

Borderlands: How Words Can Transcend the Wall

English 242, Section 1, Fall 2019

**With chains of matrimony and modesty
You can shackle my feet
The fear will still haunt you
That crippled, unable to walk
I shall continue to think.
— Kishwar Naheed**

Instructor: Professor Cathleen Miller
Office: FO 114
Mailbox: FO 124
Phone: 408/924-4441

E-mail: Cathleen.Miller@sjsu.edu
Office hours: Thursdays 3–4:00 p.m.
Class schedule: Thursdays 4:00-6:45
Classroom: Faculty Offices 104

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The San José State College of Humanities and the Arts as a whole is exploring the concept of immigration this year, under the heading “Borderlands: Immigration and Migration in the 21st Century.” As Dean Shannon Miller writes: “With the support of student fees, your colleagues are producing plays, bringing in musical and theatrical groups, hosting writers, and creating opportunities for students to curate a film festival, learn from major industry figures, and participate in a television production.” We’ll immerse ourselves in this conversation through events and participation.

As nonfiction writers we can make a major contribution to this Borderlands discussion by looking at what the Fulbright Commission calls “cultural exchange.” Through the methods of creative nonfiction we are able to represent our personal truth, and the truth of those we interview, in a dramatic fashion that allows readers to experience fully how it feels to be “the other.” This semester we will engage in an ongoing dialogue about these issues—and more apropos to a writing workshop—strive to master the techniques of creative nonfiction as our instrument.

We’ll discuss methods to write for a global audience, a topic of importance in the digital age, and how we can use these tools for international discourse and advocacy. Students will be given prompts each week for two-page assignments to practice these techniques. Other than that, you are free to bring into workshop essays on topics of your choosing, including chapters of your thesis. In addition, we’ll read a couple of nonfiction British authors, look at how their voices differ from Americans, and the concept of World Englishes.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR ENGLISH 242

- To understand the fundamentals of creative nonfiction
- To improve your skills as creative nonfiction writers
- To improve your skills as editors

REQUIRED READING

Madame Depardieu and the Beautiful Strangers; Antonia Quirke
The Light in the Dark: A Winter Journal; Horatio Clare

**We must hear all the stories...
And by hearing all the stories,
we will find points of contact and communication,
and the world story, the Great Story,
will have a chance to develop.
— Chinua Achebe**

WORKSHOP

Students will be asked to workshop at least two pieces of your choosing over the course of the semester. Submissions may be articles, essays, or book chapters, but should range from 1,500 to no more than 5,000 words. If book chapters are submitted for workshop, please preface with a brief summary of the work and tell us where this sample fits in. Pieces submitted for workshop should be complete and polished...not drafts with bracketed phrases like [clever conclusion to go here].

During the workshop process students will learn to critique each other's work, which is a very different skill than being a good writer. The trick is to 1) praise what's good 2) ascertain what's wrong with a piece 3) offer positive criticism and suggestions on how to fix it—while realizing the individual style and goals of the author may differ from your own. Students will bring paper copies of your writing projects to class; the work will then be distributed, critiqued at home, and brought to the following class for discussion. Editors are asked to offer line edits on the page and at least a paragraph of typewritten comments that address the overall tenor of the work; please bring two copies of the latter, one to return to the author, and one for me.

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

We will also do short, two-page writing assignments on a specific topic each week that reinforce the week's lesson; these will allow you to experiment, as they will be graded simply on quantity (the fact you've done the assignment) rather than quality. Students should hand in ten two-pagers over the course of the term; you may choose which weeks to omit according to your preference. As these assignments are not graded, I will not be providing comments on them, merely reading them for content.

PRESENTATIONS

Each student will give a ten-minute talk on one of the texts on our required reading list, e.g. the author's use of voice, structure or point of view, or perhaps their way of dealing with dialogue or controversial material. Other presentations will offer insights in literary craft separate from the required reading, breaking down for the class techniques we can use to write creative nonfiction.

BORDERLANDS EVENT REVIEWS

As part of our Borderlands exploration, students will be required to attend two events listed on the Borderlands website, <http://www.sjsu.edu/humanitiesandarts/Borderlands/index.html>. Afterward you should write a two-page review of the experience, which will be due on December 5. Please plan your schedule accordingly.

**The reason for evil in the world is that
people are not able to tell their stories.
— Carl Gustav Jung**

CLASS PROTOCOL

There are no trigger warnings in the nonfiction workshop, because this genre represents real life, which is fraught with violence, racism, heartache, addiction, and—thank god—sex. Students are welcome to disagree with one another during class discussions; however, all our dialogue must be conducted with respect for each individual's opinions and work. In addition, the use of laptops or cell phones is forbidden while class is in session.

OFFICE HOURS

Please feel free to visit me during my office hours; it's a good idea to make an appointment, otherwise I work on a first-come, first-served basis. Email is meant for brief questions and I encourage you to use it sparingly; this is not an online course. If you are absent, please contact one of your classmates to find out what you missed.

ATTENDANCE

Required, because your contributions are fundamental to English 242's course objectives; for example, students are required to interact with others in the class in our goal to create a literary community. Students who come in after roll call will be considered absent. If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than one class, please contact me as soon as possible.

PAPER FORMAT

Hard copies of submissions are due the week before your workshop date. All material handed in should follow the same guidelines as those for submitting professional manuscripts:

- typewritten, double-spaced, black ink with copy dark enough to be easily read
- one-inch margins on all sides
- text on one side of the paper only
- 12-point type in a highly-legible font, preferably Times New Roman or Courier New
- indented paragraphs (the appropriate format for print essays, *not* double spacing between paragraphs)
- your name and the assignment title single-spaced in the upper left-hand corner of the first sheet
- title centered on the first page
- pages numbers included
- pages stapled or paper-clipped together

Points will be subtracted for improper formatting.

**The very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world...
lies will pass into history.
— George Orwell**

**The writer isn't made in a vacuum. Writers are witnesses.
The reason we need writers is because we need witnesses
to this terrifying century.**

— E. L. Doctorow

GRADE REQUIREMENTS

Grades are meant to reflect—quite simply—the quality of a student's work. Final grades will be calculated thus:

40% workshop submissions (see grading guidelines below)

20% 10 two-page assignments (on the number completed)

20% verbal and written critiques (on the student's dedication to helping your peers)

10% presentation (on the quality and delivery of information)

10% literary event reviews

Grading Guidelines:

A paper: has a creative approach, polished prose free of mechanical problems, keeps the reader's interest, is organized logically, flows smoothly, impresses the reader with the author's ethos and command of the topic, was delivered on deadline and within the appropriate word count.

B paper: has all the above except may contain one or two minor areas for improvement.

C paper: C is considered "average" by departmental policy. Usually a C paper offers lackluster creativity and/or content and needs further refinement at the prose level.

D paper: is either substantially shorter than the required word count, or has so many problem areas that it is difficult to follow because it contains poorly-crafted content or a plethora of mechanical problems. It is below the standard of writing acceptable for a graduate course.

F paper: is a failure to achieve the majority of requirements outlined above for an A paper.

Note that pluses or minuses may be added to grades that are in between two letter grades.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment 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. In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

The link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. <http://www.sjsu.edu/qup/syllabusinfo/>

Literature is the conscience of the culture.

— Jayne Anne Phillips

Schedule for Nonfiction Workshop
English 242, Section 1 – Fall 2019

MD=Madame Depardieu and the Beautiful Strangers
LD=The Light in the Dark

DATE	ASSIGNMENT DUE THAT DAY
Aug. 22	1. Introduction to the course Snack Patrol: Dina Eastwood
Aug. 29	2. Write 2-pager: a story of how immigration has touched my life Presentation: interviewing people from other cultures by Sharon Simonson Snack Patrol: Talia Adry & Lily Dalton
Sept. 5	3. Write 2-pager: interview someone from a different culture than your own and write a profile Presentation: how to navigate the minefield of political correctness by Dina Eastwood Snack Patrol: Les Brady
Sept. 12	4. Story of the night! Write 2-pager: record a scene from your week using sensory detail NO PRESENTATION
Sept. 19	5. Write 2-pager: on your experiences with Story of the Night! geared toward local readers Presentation: writing for a global audience A.J. Mackillop Presentation: tips for interviewing trauma survivors by Lily Dayton Snack Patrol: Les Brady & Ching Ching Tan
Sept. 20	Reed 152 Launch with Jonathan Franzen
Sept. 26	6. Write 2-pager: based on your experiences with Story of the Night! geared toward a global audience Presentation: writing for the web vs. writing for print by Brian L. Smith Snack Patrol: Shannon Riley
Sept. 27-30	MFA exam
Oct. 3	7. Write 2-pager: tell a story about your personal life utilizing universal themes Read MD Part I (pgs. 1-133) Presentation: on Antonia Quirke by Rachel Crawford. Presentation: discuss narrative voice, p.o.v. in MD by Sophia Apodaca Snack Patrol: Gabriela Dolores
Oct. 10	8. Write 2-pager: turn up the volume on your voice Read MD Part II (pgs. 133-246) Presentation: discuss characterization, pacing & narrative devices in MD by Sarah Dalton-Erickson Snack Patrol: Brian Smith
Oct. 10	CLA presents Rita Bullwinkel

- Oct. 17 9. Write 2-pager: write a thematic essay with an agenda of advocacy (telling)
 Read MD Part III (pgs. 246-conclusion)
 Presentation: discuss structure in MD by C.J. Prusi
 Snack Patrol: A.J. MacKillop
- Oct. 24 10. Write 2-pager: tell a story with an agenda of advocacy (showing)
 Presentation: conversation with Antonia Quirke led by Aleix Hodges
 Snack Patrol: Dina Eastwood
- Oct. 24 CLA presents Carmen Maria Machado
- Oct. 31 11. Write 2-pager explaining the Trump phenomenon to another country
 Read LD I (pgs. 1-73)
 Presentation: on Horatio Clare A.J. MacKillop.
 Presentation: discuss narrative voice, p.o.v. in LD Ching Ching Tan
 Snack Patrol: Sharon Simonson
- Nov. 7 12. Write 2-pager a personal anecdote on the environment and/or climate change
 Read LD II (pgs. 73-144)
 Presentation: discuss characterization, pacing & narrative devices in LD by Shannon Riley
 Snack Patrol: Sarah Dalton-Erickson
- Nov. 7 CLA presents Tyehimba Jess & Harmony Holiday
- Nov. 14 13. Write 2-pager an opinion piece on the environment and/or climate change
 Read LD III (pgs. 144-conclusion)
 Presentation: discuss structure in LD by Gabriela Dolores
 Snack Patrol: Aleix Hodges
- Nov. 21 14. Write 2-pager: write your own meditation on the Borderlands theme
 Conversation with Horatio Clare
 Presentation: how to represent a character through dialogue by Sherri Harvey
 Snack Patrol: C.J. Prusi & A.J. Mackillop
- Nov. 21 CLA presents Marilyn Chin, Shawn Wong, & Lawson Fusao Inada
- Nov. 28 THANKSGIVING BREAK (gobble gobble)
- Dec. 5 15. Write 2-pager: tell a story strictly in dialogue & differentiate the characters through their voice
 Presentation: how do we represent a culture? by Talia Adry
 Snack Patrol: Sophia Apodaca
- Dec. 5 Steinbeck Fellows reading
- Dec. 12 Final Reading, Party, & Tearful Farewells