

## Syllabus English 205 Introduction to Creative Writing

Dr. C.Crabtree 219 Briggs 993-1080

Office Hours: Tues, Thur., 2:00-4:00 (subject to cancellations occasionally for meetings), most Tues. and Thur. Lunch periods (12:45 -2:00, and usually later Tuesday) and liberal hours MWF by appointment. I'm in my office a great deal, so I'm often available much of the day. Office hours may be cancelled because of meetings, so to be sure, call or see me in class to make an appointment.

e-mail address:

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If your name isn't obvious in your e-mail, please put your name in your subject line. I sometimes receive 60 e-mails at the office, so try to get my attention as a student.

Texts: Three Genres: The Writing of Poetry, Fiction, and Drama, Sixth Edition, Stephen Minot, 1998.

Abandon Automobile, ed Melba Joyce Boyd and M.L.Liebler, 2001

Recommended: The Artist's Way, Julia Cameron, or any of Natalie Goldberg's books on writing.

Please set aside about \$10.00 for theater tickets and coffee at poetry readings.

### Objectives and Description:

The student will engage in a variety of creative writing exercises and assignments; the course, like the text, is organized into sections entailing the study and writing of poems, stories, and short plays as models for writing your own work in each genre. One of our most powerful tools, after reading good work by published writers, is the peer critiquing of student poems, fiction, and short dramatic sketches. Students will gain an understanding of genres and the boundaries where genres blur (as in the prose poem or performance poem). We will discuss theories of creativity, but students will find their own methods rather than follow a formula.

Students will attend function on and off campus to further stimulate creativity and awareness of the place of the writer in our culture. See below.

Undergirded by a personal journal and self-directed readings in the three genres, the main work of the course will be the students' discovery and exploration of creative sources in their own memory, experience, and imagination. Students will learn to tap into their own creative sources, learn the role of reading and critiquing work of others in the sharpening of one's own talent, and gain the tools needed to turn out at least a few good pieces of writing.

To the creative "inspiration" will be added the hard work and discipline of revision, vocabulary-building, and critiquing the work of others. Constructive critiquing of the work of others in small groups is an important part of the course, and students must conduct themselves with integrity and sensitivity in the groups. Ideally, the student will come away from the class with a sharpened appreciation of the creative process and with a heightened insight into the workings of the language, including metaphor and other types

of figurative language. Remember, too, that a glimmer of inspiration may bear fruit [please pardon the mixed metaphor!] at some time in the future. Learning the discipline of revising will help you develop your creative talent in the future.

#### Course Requirements:

Reading of text as assigned; writing and revising about seven poems, two to five stories, and two short plays.

Attendance at three or more local poetry readings, museum, theater or cultural festivals as agreed upon in class, a visit to the Detroit Art Institute and Wright Museum. See attached schedule of readings and events and ways to fulfill this requirement.

The journal includes a reading journal (responses to the text and work in hand-outs) and your own freewriting and other informal writing. The reading journal allows you a range of reading with minimal comments on your part, and may also be used as your notebook. I will collect it occasionally.

Please note that every Tuesday you will be given a writing "prompt" --something to get you started on a creative venture. The piece of writing you produce, whether poetry, fiction, or drama, is due the next class, normally Thursday, until you are assigned a group meeting time on Thursday. Thus we write on Tuesday, and critique your efforts and discuss the text on Thursday until I decide the class is ready to work in small groups on Thursdays.

You will turn in about seven poems, two or three completed or partial stories, and two one-acts.

You are strongly encouraged to submit your best poem to the Dudley Randall Student Poetry Competition, and to consider as well submitting an appropriate piece of writing to the Women's Studies Writing Competition. The deadlines are in Winter, so save your work with this in mind. Our student literary journal, [sic], will take submissions sometime this semester, and several students from 205 have had work published in [sic].

In Week 11 or 12, we will give an evening reading, possibly in combination with other creative writing students and local poets, at Grounds, the campus coffee house. Some of us may get involved with Slam/Performance poetry as well.

#### Policies and Procedures:

No amount of hard work can guarantee an "A" in a creative writing class. The class is set up, according to a long tradition in the English Department, so that anyone who works conscientiously, attends class regularly (2 cuts permitted), and turns in good efforts, will receive a respectable grade based on process as well as product. "A" grades are given to students whose work shows talent, originality, and discipline (discipline involves hard work, serious revising, and attention to poetic and literary forms). I will give checks, check pluses, and check minuses as well as verbal comments which will keep you apprised of your progress without my having to slap a grade on your work. The midterm grade will reflect the work turned in, and also your class and small-group participation. The final grade is based on class participation (15%); journal (5%); attendance at one U of D Mercy Theater Company play, and two other events on or off campus (to be discussed in class) which are required but ungraded; and your final writing portfolio (85%).

An additional note about grading: In a sense, it is antithetical to the poetic process for the student to work in order to get a high grade; on the other hand, it is natural for poets to hope for appreciation of their poetry. The instructor's intellectual integrity requires

some rigor in the grading process. Thus, students must prepare for disappointment if they seek an "A" as the only acceptable acknowledgement that they have talent, have worked hard, or have grown a great deal.

Here is a thumbnail sketch of the way grades have been given in this class:

- D Student has missed class frequently and/or failed to turn in work.
- C Student has some skill or talent, but has missed class frequently, failed to revise thoroughly, and/or not contributed to the growth of classmates.  
Student has grown a bit, but has not put in much effort; or student has missed three or four classes or failed to turn in assignments; or student has lots of talent but has missed several classes, even if for serious personal reasons.
- B Student has attended all required classes, has grown a great deal, has contributed to the growth of others and has achieved some good creative efforts.
- B+ Student has talent and skill and has achieved some very good poems, as well as contributing to the growth of others.  
A top-notch student has achieved a lot, shows talent and promise, and has been in class and contributing to the work of others.
- A The same as the student with an A-, but represents the instructor's judgment about the talent and actual achievement of the student.

A Final Note to Students:

Our development as writers requires a safe atmosphere and trustworthy companions. If you do not wish to, or do not feel capable of, accepting the people in your class and the material they may choose to write about, please drop the class. Also, you must be prepared to share most of your work (see me if something very private emerges from a writing assignment which you don't wish to share with the class) and hear responses from your classmates and from me. Respect for each other is rooted both in the Mission of the University and in the creative process itself.

Plagiarism is unusual in a class like this; nonetheless, I will mention that any work submitted that is demonstrably not your own creative effort will receive a grade of zero.

Attendance policy: You are permitted only one absence, and even one can set back your process. I subtract 3 pts from your 15-point class participation grade for each class missed after one absence. You need to be in class to get the prompt; your group needs your active and reliable presence when their work is being discussed the small groups. Absences may also indirectly affect your grade, as will failure to turn in work.

Assigned poems, sketches, and exercises can be turned in, if possible, before class on Thursday up to about ten minutes prior to class. All work other than in-class drafts should be typed. After a few weeks we will break into small groups for part of the class. For small groups, the assignment is due in 8 copies at the time of the group meeting. Put a large asterisk on my copy of your work.

A Further Note on Method and Content: Writing is usually considered to be a solitary act; part of the creative process which you will be exploring in this class entails private experience. Yet a crucial part of creative writing classes is the group or peer critique. Almost all published poets and writers use, or have used, a group to help them hone and polish their work. Thus you must be prepared to share your writing with the class as a whole and/or your small group. Your class participation grade will depend in part on your

generosity in commenting on your classmates' work.

In addition to your active presence and feedback, you are expected to treat any personal information (whether fictionalized or autobiographical) implied or made explicit in your classmates' writing as confidential. The group meetings must feel safe for all members if creativity is to flourish. Although most of our comments will underscore what is positive in your work, you'll need to listen without defensiveness to all of our comments if you are to benefit from them.

About possible changes to the syllabus: Much of what occurs in the class will depend upon you and your classmates—what they bring to the class in terms of experience and insight, what they develop in the context of our discussions. As a consequence, I may make slight changes in the schedule depending upon how the class is progressing. For example, sometimes we extend the writing of poetry a bit and cut the drama writing a bit short, based on interest and talent in the class. I often adjust our discussions to emphasize something we need more work on. Be in class, and thus announcements of slight changes will not surprise you.

A second reason that flexibility may be required is the possibilities for guest poets and writers to visit the class or the availability or relevance of a film to our work.

#### Week 1

Introduction, philosophy of the instructor, procedures. What is poetry? Why no rhyming poetry is accepted until Week 5.

Bring text to all classes (except later small-group meetings). Freewriting. Prompt for poem. Reading journal assigned, three poem responses per class meeting. The creative process.

#### Week 2

Read Chs 1 and 2 of Minot. We have a special event for our class and other CW students, so go to Loranger Exhibit Space in the Architecture Building at 4 pm. Bring a poem. Poet Roger Weingarten will discuss the writing process, with a public reading to begin at 5 pm. Class will end on time at 6:30. Bring your Week 2 poem to turn in to me. .always have two copies—one for me, and one for you to keep. Have reading responses for 6 poems from the texts, and the poem or exercise done based on last week's prompt. Read Ch. 2 carefully.

#### Week 3

Have Minot read, Chs. 3, 4, and 5. We'll look over the Glossary and Trouble-shooting Guide in the text (pp. 420-436); you'll need to refer to these often. Discuss a few more poems from Ch. 2. Writing exercise in class. Why you must grasp the ideas of metaphor and imagery. Respond to poems in text in your journal.

Poem or completed exercise due. Drop it off early to my office if possible (I'll photocopy some to discuss in class). Journal in class. Creative process.

Week 4 Critiquing begins if I judge the class is ready. Keep reading the texts.

Poem prompt. Chs. 6, 7 and 8 in Minot. Uses of memory and observation in writing. Bring an object from home that is significant to you to use in your prompt. Poem due. Journal check. Read Minot, Chs. 10 and 11.

ounds, images, and avoiding abstraction in poetry. Film on poets. Prompt for Thursday.

Bring enough copies of your work for half the class (We may not get to everyone) . I'll talk to you about whether I think the class is ready to go into Thursday small groups. Bring 8 copies of your work to be discussed in group once this starts.

#### Week 5

Prompt for a poem using dialogue. . Poem is due typed in 7 copies for your group meeting. Read Minot on writing fiction, Chs. 12, 13,14, and 15. We'll giv special

attention to the story, "Sausage and Beer." Prompt for sketch using dialogue. Dialogues in your journal for next class. Listening for dialogue. Incorporating dialogue to express character. Interviewing, observing, and eavesdropping.

Week 6

Minot, Chs. 16 through 20. We'll be discussing tension as we build from a sketch to a story. Bring copies of your sketch or story to class.

We'll discuss your sketches and where they are going.

Week 7

Chs. 21 through 24. Prompt and discussion of how to revise what you have so far. Generating a story kernel from memory. Observation and description. Using description in your sketch from memory.

Group meetings. Bring copies of your ongoing or new work to class.

Week 8

Chs. 25 through 27. Plot considerations. You may complete a story, or discard it and begin a new one. Imagination, symbolism, and pacing. Revision techniques.

Group meeting.

Submitting to the Dudley Randall Student Poetry Competition and the WS contest.

Week 9

\*\*\* In-class reading to the class and guests of your works

Prompt and revision tasks. Minot, Chs. 27, 28 and 29.

Week 10

Possible guest fiction writer. Prompt for fiction or dramatic scene.

Small groups. Bring copies of your scene or sketch.

Week 11

Minot, Chs. 31 to 35 on drama. Read the plays carefully. Prompt for a sketch.

Small-group critiquing of sketches from last week's prompt.

Week 12

Revision of sketches and one-act plays. Read Chapters 37-40. Prepare for reading aloud.

Small groups. Our "We've Got the Word" poetry reading and open mic in Grounds (date to be announced)

Poetry Reading in Grounds, April 6 (probably 7pm-9:15)

Week 13

Prompt for final sketch or poem. Prepare and rehearse your three best efforts (if short) or a longer piece for our public reading. If your portfolio is ready, I will accept it any time.

Week 14

Turn in your portfolio with poems, sketches, dialogues and selected journal entries.

. We'll have an informal reading of two or three of your favorite pieces. We'll go over how to submit poems and fiction for publication and contests; forming an ongoing writer's group.

Exam as scheduled.