263: Introduction to Creative Writing
Spring 2013

Instructor: Dr. Liahna Armstrong
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Class meets: M-W 2:00-3:40 PM, L & L 243
Office hours: ML 3:45-4:45 PM; Wed 10:45-11:45 AM + by appointment

Texts:
All texts will be either handouts passed out in class or documents posted on Blackboard.

Recommended:
A good thesaurus

Course description:
This course is designed to provide beginning creative writing students with experience reading and writing in each of three genres: poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction. Discussions and exercises will focus on how to use tools of the writer’s craft—language, setting, characterization, imagery and sensory detail, tone, voice, etc. We will read and examine literary works by established writers to see how the creative implements can be employed, and then students will produce writings of their own using the skills learned. You will be regularly writing and revising during the quarter, and critiquing each others' work in a periodic workshop. Your final product for the course will be a finished, polished portfolio of your best work. You will also do some “group composition,” working with others to create original texts.

Learner Outcomes:
- Become familiar with the major tools of creative literary composition and be able to employ them in original works of your own in the genres of poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction.
- Be able to read critically and offer constructive suggestions about the work of your fellow classmates.
Augment your sensitivity to language and vocabulary, your creative skills, you’re your imaginative range and depth.

Build a portfolio of finished creative work that exhibits your growth as a writer over the course of the term.

Assignments and projects:

Reading:
- Students will read and carefully prepare designated reading assignments. Occasional quizzes may be given to test students’ familiarity with reading material.
- Each week, class time will be devoted to discussing readings, conducting group activities, some lecture, and periodic workshops in which student writing will be critiqued.

Writing:
- Format: All written work must be typed as a Word document and brought to class on the day due. You do NOT need plastic covers. For this course, I do not receive emailed assignments.
- Two graded mini-essays on aspects of the focus genres addressed.
- Periodic graded quizzes on material prepared from readings.
- Periodic graded writing exercises as assigned by the instructor.
- Periodic graded discussions on Blackboard “Discussion Board.”
- Students will be expected to keep an ongoing composition notebook that will include notes, ideas, jottings, and informally composed writings. The composition notebook will be periodically turned in for review by the instructor. Notebooks will not be graded.
- Original creative works (sketches, poems, creative non-fiction, vignettes, and short fiction): these works will not be graded individually. Rather, I will return them with comments. They may be selected for discussion in the workshop, so you will have the benefit of other readers’ insights as well as the instructor’s suggestions. Some of them will involve mandatory revision; in cases where revision is not required, you may choose to revise the work. Revisions, along with originals, will be part of the final portfolio.
- For each in-class workshop, you will be expected to bring multiple copies of your assignment.
- At the end of the quarter, each student will submit a formal portfolio of his or her best work (after revision) from the quarter. I will explain the format for the portfolio in class. The portfolio will be graded. Grades will be based on the overall quality, insight, and originality of the works; the ways in which they incorporate thoughtfully the literary elements we study; the effectiveness of the revisions undertaken; and the sophistication of language. In cases where the work in the portfolio is a revision, include the original version with the comments and suggestions stapled to the revised version.
- In lieu of a final exam, we will have a celebratory reading, where each student will read a work he or she has chosen to share.
- In cases of holidays, assignments may be adjusted.

Evaluation Criteria:
Attendance/participation/discussion 25%  
Mini-essays, Blackboard posts, and exercises 25%  
Notebooks 10%  
Portfolios 40%

Expectations:
- Regular attendance and keeping up with reading, writing assignments, and online components are required of everyone.
- It is expected that readings will be prepared meticulously and completed when due. Meticulous preparation means looking up all words you don’t know.
- Thoughtful involvement in class discussions is expected, especially as the comfort level with speaking in class grows for each student. We want to encourage an open atmosphere where issues can be explored provocatively, without making people feel pressured or silenced. Respecting opposing views and listening to others are crucial elements of good discussion.
- Students are expected to treat each others’ work with respect and encouragement. Yet, since the purpose of the course is to enhance your writing skills, it is crucial that you do not take constructive criticism personally, but rather find ways to benefit from it.
- Participation in final reading on Tuesday, June 10, 12-2

Weekly Schedule:

Weeks 1 and 2: 4/2, 4/7-4/9 Poetry  
Topics: How poetry functions: show, not tell; the speaker; language operating at white heat; not “beautiful”; rhythm and rhyme; forbidden words; denotation and connotation; imagery and sensory detail; sound and meaning (phonetic intensives, musical devices, alliteration and assonance, etc.)  
Read: Poetry HO’s  
Write: Poetic lines, Poem #1 and 2, Group poems  
Blackboard: Conversation about one assigned poem

Week 3: 4/14-4/16 Poetry  
Topics: Continue sound and meaning; metaphor and figurative language  
Read: Poetry HO’s  
Write: Poetic lines, Poem #3  
Blackboard: Conversation about one assigned poem

Week 4: 4/21-4/23 Poetry  
Topics: Finish poetic devices  
Read: Poetry HO’s  
Write: Poem #4, Mini-essay about assigned poem due

Week 5: 4/28-4/30 Creative Non-Fiction: Memoir  
Topics: Childhood and adolescent memories, evocation of place, emotional/psychological remembrance, symbolic detail, chronology and time, vignettes  
Read: Memoir HO’s  
Write: Memory lists, memoir opening and closing lines

Note: You must view the film This Boy’s Life on your own for Week 8
Week 6: 5/5-5/7 Creative Non-Fiction: Memoir

Topics: Finding a voice; from memory to story
Read: Memoir HO’s
Write: Short memoir
Blackboard: Conversation about published memoir to be assigned

Week 7: 5/12-5/14 Creative Non-Fiction: Memoir

Topics: Probing the past for meaning, epiphany and revelation; invention vs. memory; revealing vs. concealing; implication vs. assertion
Read: Memoir HO’s
Write: Memoir # 2

Week 8: 5/19-5/21 Creative Non-Fiction: Memoir; start Short Fiction

Read: Memoir HO’s
Write: Mini-essay on memoir/film This Boy’s Life
Read: Story HO; class exercise

Week 9: 5/26: No class, Memorial Day; 5/28 Short Fiction

Read: Story HO’s
Topics: plot, character, setting, dialogue, dramatic tension
Write: Character sketch
Blackboard: Conversation about published story to be designated

Week 10: 6/2-6/4: Short Fiction
Read: Story HO’s
Write: Short story #1