

INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING, 285

Tuesday & Thursday, Simpkins 308.
285 001
Professor Erika Wurth, office # 109.

The texts required for this course are: my packet; purchasable at the campus bookstore. We will be looking at selections from: Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, *Writing Down the Bones*, *The Practice of Poetry & Creating Fiction* and a few essays from other sources. I will also hand out a short glossary of helpful poetic/fiction terms, poetry by Hughes, Williams, Plath, Cummings, Ginsberg, Olds, Lee, Alexie and Cisneros, fiction (short stories) by O'Connor, Hemingway, Salinger, Carver, Oats, Baldwin, Diaz, Lahiri and Alexie.

This class will be run as a hybrid online/physical course. See day by day schedule below.

My office is located in Simpkins 109 and my office hours are Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10-12 & 2-5 online or in person. When we're holding physical class I will be extending my physical office hours and will be available Tuesday/Wednesday/Thursday 10-12 & 2-5 and sometimes those same hours on Monday & Friday. Please feel free to come in (or email) with any questions or if you just want to chat – also try to reserve this time for any questions pertaining to your grade or questions specific to your particular projects. I'm also available via Skype or email me if you'd like to make a phone appointment, during the time when the course is online.

The reading list for the course appears long but **don't panic**- we'll be doing only one poem or short story for each author. Also, I believe in writing from example (if you don't read, you can't write) & I want to familiarize you with some of the history of contemporary writing through a few essays on writing & through a short selection of poetry & fiction from (mainly American) modern & contemporary writers.

For **poetry**, I want you to write two pieces for workshop & **fiction** you only have to write one piece to be workshopped. Workshop is a process of peer review, where your peers discuss what works in the piece, and what could use some tweaking.

During the two week blocks we're having physical class, I'll have you read from the packet, and we'll talk about the three basics of poetry, then fiction. During the online portion of the course is when you'll be workshoping, via email.

Ask yourself, when we're looking at either the work of others in the class or of the selected writers, not only what do these poems/stories mean but what are they doing & how are they doing it? What's appealing/not appealing & how are they achieving the effects that make them (hopefully) pleasurable to read? How do they sound? What are the images? What is their form? What is the content & why?

Specifically, as to when we workshop with each other remember, you want to be honest, but it's important that you're not a jerk. Be specific – when you make a comment, show evidence for that comment in the text (don't use generalizations). Additionally, think about what the poem or story wants – rather than what you think it ought to be & aid in that vision. As to when your work is being workshopped, be open. Don't explain or apologize. It is important that we develop a community in this class that fosters the ability to be comfortable enough to risk with one another in our work and in our feedback. Keep in mind that feedback is not to be taken as a personal attack. It's to be taken as a way to improve your work. Remember, you're the ultimate judge of your own work but you can't be your own audience so listen carefully to what others have to say.

As to the writing of the poems or stories, we will be doing writing exercises before workshop in order to help you in the process of writing something for workshop. For poetry, we will focus on these three basics: **sound, image & metaphor**. For fiction: **characterization, plot and point of view**. For the pieces you'll have workshopped, I want you to utilize these practices and your work needs to be edited for basic grammar issues before you turn it in. If you're really stuck, email me – we all have writers block at some time or another.

As to the two poems that I want you to turn in, I have only two rules: the first is that they do not rhyme (trust me on this one, NO ONE does it anymore). The second is that they must not be on the subject of love (we're trying to avoid cliché, right?). As to the fiction piece the rules are that they must be 4-8 pages long and cannot be genre fiction (in other words as to fiction, anything that fits easily into a genre – detective/mystery, romance, sci-fiction – nor should you try to be LITERARY i.e. Hemingway, for example. Just write about life – made up or real). The stories should be in Times New Roman, 12 font. The poems should be single-spaced, the fiction double-spaced.

When it is your turn to workshop, your stories need to be emailed to me the class date BEFORE it is to be workshopped. Then, I will email it to the rest of the class by the next day, and I will expect everyone to email me and the person who is workshopping their story their feedback by the next class date – the date you are technically workshopping. You must email AT LEAST a page of typed comments speaking to the three basics (image, sound metaphor for poetry. Plot, characterization, point of view for fiction), and clearly demonstrating that you have read the entire set of poems or story.

During the two week blocks that we hold physical class, I will meet with everyone one on one, to discuss the work that you're going to do, or have done, and during the beginning of finals week, your final portfolio. Physical class dates will be reserved for the reading material from the packet. I will also quiz when we have physical class, and are reading from the packet.

We will be discussing some of the history and biography behind the texts and we will also explore issues of gender, race and sexuality. If this is uncomfortable for you, you may consider taking the course at another time.

Your grades are mainly dependent upon your work but attendance (in terms of showing up to physical classes and turning things in on time online), quizzes and especially participation affect your grade. Participation is why we're here and it's what makes a class effective. I don't expect you to be Shakespeare, just occasionally speak in class, and turn your feedback in on time, and fulfill the requirements above.

As for plagiarism, don't do it. I can't emphasize this enough. It isn't worth it as I don't expect that your work will be in the Hemingway category – at least at this point. It is so easy to spot plagiarism and the consequences are dire. At the least I have to fail you and in the worst case scenario you can be expelled. You must do your own work. Any act of plagiarism will result in at least an F grade in this course. If you have any doubts about whether or not you are using your own or others' writing ethically and legally, ask me. Work cannot be handed in for credit that is or was written for another class either here or elsewhere, even if it is much revised. Work you did in high school is best left there. The whole idea is to give you new occasions to write, for you to discover fresh ways to imaginatively deal with the world around you. Please submit work written only during the current term. Western Illinois University's official Academic Integrity Policy is found at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>. Please read it, in its entirety. If you're having a problem, please come and see me.

** If you have a learning difference that requires accommodation or if, for any reason, you feel you need extra help in learning the material or demonstrating that you understand the material, please contact me.*

*** Recommended books:** *The Midnight Disease, On Writing, Letters to a Young Poet, Writing Down the Bones, Bird by Bird and Creating Fiction and The Art of Writing; Notes on Craft for Young Writers*

Schedule:

Poetry and poetry essays (from packet).

*Tuesday Aug 23, I'll go over the basics of the syllabus. Please read the rest and email me with any questions. We'll go around the room and do a "get-to-know-you" exercise. Look up the definition of cliché, and email me one cliché that you think applies to poetry, and one that applies to fiction. I'll pass a sign up sheet for workshop around.

*Thursday Aug 25, come having read Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet," the craft essays "First Thoughts," "Writing as Practice," "Thoughts on the Gifts of Art" and "Everything I Know About Writing Poetry," and the first three poems in the packet (by Hughes, Cummings & Plath). We'll discuss the essays and I'll give a brief lecture on sound, image and metaphor (the three basics of poetry). I'll quiz on the reading.

*Tuesday Aug 30th, come having read the second three poems in the packet (by Cummings, Ginsberg & Olds).

*Thursday Sept 1st, come having read the last three poems in the packet (by Cisneros, Lee & Alexie). Folks who are workshopping Sept 6th, send me your two poems.

BEGIN POETRY WORKSHOP (read "helpful workshop tips" – I'll email this to all).

*Tuesday Sept 6th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Sept 8th, email me their poems.

*Thursday Sept 8th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Sept 13th, send me your poems.

*Tuesday Sept 13th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping the 15th, send me your poems.

*Thursday Sept 15th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping the 20th, send me your poems.

*Tuesday Sept 20th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks workshopping the 22nd, send me your poems.

*Thursday Sept 22nd, all, send feedback for folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Next week, PHYSICAL CLASS – come having read "Going to Meet the Elephant."

*Tuesday Sept 27th, PHYSICAL CLASS – come having read “Going to Meet the Elephant. I will lecture on the three basics of fiction (plot, characterization and point of view). Make one on one appt with me.

*Thursday Sept 29th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Come having read the first three stories (by O’Connor, Hemmingway, Salinger) in packet.

*Tuesday Oct 4th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Come having read the stories in the packet by Baldwin, Carver and Oates.

*Thursday Oct 6th, PHYSICAL CLASS. Come having read the stories in the packet by Lahiri, Diaz and Alexie. Folks who are workshopping Oct 11th, email me their story.

*BEGIN FICTION WORKSHOP (re-read “helpful workshop tips”).

*Tuesday Oct 11th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 13th, email me your story.

*Thursday Oct 13th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 18th, email me your story.

*Tuesday Oct 18th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping Oct 20th, email me your story.

*Thursday Oct 20th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping the 25th, email me your story.

*Tuesday Oct 25th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Folks who are workshopping the 27th, send me your story.

*Thursday Oct 27th, all, send feedback to folks who workshopped and cc me via email. Next week, PHYSICAL CLASS.

*Tuesday Nov 1st –Thursday Nov 10th. PHYSICAL CLASS. One on one peer review. Week one, bring the poems you workshopped. I will pair you with three people that you can discuss your work with, one on one, throughout the class. Week two, bring the story that you workshopped. I will pair you with three people that you can discuss your work with, one on one, through the class. Make one on one appt with me.

*Tuesday Nov 15th & Thursday Nov 17th. Work on final portfolio. Look at poems and email me with concerns about final revisions.

*Tuesday Nov 22nd & Thursday Nov 24th, Thanksgiving Break.

*Tuesday Nov 29th & Dec 1st. Work on final portfolio. Look at story and email me with concerns about final revisions.

*Tuesday Dec 10th & Thursday Dec 12th, polish final portfolio.

*Tuesday Dec 17th, turn in final portfolio.