

## English 71: Introduction to Creative Writing

Spring 2013

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Office Hours:  
Tues. 1:30-2:30 and by appointment

Section 06: T/Th 3-4:15 p.m. (Clark 316)  
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*“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.” - William Wordsworth*

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course designed, adopted, implemented, and administered by the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San Jose State University in accordance with the University’s General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts.

In this course, we will read, discuss and write poetry, creative non-fiction and short fiction. The course will be taught using a combination of discussion and writing workshops. In the discussion, contemporary and historical published works will be closely read and analyzed. In the writing workshops, creative work by class members will be analyzed and critiqued for revision.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Decipher and understand the form and content of assigned literary works;
2. Comprehend the historical and cultural contexts of assigned literary works;
3. Recognize the accomplishments of and issues related to writing by women and men representing diverse cultural traditions;
4. Acquire through both individual and collaborative/workshop efforts of a written and oral nature the skills necessary for reading, discussing, analyzing, interpreting, and—most importantly—emulating and writing works of poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction;
5. Communicate such skills with clarity and precision;
6. Develop an appreciation of literary works as expressions of human intellect and imagination, and as representations of diverse human cultures;
7. Develop the ability to write literary works that express intellect and imagination and that represent diversity in human cultures
8. Respond to literature through clear and effective communication in both written and oral work;
9. Read and respond to texts with both analytical acumen and personal sensibility;
10. Appreciate how literary works illuminate enduring human concerns while at the same time representing their particular cultures;
11. Write works of poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction that are of interest and value to the writer, to other students in the course, and to a diverse reading audience.

### ENGLISH DEPARTMENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will demonstrate the ability to

- 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric. (Objective met via reading assignments, writing assignments and discussions.)
- 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature. (Objective met via reading assignments and discussion.)

- 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject. (Objective met via writing assignments and critical reflection.)
- 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively. (Objective met via Literary Event Research Paper.)
- 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts. (Objective met via reading assignments, writing assignments and discussions.)

## REQUIRED TEXT

Reader. Available at Maple Press, 481 E. San Carlos (will be delivered Feb. 2 in class)

Other course cost: Extra copies of pieces for sharing.

## RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

Six-word memoirs: <http://smithmag.net/sixwords/>

Videos of poems read aloud: <http://www.favoritepoem.org/videos.html>

To see clips from *Def Poetry Jam*: [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=def+poetry](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=def+poetry)

Spoken word poetry: <http://spokenwordart.com/videos.php>

*Reed*, SJSU's literary magazine: <http://www.reedmag.org/drupal/>

SJSU Writing Center: <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Creative Writing: We will write fiction, poetry and nonfiction as per the course schedule (with possible additions and changes). There will also be a diagnostic "Self Portrait" piece that you will revise at the end of the semester.

Literary Event Paper: You will attend a literary event this semester on or off campus. *Before and/or after the event, research this writer by perusing this writer's webpage, blog Facebook page, Goodreads page, etc. and/o, by examining interviews and reviews, etc.* Write an approximately 3-page paper that focuses on:

- a) What you learned in your research of this writer. What was most interesting, surprising, illuminating? Incorporate 2-3 direct quotes (using quotation marks) by or about the writer. Include a bibliography at the end of the paper that indicates your sources. (Use correct bibliographic form: MLA, APA or Chicago Style.)
- b) Your personal response to the event: Possible questions you can address: What did you like and why? What did you learn? What surprised you and why? What did you find interesting and why? What questions did it raise? What connections did you make between what we discussed in class about this writer and what you experienced at the event? Would you attend a similar event again? Why or why not? Etc.
- c) At the top of your paper list the title of the event, and the day, time and location.

For information about literary events see:

- [www.litart.org](http://www.litart.org) (Center for Literary Arts at SJSU)
- <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/events> (English Department Events listed)
- <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentaffairs/mosaic/> (MOSAIC Poetry Series/Spoken Word Events)
- [www.sjsu.edu](http://www.sjsu.edu) (click on "Events")

Extra Credit: For Extra Credit, you may attend up to 2 more literary events and write more papers, following the same directions as above. Each paper can add approximately 2% to your grade if the paper fulfills the assignment, is well-written and virtually error-free. Write "EXTRA CREDIT" at the top.

Final: 1) Choose one poem, one piece of fiction, and one piece of nonfiction. Revise each one to make it “shine”: Use the freshest language possible; get rid of clichés and any words that are absolutely unnecessary to avoid “over-writing”; add details to more deeply develop character, setting and ideas; use repetition and rhythm and sound for best effect; give it a title that “does a lot of work”, etc. 2) Write a reflection for each piece, explaining what you changed and why—e.g., how you made it better. 3) Include a first draft and final draft for each piece.

<i>Course grade will be determined this way:</i>	
Fiction	20%
Poems	20%
Nonfiction	20%
Literary Event paper	15%
Diagnostic and Revised Self-Portrait	5%
Final	10%

## **GRADING**

A: Creative writing that receives an “A” is likely to:

- Fulfill all assignment requirements
- Demonstrate complex, unique and/or insightful approach
- Function well as a whole
- Demonstrate engaging voice
- Incorporate strong word choices
- Incorporate, where appropriate, striking imagery
- Lack clichéd or over-used language
- Incorporate unusual/unique associations that fit the tone of the piece
- Lack spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

B: Creative writing that receives a “B” is likely to:

- Fulfill most of the assignment requirements
- Demonstrate insightful approach
- Function generally well as a whole
- Demonstrate a generally engaging voice
- Incorporate some strong word choices
- Use some concrete imagery
- Mostly lack clichéd or over-used language
- Mostly lack spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

C: Creative writing that receives a “C” is likely to:

- Neglect some aspects of the assignment requirements
- Be derivative of other works
- Not completely function as a whole (some parts may be underdeveloped)
- Incorporate some strong, and some weaker, word choices
- Lack concrete imagery
- Include clichéd or over-used language
- Have some spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

D: Creative writing that receives a “D” is likely to:

- Not fulfill the assignment requirements
- Not function as a whole
- Be a cursory response that demonstrates lack of motivation and/or poor understanding of the assignment

F: No response.

## POLICIES

**Late Assignments:** No matter the reason for lateness, late assignments will be reduced a grade for every class session they are late (or, if ungraded, will receive half credit if turned in the next class session but no credit any later than that). This policy helps you to avoid habitual late work and to be prepared to contribute to class discussion and activities. All assignments will be accepted *only in class*, not in my office or mailbox, and not as email attachments. *Please do not ask for exceptions to this policy because you put me in an awkward position.* I know we all have emergencies occasionally. One reduced grade on one assignment will not be the end of the world. Do Extra Credit if you're concerned about your grade.

**Absences:** If you are not in class, contact classmates to get assignments, directions, handouts, notes, etc. Please do not make your absences extra work for me. In-class activities cannot be made up.

### **Paper format:**

- \* Typed in 12-point Times New Roman
- \* Double spaced (for poetry, 1.5 spaces)
- \* Staple BEFORE class (buy a stapler if you don't own one)
- \* Name and page number on each page
- \* Name, date, and class time on first page

**Be Fully Present. No electronic devices are to be on/used/visible during class.** No cell phones, iPods, texting, internet, etc. during class unless we are in the act of writing and you want to use a laptop.

**SJSU Grading Policy:** The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A=excellent; B=above average; C=average; D=below average; F=failure. Courses graded according to the A, B, C, No Credit system shall follow the same pattern, except that NC (No Credit) shall replace D or F. In such classes, NC shall also substitute for W (Withdrawal) because neither grade (NC or W) affects students' GPA.

**Academic Integrity:** Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's Integrity Policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs. The policy on academic integrity can be found at: [http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/index.html](http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

**Campus policy in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act:** If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability. Any student needing special assistance should contact Disabled Student Services, located in Administration 110.

**Course Schedule**  
**(This course schedule is subject to additions and changes.)**

Week	Date	What's on Tap
1	Th 1/24	Introduction to class; beginning to write.
2	T 1/29	Self-Portrait diagnostic beginnings.
	Th 1/31	Self Portrait continues. Reader delivered to class (bring cash).
3	T 2/5	Read Jayne Anne Phillips in Reader.  <i>Tues. 2/5: Jayne Anne Phillips, Library 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 7 p.m.</i> <i>Wed. 2/6: Jayne Anne Phillips. Library 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 1 p.m.</i>
	Th 2/7	“Self-Portrait” diagnostic due.
4	T 2/12	Write 10 Facebook statuses from the year 2053. (3 copies)
	Th 2/14	Valentine’s Day writing in class. Discuss: Conflict, character, setting.
5	T 2/19	Have a person who stole something explain why she/he stole it. 1-3 pages max, double-spaced. (3 copies)
	Th 2/21	Read Susan Straight in Reader
6	T 2/26	You are an astronaut. Describe your <i>perfect</i> day. 1-3 pages max, double-spaced. (3 copies)
	Th 2/28	Read Susan Steinberg in Reader.  <i>Thurs. 2/28, Straight &amp; Steinberg Reading, Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 7 p.m.</i>
7	T 3/5	Visiting Poet: Mark Heinlein
	Th 3/7	Re-creations.
8	T 3/12	Visiting Poets: Danielle Roberts & T.J. Flores
	T 3/14	More re-creations. Words, words words...lines...and stanzas.

Week	Date	What's on Tap
9	T 3/19  Th 3/21  3/25-3/29	Write a poem using the words, lines and stanza requirements discussed in the previous class. (4 copies)  Read Dana Gioia  Spring Break
10	T 4/2    Th 4/4	Write a poem in the style of Dana Gioia. (4 copies)  <i>Wed. 4/3, Dana Gioia, 7 p.m., Engineering 189</i> <i>Thurs. 4/4, Dana Gioia, 1 p.m., venue TBA</i>  Ekphrastic poetry
11	T 4/9    Th 4/11	Write a poem in the form of an apology letter; see two examples page 8 of syllabus. (4 copies)    Character, conflict and setting in Creative Nonfiction.  Think back to the closet of your youth, and write a list what was inside. Think about how the closet contents might a metaphor for who you were as a child, who you might have wished to be, and who you have become.
12	T 4/16    Th 4/18	Write 3-5 imagined journal entries by one of your family members. (3 copies)    Read Carmen Gimenez Smith.  <i>Thurs. 4/18, Carmen Gimenez Smith, Library 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 7 p.m.</i>
13	T 4/23    Th 4/25	Write a piece about the five things that thrill you the most. Structure it with numbered section headings. (3 copies)  .  Write about a time when you were in transit of some kind—on a train, plane, bus, or bike, in a car or even on foot. Write about where you were going and why, and focus on what you were thinking, seeing, and feeling as you moved. (3 copies)

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>What's on Tap</b>
14	T 4/30 Th 5/2	Literary Event Papers Due. Work on Self Portrait revisions
15	T 5/7 Th 5/9	Revision of "Self Portrait" due Work on Final revisions.
16	FINAL	FINAL due by 5/16, Thursday.

**ENGL 71: Introduction to Creative Writing**

**Diagnostic Writing**

**Write a piece based on the following prompt:**

1. Read (aloud) the poem "Self-Portrait" by Adam Zagajewski.
2. Notice the details included in the text.
3. Notice the order and organization of details—how they are arranged in the text.
4. Write a poem or a prose piece of at least 250 words that is your self-portrait. Select interesting details as Zagajewski has done, arranging them in such a way as to reveal interesting things about yourself.

SELF PORTRAIT

Between the computer, a pencil, and a typewriter  
half my day passes. One day it will be half a century.  
I live in strange cities and sometimes talk  
with strangers about matters strange to me.  
I listen to music a lot: Bach, Mahler, Chopin, Shostakovich.  
I see three elements in music: weakness, power, and pain.  
The fourth has no name.  
I read poets, living and dead, who teach me  
tenacity, faith, and pride. I try to understand  
the great philosopher—but usually catch just  
scraps of their precious thoughts.  
I like to take long walks on Paris streets  
and watch my fellow creatures, quickened by envy,  
anger, desire; to trace a silver coin  
passing from hand to hand as it slowly  
loses its round shape (the emperor's profile is erased).  
Beside me trees expressing nothing  
but a green, indifferent perfection.  
Black birds pace the fields,  
waiting patiently like Spanish widows.  
I'm no longer young, but someone else is always older.  
I like deep sleep, when I cease to exist,  
and fast bike rides on country roads when poplars and houses  
dissolve like cumuli on sunny days.  
Sometimes in museums the paintings speak to me  
and irony suddenly vanishes.  
I love gazing at my wife's face.  
Every Sunday I call my father.  
Every other week I meet with friends,  
thus proving my fidelity.  
My country freed itself from one evil. I wish  
another liberation would follow.  
Could I help in this? I don't know.  
I'm truly not a child of the ocean,  
as Antonio Machado wrote about himself,  
but a child of air, mint, and cello  
and not all the ways of the high world  
cross paths with the life that—so far—  
belongs to me.

—Adam Zagajewski (translated by Clare Cavanagh)

**This is Just to Say**

I have eaten  
the plums  
that were in  
the icebox

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for breakfast

Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet  
and so cold

- *William Carlos Williams*

**I Had Just Hung Up from Talking to You**

I had just hung up from talking to you  
and we had been so immersed in the difficulty  
you were facing, and forgive me,  
I was thinking that as long as we kept talking,  
you in your car in the parking lot of the boys' school  
as the afternoon deepened into early evening,  
and me in the study, all the books around  
that had been sources of beauty to us,  
as long as we stayed in the conversation  
padded with history like the floor of the pine forest,  
as long as I thought out loud, made a joke  
at my own expense, you would be harbored in that exchange,  
but the boys were leaving the track  
and after we hung up I looked out the window  
to see the top of the bare January trees spotlighted to silvery red,  
massive but made from the thinnest  
twigs at the ends of the branches at the ends of the limbs  
they were waving and shining in a light  
like no other and left only to them.

- *Jessica Greenbaum*