

Introduction to Creative Writing (INCW) CTY Course Syllabus

There are five basic components to this course:

1. Reading and discussing the work of published authors. The basic law of writing is that the best writers read—a lot.
2. Generating our own raw material, sometimes based on those published authors, sometimes not. Expect to begin each morning with 5-10 minutes of freewriting and/or a brief warm-up exercise based on a poem or story-excerpt not in either of our anthologies. Expect to write several times each day in a variety of ways and for varying lengths of time.
3. Drafting: selecting and shaping chunks of raw material into rough poems and stories (usually in the computer lab).
4. Workshop: reading, writing about, and discussing the work of each other. This might be the most difficult part of the class for many of you; it also might be the most enlightening. Generally, the way it goes is you all submit the draft of a story or poem, and we make copies for everyone. You read each piece, marking it up, and write a brief synopsis, plus a paragraph or two of suggestions/questions about revising the piece. We then go one-by-one, discussing each story or poem while the writer is silent—this demonstrates to the writer what is working and what isn't; it gives the writer a taste of how a carefully-reading audience responds to the piece in its current form.
5. Revising/editing our work for clarity, correctness, fluidity, and style (usually in a computer lab).

What I mean by "**pieces**": regularly you'll submit a typed poem or story for workshop (you must submit at least 1 of each). These will likely evolve from in-class experiments, but you are free to revise that raw material in pretty much whatever way you like. Also, as long as you submit at least 1 story and 1 poem for workshop, it doesn't matter to me who is writing in which genre when—just turn in whatever you feel most compelled by on whichever dates are most appropriate for your pace and interests. There is a tentative schedule for lab times, due dates, and workshop sessions on the reverse of this page.

Also note: every day starts with a poem or short story excerpt which is not in our anthologies; I'll read it aloud, sometimes twice, and then we'll run through a short, usually 10 minute warm-up exercise based on that piece.

Texts

Modern American Poetry (Great Books Foundation)

The Story and Its Writer, Compact 7th edition (edited by Ann Charters, Bedford/St. Martins)

Monday Day 1

Morning: Course overview; honor code and computer policy; icebreaker and introductions; relationship between words and ideas (Billy Collins, “On Turning Ten” exercise); pre-assessment; begin reading Illuminations packet (writers on writing)

Afternoon: You on Day One of Creative Writing piece (sharing of responses); what’s-the-last-line exercise on James Wright’s “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota”; imagery (close reading and group discussion of Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Fish”

Evening: Illuminations presentations and discussions

Tuesday Day 2

Morning: Poem-a-day; pick a word exercise; more imagery writing; ghazal exercise (poems by Fogle, Rich, Hafiz—read, discuss, imitate); setting (brainstorm, write); haiku (examples by Issa, Basho, Kerouac, Reuben Jackson, Tracie Morris: write as many as you can in 15 minutes using places from the setting brainstorm exercise); sonnet (examples by Brooks and Hayden).

Afternoon: “sifting time” (flip through notebooks, looking for chunks of material with potential, star it, underline it); villanelle (Roethke); groups brainstorm a list of words with different uses; sestina (Bishop); time to try one of the previous three fixed traditional forms).

Evening: Simulated workshop on Cisneros and Kincaid; read and comment on instructor and T.A. poems/stories

Wednesday Day 3

Morning: Poem-a-day; protagonists’ motivations and reliability (Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” and Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”)

Afternoon: Groups list prompts/premises for stories (characters, settings, internal and external conflicts; workshop instructor and T.A.; self-portrait in 3rd person exercise (poems by Wright, Mozee, Creeley)

Evening: Lab time to draft pieces for workshop.

Thursday Day 4

Morning: Poem-a-day; larger meaning and little everyday details (Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”, whole-class brainstorm on board—what do men of family/neighborhood do together? Talk about? Women? Kids when together?); how dialogues can reveal/lead to serious conflicts and themes (whole-group brainstorm various conversation topics and what they might lead to or reveal about the participants)

Afternoon: Myth & History; Occasional Poems: H.D., Dove, Wright, Brooks, Crane, O'Hara, Hogan (individuals list important occasions in life thus far: holidays, milestones, then a group-storm on mythological/historical figures it'd be cool to write about; write the beginning of either a poem from the POV of one figure, or a story involving 2 figures (for example, George W. Bush & Dracula); solo-trios work on either 30 line poem w/ 1 figure in each line; or 10 haiku stanzas, with 1 figure per stanza

Evening: Prep for student workshop—"How to Read a Poem" (MAP); try to suppress merely personal preferences and understand each piece on its own terms, its own intentions; distribute copies of student work; read silently, write comments.

Friday Day 5

Morning: Poem-a-day; workshop.

Afternoon: Workshop; 10 minute poem exercise.

Sunday Evening

Finish workshop. Sara Beth's writing activity developing character.

Monday Day 6

Morning: Poem-a-day: Eady's "Cab Driver Who Ripped Me off" (1st brainstorm jobs, roundroom sharing, I read it, then we write from POV of someone with one of those jobs, griping about the world in some way); big issue today is dialogue and setting (Eliot's "Preludes," Wolff's "Say Yes" [is the ending too ambiguous?], Hemingway's iceberg principle, then "Hills Like White Elephants" (first silently, then together aloud; how does setting reflect character? Is the dialogue's indirection an appropriate choice? Why/not?); solo-duo; write a dialogue, occasionally referring to setting.

Afternoon: Some dialogues aloud; roundroom sharing: either read or tell us about something good from your notebook; work on anything in notebook so far.

Evening: Computer lab #2: draft and type up new work; revise old work.

Tuesday Day 7

Morning: Poem-a-day ("Monologue for an Onion": aloud, then on screen. 5 minutes of group debate: what is the most profound/symbolic of items you might find in the produce aisle at the grocery store? Results on board, discuss); read silently R. Crumb's version of Kafka's "A Hunger Artist", then together and aloud the real one (how does this bizarre situation have a larger meaning? What is that larger meaning? Write first, then talk); groups make a list of crazy jobs/talents, share on board, write for 10 minutes incorporating one; Nature/Animals (quick individual brainstorm of memories & images involving nature/animals; team up and take 5

minutes to prep for brief presentations on poems by Bishop, Stafford, Creeley, O'Hara, Wright, Snyder, Plath, and Hirshfield—they simply read it aloud, and comment on 2-3 specific lines/issues); write again, individually, on either animals/nature or symbolic fruit/veggie

Afternoon: Distribute copies; prep for workshop.

Evening: Workshop

Wednesday Day 8

Morning: Poem-a-day (Espada's "My Father as a Guitar" and "Why I Went to College"); workshop.

Afternoon: Any remaining workshop; open writing time (options: write something new and up to you, titles exercise, revise an old workshop piece, develop/combine/connect any notebook fragments)

Evening: Read O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"; Carver's "Cathedral"; review Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Wolff's "Say Yes": POV/voice discussion. Advantages of 1st vs. 3rd person in terms of knowledge, language, familiarity/empathy/terror. O'Connor: 1st person someone; or 2nd person @ grandmother [it's in 3rd person limited?]: what is lost when you make this shift? Poe: it's in 1st person, try as 3rd person omniscient; what's lost? Wolff: it's in 3rd person limited, try in 1st Carver: although it's in 1st person, does the narrator seem to be holding back? could this story become "more emotional", might we "feel closer to" the narrator if it were in 3rd person omniscient/limited?

Thursday Day 9

Morning: Poem-a-day: Yusef's "Black String of Days"; Nicholosa Mohr's "Tell the Truth": done right thing? 3rd person limited; conflict to argue about; a different kind of ambiguity than "Say Yes": we know what happens, but there's flexibility as to what's right/wrong; groups rewrite chunk in 1st person; select character and little paragraph or two; read aloud, discuss pros & cons: POV affects level of language that can be used, knowledge/authority, and emotional direction/spin; Poems on Family—list every relative can think of w/ little space around; fill in details for 5 min; then read Masters (55, Lucinda Matlock), WCW (109, 114, widow's springtime lament, last words English grandmother), Crane (165, grandmother's love letters), Hayden (winter Sunday, 205, start off), Levertov (batterers, 237-8), Justice (men at forty, 249), Creeley (self portrait, 282), Li Young-Lee's "The Gifts"—groups: pick one, prep for 5, then aloud, discuss verb tense, POV, commentary on 2 + images/lines/issues/moments

Afternoon: Discuss Strand's "For Jessica, My Daughter"; write for at least 15 minutes in the notebooks, preferably family-inspired. Writing Lab 2-3pm.

Evening: Sara Beth on Marquez story, specific detail.

Friday Day 10

Morning: Discussion of conflicts w/in schools; poem-a-day: Jeff McDaniel's "1976," write; brainstorm school subjects/classes (yell to me) & chores (storm w/ each other), on board; read giovanni's housecleaning (on screen); then "The Music of Astronomy" (473) & "Mathematics"(463) & "I Stand Here Ironing"; write for 10-15 minutes, trying to turn a school subject/chore into a piece.

Afternoon: Computer lab 2-3pm: turn in workshop piece #3.

Sunday Evening

Distribute copies; prep for workshop. Open writing time.

Monday Day 11

Morning: Poem: Tracy K. Smith "Zappa at my Family Reunion," workshop.

Afternoon: Workshop just a few pieces. 20 little poetry projects/ Open/free writing time. Ekphrasis: photo/painting prompts/pass out postcards.

Evening: Computer lab, 7-8pm. Turn in last piece for workshop. Back in classroom, continue workshop.

Tuesday Day 12

Morning: Parent-Instructor conference sign-ups; poem-a-day: Lux's "Cellar Stairs" (a feared place); finish up previous round of workshop; read and discuss Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (surprise endings)

Afternoon: Brainstorm grocery & dept. stores (on board). Read Updike's "A & P" & Hall's "Woolworth's" (325): write a poem/story-start set in a department/chain store and try to let it stretch out into something more serious/surprising; writing lab 2-3pm/piece #4 due.

Evening: Introduce abecedarian; distribute copies; prep for workshop. Try abecedarian/read independently.

Wednesday Day 13

Morning: Workshop

Afternoon: Collect all workshop submissions, just see what's there. Graze/troll for overlooked pieces. Consider one if you had to read aloud tonight. Practice readings; slow down, speak up. Read Kafka's "The Vulture": is it a story? Why/not? Team-imitation.

Evening: Student reading in Bacon Hall.

Thursday Day 14

Morning: 830-10AM workshop; Memory and specificity of place: Hugo's "2433 Agnes, First House, Last in Missoula" & Bishop's "Waiting Room"; 10-1130: lab, finish portfolio pieces (2-3, pref. both genres, plus a short reflection discussing the evolution of each piece, your self-evaluation of each piece)

Afternoon: Post-assessment; Students complete SPE's; Packet of Paz & Cummings (breaking up the page/concrete poems) poems: read, discuss why/not a poem, team imitation, get on board.

No "evening" time; instead, studyhall 330-530: Start Big Fish.

Friday Day 15

Morning only (9-11am): Wrap-up. Finish Big Fish. Return portfolios & distribute certificates.