week seven or eight): 25%

Essay three (1200-1500 words; due week twelve or thirteen): 25%

Final exam (take home, due before noon on Tuesday, May 7, to your TA): 25%

Class Participation/Attendance (lecture & section; this means attending lecture and section, completing work in a timely, quality fashion, and participating in discussion beyond just hot seat days and in section): 15%

NOTE: we are generous graders. We will not change grades unless there has been a calculation error. If you are eager to get an A, begin that journey in week one, not week ten or fifteen.

A: 930-1000; A-: 929-895; B+: 894-870; B: 869-830; B-: 829-795; C+: 794-770, etc.

## **TEXTS**

**For lecture, everyone should acquire these texts (ebook or paper copies):**

Susan Holbrook, *How to Read (and Write About) Poetry* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; Broadview, 2022)

Lucille Clifton, *How to Carry Water* (BOA Editions, 2021)

Natasha Trethewey, *Monument* (Ecco, 2019)

Kate Daniels, *The Niobe Poems*. Pittsburgh, 1988. (available as unlimited download via USC Libraries: <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy1.usc.edu/stable/j.ctt5hjpzf> (search the title at usc.edu/libraries)

Kate Daniels, *In the Months of My Son's Recovery* (LSU, 2019; Kindle edition also available and check USC Library website for free download, too)

Amorak Huey, *Dad Jokes from the End of the Patriarchy* (Sundress, 2021)

**And you need to buy ONE book for your section:**

Monday with Alexandria Hall: Catherine Barnett, *Human Hours*

Wednesday with Erin Lynch: Ada Limon, *Carrying*

Friday with Thomas Renjilian: Mark Doty, *Fire to Fire*

**LECTURE SCHEDULE (subject to revision as pacing of the course necessitates)**

**Part One: Introducing Poetry, featuring Lucille Clifton & Natasha Trethewey**

Week One (January 9 & 11): Understanding and working with poetry

Tuesday: Introduction to the course and meet the TAs; some poems from Lucille Clifton, Amorak Huey, and Kate Daniels; Maya Angelou, “On the Pulse of the Morning”

Thursday: Amanda Gorman, interview and inaugural poem; clarification of Hot Seat and other details

Week Two (January 16 & 18)

Tuesday: Holbrook, Introduction and a few sonnets from Shakespeare (pp. 1-16); discuss “Getting to Know You” essay in section

Thursday: Clifton, 1-30

Week Three (January 23 & 25)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT begins; Holbrook, 17-24—poetry and the Harlem Renaissance; Oliver, PDF from POETRY HANDBOOK, 19-28 (sound); Robert Frost, “Stopping by Woods”

Thursday: HOT SEAT: Frost, “Home Burial”; Trethewey, 1-34

Week Four (January 30 & February 1)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; Holbrook, 25-32: Edna St. Vincent Millay and others; Clifton, 34-84

Thursday: HOT SEAT; Theodore Roethke, “My Papa’s Waltz”; Trethewey, 35-72  
**getting to know you assignment due to your TA this week or next**

Week Five (February 6 & 8)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; Holbrook, color plates and 33-43; William Carlos Williams, “The Great Figure”; W.H. Auden, “Musee des Beaux Arts”; Jane Flanders, “The Cloud Painter”; Natasha Trethewey, “History Lesson” (Ekphrastic poetry/poetry and art)

Thursday: HOT SEAT; Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art” and “Sestina”; Marilyn Hacker, “The Art of Losing”; discuss prompts for next essay in section this week (due week seven or eight); **in section, skim the last part of Holbrook, “How to Write about Poetry” and discuss briefly**

Week Six (February 13 & 15)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; Holbrook, 45-56; Clifton, 85-106

Thursday: HOT SEAT; Trethewey, 73-106

Week Seven (February 20 & 22)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; Holbrook, 57-68; Gertude Stein, "If I Had Told Him"; Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud"; Clifton, 108-56

Thursday: TA Craft Talk; **Essay due (1000-1200 words) this week or next; 2/25: last W day without consequences**

Week Eight (February 27 & 29)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT: Holbrook, 69-76; James Merrill, "Christmas Tree"; John Hollander, "Soda Pop"; Clifton, 157-99

Thursday: TA Craft Talk

Week Nine (March 5 & 7)

Tuesday: TA Craft Talk

Thursday: HOT SEAT; Holbrook, 77-93; Trethewey, 107-24; **before break, discuss prompts for next essay in section**

SPRING BREAK

Week Ten (March 19 & 21)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; Holbrook, 95-102; more on Gwendolyn Brooks; Clifton, 200-38

Thursday: HOT SEAT; finish Holbrook, 103-16 and wrap up Clifton; Trethewey, 125-85

**PART TWO: Featured Poets: Kate Daniels & Amorak Huey**

Week Eleven (March 26 & 28)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; wrap up Trethewey; Kate Daniels, *Niobe Poems* ix-9

Thursday: HOT SEAT; *Niobe Poems* 13-30

Week Twelve (April 2 & 4)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; *Niobe Poems* 31-41

Thursday: HOT SEAT; finish *Niobe Poems* 45-60; **essay due this week or next in section; last W day**

Week Thirteen (April 9 & 11)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; *In the Months of My Son's Recovery* i. Her and *Recovery* ii. The Addict's Mother, 31-49

Thursday: HOT SEAT; *Recovery* ii. continued, 50-61 and *Recovery* iii. Him

Week Fourteen (April 16 & 18)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; *Recovery* iv. Us 77-93; finish Kate Daniels; **discuss final exam assignment in section this week**; begin Huey, *Dad Jokes* (1-25)

Thursday: HOT SEAT; Huey, *Dad Jokes*, 26-60

*LA Times* Festival of Books, April 20 & 21st; please try to attend at least one poetry session and submit your response to your TA before April 25

Week Fifteen (April 23 & 25)

Tuesday: HOT SEAT; Huey, 61-84

Thursday: HOT SEAT; finish Huey and wrap up the course; on line class evaluations

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**FINAL EXAM due to your TA by noon on Tuesday, May 7**

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**Definition of Excellence in Teaching: USC Department of English**

All writing is creative, and all civic engagement requires a sophisticated understanding of discourse and interpretation. The USC Department of English is committed to the power of the story, the word, and the image. We analyze and organize complex ideas, evaluate qualitative information, anticipate how real audiences respond to language, and study behaviors of complex characters leading uncertain lives with competing values. We develop critical abilities for a successful life, but our stories tell us why life is worth living.

Excellence in teaching is an active engagement with these commitments, perspectives, and values. A student with a major in **English** should graduate with an appreciation for (1) the relations between representation and the human soul, and (2) the relations between words and ideas. Teachers will encourage this appreciation through their knowledge and conveyance of the subject, the appropriateness of instructional materials, and the quality of their students' responses. We expect our students to:

- o understand the major representations in English discourse from earliest beginnings to the current moment; all literatures exist in conversation with earlier literatures;
- o organize and interpret evidence;
- o feel the experiences of others, both by engaging in literatures and by their own efforts to create new literatures;
- o understand how periods, cultural intentions, and literary genres differ;
- o grasp the skills and theories of interpretation, and the history of our own discipline;
- o see how interpretive interests shift with time and place;
- o attend to linguistic details of semantics, phrasing, and structure;
- o assume there are reasonable alternative understandings of a text;
- o adjudicate differences through reasoned arguments that honestly engage counter-arguments.

Our students will have lives in very different arenas, but all calling for skills in discourse, empathy, civil argument, and civic engagement. We cannot and should not say what those careers will be; we train students for jobs that have not yet been invented.

English Department students with an interdisciplinary major in **Narrative Studies** should expect instruction that inculcates an appreciation for all of the above, and coordinates with definitions of teaching excellence in USC's corresponding departments.

The Department of English adheres to the modalities of instruction published in the "USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching."

Approved September 18, 2018  
Undergraduate Studies Committee  
Department of English

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call



The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis

services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis. Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.