

San José State University
Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 71, Intro to Creative Writing
Spring 2015

Instructor: Nick Taylor
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Office Hours: Mon/Weds 1:30pm - 3:30pm and by appointment.
Class Days/Time: Mon/Weds 12:00pm - 1:15pm
Classroom: BBC 121

Course Description

Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course offered in accordance with the University's General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts (Area C2).

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

Student Learning Objectives

SLO 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.

SLO 3 - Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.

Required Texts

- Burroway, Janet, ed. *Imaginative Writing, Fourth Edition*. Pearson, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-13-405324-0.
- *Reed Magazine*, Volume 67 (2014 edition). *Reed* is the campus literary journal and will be available to purchase in class from a *Reed* staff member.

Writing Assignments

[SLO #3]

Poetry

- A self-portrait poem
- A poem containing sensory images and concrete details
- A list poem
- A conceit (metaphor) poem
- A villanelle

Fiction

- Character sketch (2pp)
- Scene (2-4pp)

- Short story (4-10pp)

Creative Nonfiction

- Memoir (2-4pp)
- Humor or Work essay (2-4pp)
- Travel essay (2-4pp)

Final Portfolio

- Revised versions of all writing assignments
- Responses to attendance at two Bay Area literary readings

Assignment Format

All material handed in (except the journal/notebook) should be **typed and double-spaced with page numbers**. Multi-page assignments must be **stapled**. Your name, the assignment title, and the date should be included at the top of the first page.

Attending Readings / Lectures

Besides reading published work, you are required to attend **two readings** by poets and/or prose writers presented on the SJSU campus or elsewhere. The Bay Area is one of the world's great literary regions, where seven days a week one can attend a reading by a renowned writer at a bookstore, college, community center, or library. Readings are listed in the Sunday editions of the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro* weekly. After attending each reading, you will write a brief response (1-2pp) to include in your final portfolio. You may respond to any aspect of the reading: the speaker, the venue, the material performed, the Q&A with the audience, etc.

Here are some of the readings being offered on campus this semester:

Jan 29, 6pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center) – MFA Program Open House featuring readings by SJSU Creative Writing Faculty, Lurie Visiting Writer Andrew Lam, and former California Poet Laureate Al Young.

Feb. 4, 7pm, MLK 225/229 - Bay Area Doubleheader with bestselling novelist and short-story writer **Michelle Richmond** (*Golden State, The Year of Fog*) and award-winning poet **Randall Mann** (*Straight Razor, Breakfast with Thom Gunn*).

Feb. 25, 7pm, MLK 225/229 - Literary Spouse Tag Team with fiction writer and memoirist **Bich Minh Nguyen** (*Stealing Buddha's Dinner, Short Girls*) and novelist **Porter Shreve** (*The End of the Book, When the White House Was Ours*).

March 4, 7:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center)- Former Steinbeck Fellow **Charles McLeod** reads from his new collection of short stories, *Settlers of Unassigned Lands*.

March 18, 7pm, MLK 255 - Poet, essayist, fiction writer and translator **Kazim Ali**. Presented by Persian Studies, Middle East Studies, Dept. of English and Comparative Literature, and the CLA.

April 2, 7pm, MLK 225/229- 2015 Lurie Distinguished Visiting Author **Andrew Lam**. Presented by the Creative Writing Program, the Dept. of English and Comparative Literature, and the CLA.

April 7, 7pm, MLK 225/229 - Santa Clara County Poet Laureate **David Perez** (*Love in a Time of Robot Apocalypse*).

April 15, 7:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center) - 2014-2015 Steinbeck Fellows **Cara Bayles, Yalitza Ferreras, and Reese Okyong Kwon**, read from work in progress.

April 22, 7pm, MLK 225/229 - The 2015 Martha Heasley Cox Lecture with novelist **Susan Choi** (*American Woman, My Education, A Person of Interest*).

April 23, 1pm, MLK 225/229 - **Susan Choi** in Conversation with CLA Director Andrew Altschul.

May 4, 6:00pm, MLK 590 (Steinbeck Center)

SJSU MFA alumnus **Daniel Arnold** reads from *Snowblind*, a new collection of mountaineering adventure tales in the tradition of Jack London and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Extra Credit Assignments

For extra credit you can attend at up to two more fiction readings and write responses to include in your final portfolio.

Class Workshop Procedures

For each unit (poetry, fiction, nonfiction) I will divide the class into four groups of approximately six students each. Your workshop group will consist of different students each unit, so you will get to read work by all of your classmates. Every time you turn in a piece of writing, you will bring enough copies for everyone in your workshop group *and* your teacher *and* yourself (eight copies, usually). We will critique the pieces at home (writing directly on the manuscripts) and discuss them in workshop groups during the following class period. At the end of the discussion, you will get to keep the seven or so marked-up copies of your work.

So what do you comment on? You have two responsibilities. The first is to indicate what you got out of the story, poem, or essay. What's your interpretation of it? If the piece were in the textbook, what would you say about it? This helps the writer understand what came across and what didn't. The second responsibility is to suggest avenues for improvement. How can the writer make this story better? Often this requires putting yourself in the writer's shoes. Remember that you can help a fellow writer with thoughtful commentary even if you would not have chosen the same topic or style in your own work.

In a workshop, writers must feel safe sharing their work with the group. Please keep your critiques confined to the work, not the author. Hostile, threatening, or personal criticism will not be tolerated.

Grading

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops and class discussions.

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's individual subjectivity, can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective

use of grammar, syntax, rhythm; also meter, rhyme, and other elements of poetic style and form. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

- Poetry 20%
- Non-fiction 20%
- Fiction 20%
- Final Portfolio (incl. literary events) 20%
- Class participation (incl. reading quizzes) 20%

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official 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.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT GRADING STATEMENT: In English Department courses, instructors comment on and grade the quality of writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All your writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

Schedule and Assignments

This class meets every Monday and Wednesday from 12:00PM to 1:15PM, starting on Monday, January 26. The last class is Wednesday, May 13. Class will not be held on March 23 or 25 (SJSU Spring Recess).

All reading assignments are in *Imaginative Writing* unless otherwise indicated.

Mon, Jan 26

Topic

Introduction; still write

Wed, Jan 28

Topic

Self portrait poems

Reading Due

Adam Zagajewski, “Self Portrait” (handout)

Linda Pastan, “Self Portrait” (handout)

Yusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It” (42)

Mon, Feb 2

Topic

More on self portrait poems

Reading Due

Elizabeth Jennings, “One Flesh” (129)

Li-Young Lee, "The Hammock" (189)
Suzanne O'Connell, "A History of Breasts" (*Reed*, 144)

Writing Due

Self portrait poem

Wed, Feb 4

Topic

Workshop self portrait poems; sensory images and concrete details

Reading Due

"The Workshop" (208)
Sherman Alexie, "At Navajo Monument Valley Tribal School" (154)
Robert Hass, "A Story About the Body" (187)
Meredith Wise, "Santa Clara" (*Reed*, 141)

Mon, Feb 9

Topic

More on imagery

Reading Due

Holly Day, "Spelunker" (*Reed*, 151)
Jonathan Travelstead, "Prayer of the Halligan Tool" (*Reed*, 154)
Jonathan Travelstead, "Prayer of the Flat Head Axe" (*Reed*, 155)

Writing Due

Imagery poem

Wed, Feb 11

Topic

Workshop imagery poem; using lists

Reading Due

Billy Collins, "Snow Day" (41)
Barbara Hamby, "Ode to American English" (86)

Mon, Feb 16

Topic

More on list or catalogue poems

Reading Due

Sharon Olds, "The Language of the Brag" (324)
Suzanne Ondrus, "For You, Who Have No Desire for Me" (*Reed*, 139)

Writing Due

List poem

Wed, Feb 18

Topic

Workshop list poem; conceit poems

Reading Due

“Metaphor, Cliché, and Conceit” (308)
Sylvia Plath, “Stillborn” (319)

Mon, Feb 23

Topic

Conceit or “metaphor” poems

Reading Due

Tony Hoagland, “There Is No Word” (320)
Michelle Bonczek, “Corpus Christi Cathedral, Krakow” (*Reed*, 148)

Writing Due

Conceit poem

Wed, Feb 25

Topic

Workshop conceit poem; villanelle

Reading Due

Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art” (213)
Steve Kowit, “The Grammar Lesson” (320)

Mon, Mar 2

Topic

FICTION UNIT BEGINS; character; listen to Russell Banks, “Sarah Cole, A Type of Love Story”

Writing Due

Villanelle

Wed, Mar 4

Topic

Workshop villanelle; more on character

Reading Due

“Character (Intro)” and “Character As Desire” (95-96)
Jorge Luis Borges, “The Book of Sand” (82)
Edith Pearlman, “Self-Reliance” (285)

Mon, Mar 9

Topic

More on character

Reading Due

Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain" (34)
Philip Jason, "A Blow to the Head" (*Reed*, 14)

Writing Due

Character sketch

Wed, Mar 11

Topic

Workshop character sketch; conflict

Reading Due

George Saunders, "Victory Lap" (69)

Mon, Mar 16

Topic

More on conflict

Reading Due

Ron Carlson, "Bigfoot Stole My Wife" (290)
Scott Blackwood, "One of Us Is Hidden Away" (181)

Writing Due

Scene

Wed, Mar 18

Topic

Workshop scene; point of view

Reading Due

Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl" (38)
Frank Scozzari, "Too Old for War" (*Reed*, 33)

Mon, Mar 23

No Class – SJSU Spring Recess

Wed, Mar 25

No Class – SJSU Spring Recess

Mon, Mar 30

Topic

Setting

Reading Due

Michael Caleb Tasker, "Silly Boy" (*Reed*, 43)
Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (280)

Wed, Apr 1

Topic

NONFICTION UNIT BEGINS; listen to David Sedaris, "Santaland Diaries"

Writing Due

Short story

Mon, Apr 6

Topic

Workshop short story

Wed, Apr 8

Topic

Memoir

Reading Due

"Memoir and the Personal Essay" (227)

Steven Suiter, "When I Was a Ghost" (*Reed*, 213)

Aleksandar Hemon, "The Book of My Life" (109)

Patricia Hampl, "Red Sky in the Morning" (176)

Mon, Apr 13

Topic

More on memoir

Reading Due

Alice Walker, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" (62)

Janice Westerling, "Going Home" (175)

Wed, Apr 15

Topic

Humorous essay

Reading Due

David Sedaris, "Standing By" (29)

Writing Due

Memoir

Mon, Apr 20

Topic

Workshop memoir; more on humor

Reading Due

Margaret Atwood, "The Female Body" (245)

Joseph Eastburn, "The Other 'F' Word" (*Reed*, 206)

Wed, Apr 22

Topic

Writing about work

Reading Due

Benjamin Percy, "Me vs Animals" (112)

Gayle Pemberton, "Do He Have Your Number, Mr. Jeffrey?" (237)

Mon, Apr 27

Topic

Hybrid nonfiction forms

Reading Due

Cara Spangler, "Split Lives" (*Reed*, 162)

Writing Due

Humor or Work essay

Wed, Apr 29

Topic

Workshop humor/work essay; travel writing

Reading Due

Casey Mock, "Stalinwood Welcomes You!" (*Reed*, 185)

Mark Lewandowski, "On Littering" (*Reed*, 209)

Mon, May 4

Topic

More on travel

Reading Due

Annie Dillard, from "Heaven and Earth in Jest" (28)

Joan Didion, "At the Dam" (148)

Jan McCutcheon, "A Good Place to Leave" (*Reed* 193)

Wed, May 6

Topic

Revision

Reading Due

"Revision" (203)

"Editing" (207)

Writing Due

Travel essay

Mon, May 11

Topic

Workshop travel essay

Wed, May 13

Topic

Submitting work for publication

Writing Due

Final portfolio

Academic Honesty

Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San José State University and the University's Academic Integrity Policy, requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The Policy on academic integrity can be found at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of somebody else's words or ideas and is considered an instance of academic dishonesty that instructors must report. You commit plagiarism by:

- buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper (or story)
- hiring someone to write a paper (or story)
- building on someone's ideas without providing a citation
- copying from another source or using a source too closely when paraphrasing

In other words, submit only your own work.

Peer Connections

Peer Connections is an on-campus center that provides peer tutoring for San José State University students. They offer assistance with writing, and if you feel you need intensive help beyond what I can provide during office hours, please request a writing tutor. Peer Connections has two locations on SJSU's main campus: in the Student Services Center (SSC) 600, on the corner of 10th and San Fernando (inside the 10th Street parking garage building), and in the Academic Success Center in Clark Hall, on the first floor next to the Computer Lab.

Disabilities Policy

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.