

# ENL 205: Introduction to Creative Writing

## University of Detroit Mercy

### Department of English

#### Winter 2007

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Office Hours: MWF 12:00-1:30, and by appointment

#### Required Books

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1963.  
Christian Hawkey, *The Book of Funnels*. Amherst: Verse Press, 2004.  
Stephen Koch, *The Modern Library Writer's Workshop: A Guide to the Craft of Fiction*. New York: 2003.  
Kelly Link. *Stranger Things Happen*. Brooklyn, NY: Small Beer Press, 2001.  
Thomas Lux. *The Street of Clocks*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.  
Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*. New York: Harcourt, 1994.  
Course Packet (available in the Liberal Arts Main Office, 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Briggs)

#### Description

This workshop-based course is for those who enjoy and want to write poetry and fiction and who wish to continue the serious study and practice of writing. Although much of our time will be spent discussing student poems and stories, we'll also read the poetry and fiction from established writers from the assigned books and handouts. In the first part of the course, you'll be asked to write poems on a regular basis, often in response to a specific catalyst; to write short responses to the assigned poems; and to make responsible contributions to all discussions. In the second part of the course, we will turn our attention to fiction (to short stories in particular).

Throughout the class, we will focus on the craft of creative writing, as well as the issues that writers sometimes face regarding their work, especially censorship. We will explore some historical examples of censorship, and explore the complex relationship between audiences and texts. Class attendance is an absolute must. For further details on the workshop philosophy, please read the *Workshop Guidelines* at the end of this syllabus.

#### Assignments

Portfolio Version #1 :           A collection of your poetry, with evidence of revisions,  
and self-assessment           400 points

Portfolio Version #2	A collection of your fiction, with evidence of revisions, and self assessment	400 points
In-class writings	100 points (these cannot be made up)	
Class participation	100 points	
926-1,000 points = A	900-925 points = A-	876-899 points = B+
825-875 points = B	800-824 points = B-	776-799 points = C+
725-775 points = C	700-724 points = C-	676-699 points = D+
625-675 points = D	600-624 points = D-	599 points or less = F

### **Attendance and Arriving on Time**

You are allowed up to three misses with no penalty. For each absence beyond three, your final course grade will be docked by ½ letter grade (i.e, a B will become a B-). I expect you to arrive at class on time, ready to go. If you come to class habitually late, or leave early, this will affect your class participation grade.

### **Late Work**

Work is due in class on the assigned date, unless I indicate otherwise. Late work will be docked one full letter grade for each day after the due date.

### **Class Etiquette**

Please observe the basic norms of etiquette and respect in the class, both in relation to me and to your peers. Also, cell phones, MP3 players, etc. should not be used during class. Your attention should be on the subject matter at hand.

### **Plagiarism**

I expect the creative writing you workshop and turn-in to be your own. If you borrow words or phrases from other writers, you need to acknowledge this. If you have questions, please ask me.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you need accommodation because of a documented disability, and/or if you have medical information to share with me, please discuss this with me as early as possible. If you have not already obtained proper documentation from Disability Support Services, I will be happy to direct you to the appropriate office. Please feel free to e-mail me as well.

### **English Major Portfolios**

All English majors are required to submit a “Major Portfolio” (or “Senior Portfolio”) before they graduate. All English majors (and those planning on majoring in English) should be saving all writing assignments (including drafts, applicable writing assignments, and any other related materials) from your courses in order to prepare your required Major Portfolio. Feel free to ask me if you have questions about the requirements.

## Course Evaluations

Student course evaluations are an important source of information for curricular and teaching improvement in the College of Liberal Arts and Education. As such, all students enrolled in CLAE courses are required to complete an online course evaluation. You will receive e-mails explaining how to complete the evaluation online. In addition, your instructor will remind you of the deadline for completing this course requirement.

**Schedule** (Note that this schedule is subject to change, and that it is your responsibility to remain informed of any announced changes.)

1-8 Introductions/Syllabus Review Carolyn Forche and Dana Levin poems (handouts)	1-10 Oliver, 1-18 Lux, 1-4	1-12 Oliver, 19-28 Brooks, 72-74
1-15 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—No Classes	1-17 Oliver, 112-118 Hawkey, 65, 69, 75-77	1-19 Workshop
1-22 Workshop	1-24 Oliver, 76-91 Lux, 5-10 Dana Levin poems (handout)	1-26 Oliver, 92-108 Brooks, 87-89; 120-21 Special Topic: Censorship and the Black Arts Movement
1-29 Kim Addonizio poems (handout)	1-31 Allen Ginsberg poems (handout)	2-2 Workshop
2-5 Workshop	2-7 Hawkey, 11-14 Olena Kalytiak Davis poems (handout)	2-9 Oliver 67-75 Lux, 14-15
2-12 Workshop	2-14 Workshop	2-16 Workshop

2-19 Portfolio #1 Conferences	2-21 Portfolio #1 Conferences	2-23 Portfolio #1 Conferences
2-26 <b>Portfolio #1 due</b> in class Begin Fiction Unit Haruki Murakami, "The Second Bakery Attack" (packet)	2-28 Koch, 3-29 Junot Diaz, "No Face" (packet)	3-2 Koch, 30-46 Jim Shepard, "The Creature from the Black Lagoon" (packet)
3-5 Spring Break	3-7 Spring Break	3-9 Spring Break
3-12 Amanda Davis, "Fat Ladies Floated in the Sky Like Balloons" (packet)	3-14 Koch, 56-69 Kelly Link, "The Specialist's Hat," 55-70	3-16 Koch, 69-78 Censorship in fiction: the case of J.D. Salinger
3-19 Workshop	3-21 Workshop	3-23 George Saunders, "The Falls" (packet)
3-26 Koch, 112-124	3-28 Dave Eggers, "Measuring the Jump" (packet)	3-30 Conferences
4-2 Workshop	4-4 Workshop	4-6 Good Friday—No Classes
4-9 Kelly Link, "Water Off a Black Dog's Back," pp. 27-53	4-11 Workshop	4-13 Workshop
4-16 Workshop	4-18 Workshop/Conferences	4-20 Workshop/Conferences <b>Portfolio #2 Due</b> in class

## Workshop Guidelines

This is how it works:

1. Each student will sign up for a date when his or her work will be workshopped by the entire class. Your work will be individually workshopped at least once during the poetry section, and once during the fiction section.
2. You must provide me with a copy of your poems/short stories to be workshopped at least 24 hours prior to your date. You can either make copies for the class yourself (about 21) or else I would be happy to make the copies for you. If you'd like to e-mail me your work, please do so at **rombesnd@udmercy.edu** as a Word attachment.
3. For poems, plan to workshop 2-4 poems on your day; for fiction, one story. Your work must be typed, edited, and as free of errors as possible.
4. During the workshop, the class and I will read your work (for poems, we will often read them aloud), marking comments and suggestions on the work itself. Then, we will discuss your work as a class. At the end, class members will sign their names to their comments, and give them back to you so that you can read and reflect on them and, if you choose, make some changes and revisions based on the class feedback. Please keep these copies.
5. As the author, you know your work best; you will need to balance your consideration of what your peers said about your work, and your intentions as a writer. In other words, not all advice and feedback is equal. Ignore what is of no help to you, and use the feedback that you feel is helpful as you revise.
6. Please remember that on workshop days your work will be read by a public audience. Although I will always be happy to read anything you write for this class, I do reserve the right to make decisions about the suitability of your work that you submit to the class workshops.

## Workshop Philosophy

1. **Criticize each piece on its own terms.** Ask yourself what the author is trying to do, and base your criticisms on whether or not the author succeeds in those aims.

2. **No ad hominem attacks.** Criticize the writing, not the writer. And don't mistake the writing for the writer, nor assume necessarily that what you are reading reflects the beliefs, values, ethics, or worldview of the author. (I.e., because Steven King writes about axe murderers does not mean that he is one.) In other words, separate the writing from the writer.

3. **Don't try to rewrite your colleague's work as if it were your own.** Respect your colleague's intent. Your comments should help the author get the piece where she or he wants it to go, not where you think it out to go.

4. **Use the golden rule.** Treat your peers and their work with the same respect with which you would like them to treat you and your work. Kindness is a critical faculty. Be tough-minded; never soft-pedal your criticisms, but always try to remember what it feels like to be on the receiving end of criticism. Be compassionate and helpful to your peers.

5. **Start with what works, end with what doesn't.** There is nearly always something right with a story or poem, something that will appeal to you, something that seems apt. That's where you should begin your criticisms. Then work your way around to what's not working.

6. **Be specific.** Try not to make vague, general comments about a piece, comments that you can't support with examples from the text itself.

7. **When your story or poem is being discussed, listen.** If you find yourself tempted to defend your story or poem in workshop, don't. Instead, listen

carefully, both to what your instructor and your peers say. As the author of the work, you may be too close to judge its strengths and weaknesses. If you would like to respond to comments about your work, wait until after everyone has spoken, and then ask your questions or make your comments.