English 366: Creative Nonfiction Writing

Dr. Terry Martin

L&L 416B; 963-1534
Office Hours: Mondays 1:00-3:00
(and by appointment)

“You never know what you will learn until you start writing. Then you discover truths you didn’t know existed.”

Anita Brookner

“A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them.”

William Stafford

Prerequisite:
ENG 263 or permission of the instructor

Required Texts:
The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers on Creative Nonfiction (6th Edition)
Eds. Robert L. Root, Jr. and Michael Steinberg

A dictionary and a thesaurus

Course Description:
English 366 is one of the classes that meets the requirements of CWU’s English: Writing Specialization major; it also fulfills the ‘Writing Strand’ of the English Language and Literature major and minor programs. In this class, you will explore varieties of creative nonfiction as both scholars and writers—by reading and discussing works written by professional writers and by writing your own. You’ll approach texts with a writer’s eye, discuss them from a craft perspective, and practice some of the techniques you discover.

This class will help you understand the variety of ways creative nonfiction is written now, offer you examples of contemporary works, and encourage you to become familiar with what practitioners, scholars, and critics in the field have to say about the various subgenres and purposes of creative nonfiction. It will help you develop strategies for brainstorming, drafting, critiquing, and revising your own nonfiction work, and provide you with the critical expertise and technical language to help you better critique your and others’ work-in-progress.

The course will alternate between class discussion and workshop sessions. During class discussion, you will be expected to explore and exchange ideas about writing, selected readings, and issues raised in class. During workshop sessions, you will be expected to share drafts of your writing, and to critique other students’ drafts. You will draft, critique, revise, and edit until you have written something that’s as as good as you can get it in the time that we have.

Course Goals:
I have identified my specific course goals for you below. I realize that you will have others of your own to add to the list. I hope that you will let me know what they are; perhaps I can assist you in meeting them. English 366 will provide you with the opportunity to:
1.) Become familiar with a sampling of good creative nonfiction, some early and some recent, representing a variety of cultural perspectives.
2.) Read, analyze, and discuss creative nonfiction in order to define the techniques of composition and examine conventions of the genre.
3.) Evaluate specific works as examples of, modifications of, or challenges to those conventions.
4.) Explore these works through small and large group discussion in order to develop your understanding of the ways language makes us know, think, feel, and act.
5.) Write formal and informal responses to creative nonfiction that demonstrate engagement, reflective thought, effective inquiry, perception of patterns in language features, and responsible interpretation.
6.) Recognize and critique the strategies employed in critical writings.
7.) Compose creative nonfiction works in some of the subgenres under study, exhibiting an awareness of audience and knowledge of genre conventions.
8.) Write a memoir, or a familiar or personal essay (something that draws on memory or personal experience, grounded in narrative and description) in a traditional format.
9.) Write an essay in a contemporary format--segmented or discontinuous or disjunctive, designed as collage, montage, mosaic, episodes, vignettes, etc.
10.) Revise and edit your own work for clarity and coherence.
11.) Critique the work of others in constructive, effective ways.
12.) Establish your own writing goals for papers and evaluate the degree to which you have successfully met them.

What Will Be Expected of You:
1) Read the assigned essays that encompass the genre’s full spectrum: personal essays and memoirs, literary journalism, and academic/cultural criticism.
2) Keep a reading/writing journal, composed of in-class writing exercises, and your responses to: A.) assigned readings, B.) drafts of other students’ papers, and C.) your own composing processes on work-in-progress.
3) Participate in class discussions and activities related to what you read.
4) Participate in small group discussions where you formulate interpretive questions about creative nonfiction, and respond to them. From time to time, you will be responsible for leading the discussion on a particular piece.
5) Write creative nonfiction essays and participate in peer editing/response groups.
6) Submit all essays and assignments on time and according to instructions.
7) Compile and submit a portfolio of the writing you do in this class, including self-evaluation according to the criteria provided.
8) Show up for class and actively participate. Since this is a discussion and activity class, it's essential that you keep up with your reading and writing, attend class, contribute to discussions, and participate in activities.
9) Attend one live reading from the Lion Rock Visiting Writers Series and write a summary and response. (Tues. April 9th: Brian Doyle—essayist, fiction writer, poet 7:30 pm, SURC Theater). You will be asked to provide proof of attendance by attaching a ticket stub or program to your written response to this reading.

Grading
Reading/writing journal 15%
1st Paper 30%
2nd Paper 30%
Oral Presentations 15%
Participation/Professionalism 10%
100%

Attendance
Plan to be here for every class session. Remember-this is not a 'just get someone's notes' kind of class; what you miss can't be made up. Because we meet just one evening a week, missing one session = missing one whole week of class. If you miss one class, your final grade will drop one full letter grade. If you miss two or more sessions, for whatever reason, you will not receive credit for the class.
Late Work
All papers must be submitted in class on the date they are due. Papers turned in after this will be marked down one letter grade for each day late. Final papers and portfolios for the class will not be accepted late.

Classroom Conduct
I abide by University policies concerning appropriate classroom conduct, academic dishonesty, incompletes, etc. Please review these sections in your CWU catalogue if you are unfamiliar with them.

Electronic Devices
Since this is a discussion and activity-centered course, using cell phones or other electronic devices during class tends to be disruptive, and is therefore prohibited. Turn off your cell phone before entering the classroom. Computers (laptops, netbooks, etc.) are not permitted for in-class use except as arranged by Disability Support Services (see “Disability-Related Accommodations Statement”).

Incompletes
Incompletes are given only for catastrophic events or severe extended illness. They are not an acceptable solution for poor time management. While I understand that occasionally there are unforeseen events and circumstances beyond your control, I believe you can, and should, finish this class in the quarter you take it.

Diversity
In my classroom, diversity is welcomed and celebrated. I will not tolerate any forms of prejudice or discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status. We are here to learn in a climate of civility and mutual respect.

Disability-Related Accommodations
If you need disability-related educational accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. Give me a copy of your “Confirmation of Eligibility for Academic Adjustments” from the Disability Support Services Office and then we can discuss how the approved adjustments will be implemented in this class. For more information, contact Disability Support Services, Bouillon 205, 963-2171.

“...stories are renderings of life; they can not only keep us company, but admonish us, point us in new directions, or give us the courage to stay a given course. They can offer us kinsmen, kinswomen, comrades, advisers--offer us other eyes through which we might see, other ears with which we might make soundings.”

Robert Coles in The Call of Stories
English 366: Creative Nonfiction  
Dr. Terry Martin  
Course Calendar, Spring 2014

Week 1:  April 7

Activities  
Class roster  

3X5 card introductions  

Syllabus  

What is creative nonfiction?  
   Differences from other kinds of writing  
   Elements of the genre  
   Examples of creative nonfiction  

Writing Journal #1: Review of Composing Processes & Writing Background  

“In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” by Alice Walker  
   Read, Discuss, Handout  

Writing About People, Places, Events, & Things: Topic Exploration  

Assignments  
Readings on genre theory:  
   Preface & introduction (xv-xxxvii)  
   Part 1: Writing Creative Nonfiction Introduction (1-2)  
      “The Landscape of Creative Nonfiction” by Bartkevicius (243-49)  
      “Memory and Imagination” by Patricia Hampl (264-73)  

Readings: Memoirs and Essays (Read all of the following:)  
   “Home” (347-53) & “Unwrapping Surprises in the Personal Essay” (354-61)  
   by Abigail Moore Allerding  

   “Lambing Midwife” (376-81) & “Gestating Memory: Capturing Narrative Details…” (382-87)  
   by Valerie Due  

   “Zion” (402-09) & “On Writing 'Zion’” (410-15) by Maureen Stanton  

Reading Journal #1  
   Pick one pair of memoirs/essays to write on  
   Write a reader-response entry on how the writer crafted the pieces, what they teach you about writing, questions they raise, etc.  
   Bring it with you to our next class  

Week 2: April 14  

Activities  
Creative Nonfiction Presentation Assignment  
   Handout, go over  
   Examples  
   Questions  

Guidelines for Critique
Handout/go over
“The Value of a Personal Critic” article from Writer

3-Step Response Method
Lecture & notes
Barriers to Using Method Effectively
Writing Journal #2: Naming Feelings
Example of Using 3-Step Response Process (“My House”)

Reading Journal Entries
Double-Entry notebook format (article)

Craft Discussion of Assigned Readings:
Allerdig, Due, and Stanton essays
Discussion of Reading Journal #1: reader-response entries

Memoir: Prewriting, Strategies for Starting & Developing Drafts
Assignment
Examples

Writing Journal #3: Recovering Memories

Writing Journal #4: Clustering

Assignments

Readings: Memoirs and Essays
“Out There” (3-7) by Jo Ann Beard (Kirsten)
“I’m Just Getting to the Disturbing Part” (46-53) by Steven Church (Dan F.
“Welcome to Afghanistan” (73-78) by Matt Farwell (Sarah V.

Reading Journal #2:
Pick one to write on. Write a reader-response entry on how the writer crafted the piece, what it
teaches you about writing, questions it raises, etc.

Writing Journal #4: Clustering

Begin drafting first essay
Assignment: 600 words or so (single-spaced) by next week
Name, Date, Draft #1, #2, etc.
Group #1: Bring enough copies for whole class
Week 3: April 21

Activities

Review guidelines for critique

Peer critique: Group #1

Creative Nonfiction Presentations
   “Out There” (3-7) by Jo Ann Beard (Kirsten)
   “I'm Just Getting to the Disturbing Part” (46-53) by Steven Church (Dan)
   “Welcome to Afghanistan” (73-78) by Matt Farwell (Sarah V.)

Peer critique: Group #1

Sample student essay

Assignments

Writing Journal #5: Taking Stock:
   Where am I in terms of the piece I’m working on? Where might I go next? What ideas did I get today (from critique of my work or critique of others’ work) that I want to keep in mind as I continue working on this essay?

Continue working on Essay #1
   Group #1: Continue writing/revising
   Group #2: 600 words or so (single-spaced) by next week
   2-3 pages single spaced & labeled
   Bring enough copies for whole class

Readings on genre theory:
   “The Art of Memoir” (250-253) by Mary Clearman Blew
   “The Art of Self” (274-75) by Steven Harvey

Readings:
   “Silent Dancing” (54-60) by Judith Ortiz Coffer
   “Chin Music” (208-17) by Michael Steinberg
   “Fiction” (19-28) by Michelle Bliss

Reading Journal #3: Entry on one of these

Week 4: April 28

Activities

Peer Critique: Group #2

Lecture/Notes: The Transforming Possibilities of Creative Nonfiction

Creative Nonfiction Presentations
   “Silent Dancing” (55-61) by Judith Ortiz Coffer (Kat)
   “Chin Music” (223-32) by Michael Steinberg (Jess)
   “Fiction” (19-28) by Michelle Bliss (Stephani)

Assignments

Complete next drafts of paper #1
Bring 5 copies to next class

Readings on genre theory:
“Finding the Inner Story in Memoirs & Personal Essays” (333-36) by Michael Steinberg
“A Narrator Leaps Past Journalism” (261-63) by Vivian Gornick

Readings:
“Bathing” (237-39) by Kathryn Winograd
“On the Fringes of the Physical World” (64-72) by Meghan Daum
“Teacher Training” (388-93) by Mary Elizabeth Pope
“Composing ‘Teacher Training’” (394-401) by Mary Elizabeth Pope

Reading Journal #4: Entry on one of these

Week 5: May 5

Activities

Video:  Writer’s Solutions (Take notes during video)
  Expression:  Gish Jen
  Description:  Rosie McNulty
  Exposition:  Bruce Brooks
  Creative Writing:  Julia Alvarez

Writing Journal #6: Video Debrief
What you learned regarding your own writing that might help with this essay

Creative Nonfiction Presentations
“Bathing” (237-39) by Kathryn Winograd (Kayleigh)
“On the Fringes of the Physical World” (64-72) by Meghan Daum (Michael N.)
“Teacher Training” (388-93) by Mary Elizabeth Pope (Vanessa)

Peer Critique: small groups (4)

Assignments:

Revise Essay #1
Using handouts provided on over and underdeveloped drafts
Pick up my marked copies/suggestions by Thursday (outside office door)
Save prior work (earlier drafts, brainstorming, clustering, etc.) in class notebook
Two copies of revised essay due next class (one double-spaced, one single-spaced; both typed on one side of page only)

Readings:
“Portrait of My Body” (107-14) by Phillip Lopate
“Some Things About That Day” (118-19) by Debra Marquart
“How I Became a Bed-Maker” (232-36) by Kate Torgovnick

Reading Journal #5 on one of these

Attend Lion Rock Reading: Brandon Schrand, 5/6  7:30, Wildcat Shop
Writing Journal #6A: Summary & response to Lion Rock reading
Week 6: May 12

Activities

Discuss and turn in Writing Journal #6A: Lion Rock write-ups

Share completed essay #1 and turn in

Discuss/debrief first essay

Creative Nonfiction Presentations

“Portrait of My Body” (107-14) by Phillip Lopate (Seana)
“Some Things About That Day” (118-19) by Debra Marquart (Emily)
“How I Became a Bed-Maker” (232-36) by Kate Torgovnick (Sydney)

Segmented Essays: Genre Theory

“Collage, Montage, Mosaic, Vignette, Episode, Segment” (371-82) by Robert Root
Read & discuss

Examples of segmented essays

Mine
Ones by students

Exercise: Cut, Paste, & Glue

In-class exercise
Solo, then in pairs
Share & discuss

Assignments:

Writing Journal #7: Segmented Essays—Cut, Paste, & Glue
1. What’s lost, what’s gained, what’s learned
2. Brainstorm possible topics for segmented essays

Readings on genre theory:

“Prose Poems, Paragraphs, Brief Lyric Nonfiction” (330-32) by Peggy Shumaker
“Brenda Miller has a Cold, or: How the Lyric Essay Happen” (308-14) by Brenda Miller

Readings:

“The Answer That Increasingly Appeals” (11-18) by Robin Black
“Les Cruel Shoes” (31-34) by John Bresland
“Everything But Your Wits” (218-22) by Joni Tevis

Reading Journal #6 on one of these

Begin drafting segmented essay

Group #2: Due next class: 1-2 pages, single spaced
Enough copies for everyone
Activities

Week 7: May 19

Peer Critique: Segmented Essays—Group #2

Creative Nonfiction Presentations

“The Answer That Increasingly Appeals” (11-18) by Robin Black (Alicia)
“Les Cruel Shoes” (31-34) by John Bresland (Cassey)
“Everything But Your Wits” (218-22) by Joni Tevis (Mikey)

Assignments:

Complete drafts of segmented essays
Group #1: Due next class; 1-2 pages, single spaced
Enough copies for everyone

Readings on genre theory:
“Mending Wall” (292-95) by Judith Kitchen

Readings:
“The Search for Marvin Gardens” (128-36) by John McPhee
“An E-Book is Not a Book…” (202-03) by Tracy Seeley
“Red Sky at Morning” (91-94) by Patricia Hampl

Reading Journal #7 on one of these

Week 8: May 26
No class meeting (holiday)

Week 9: June 2

Activities

Creative Nonfiction Presentations

“The Search for Marvin Gardens” (128-36) by John McPhee (Franco)
“An E-Book is Not a Book…” (202-03) by Tracy Seeley (Daniel S.)
“Red Sky at Morning” (91-94) by Patricia Hampl (Crystal)

Portfolio Requirements

Peer Critique: Segmented Essays—Group #1

Writing Journal #8: Where Am I? Taking Stock
Based on peer feedback on segmented essay

Writing Journal #9: Self-Evaluation

Assignments:

Readings:
“Northeast Direct” (83-86) by Dagoberto Gilb
“A Little While” (61-63) by Edwidge Danticat

Revise segmented essays
Due next class; double-spaced
Writing Journal #8: Taking Stock - Where Am I?
Writing Journal #9: Self-Evaluation

Assemble, organize, and label portfolios, according to instructions (due next class)

Plan to read “Best Piece” aloud during final class meeting (bring extra copy of best piece to leave with me)

**Week 10: Finals Week**
TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 12-2

Creative Nonfiction Presentations:
“Northeast Direct” (83-86) by Dagoberto Gilb (Daniel R.)
“A Little While” (61-63) by Edwidge Danticat

Read aloud “Best Pieces”

Portfolios due

Course evaluations

Celebrate!

*Group #1: Stephani, Seana, Emily, Sydney, Alicia, Crystal, Kat, Jess, Mikey, Cassey

*Group #2: Kirsten, Dan F., Sarah, Michael N., Vanessa, Kayleigh, Daniel R., Daniel S., Franco