

San José State University | Department of English & Comparative Literature
ENGL 242-28161 (01) | Nonfiction Writing Workshop | Spring 2020

Instructor: Faith Adiele, Lurie Visiting Writer
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Office Hours: Thursdays, 3:00-4:00 PM and 6:45-7:15 PM
Class Days/Time: Thursdays, 4:00-6:45 PM
Classroom: Hugh Gillis Hall 227

Course Description

This workshop explores the intersection of personal narrative, research and lyric in creative nonfiction in the digital age. Class discussion will focus on figuring out what form your story wants, using research to create innovative structure and metaphor, leveraging the oral tradition, and the possibilities that hybrid writing affords multicultural/ multilingual/ gender fluid/ cross-genre and other complex stories. In addition to workshopping stand-alone essays or thesis chapters, assignments will involve short experiments with mapping, digital storytelling, visual reporting and other innovations. Texts may include an analysis of innovative narrative forms found in nature, and a researched, mixed-genre memoir about California natives.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

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

Required Texts/Readings

Jane Alison, *Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative*, Catapult Press, ISBN 9781948226134

Deborah A. Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, Heydey Books, ISBN 9781597142014

Any supplemental texts will be provided on Canvas. Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on Canvas. Login at <http://sjsu.instructure.com>. You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU on Spartan App Portal <http://one.sjsu.edu> for updates.

Course Requirements and Assignments

WORKSHOP

You will workshop at least two pieces of new or substantially revised CNF over the course of the semester. Submissions may be articles, essays, or book chapters, but should range from 1,500 to 5,000 words. Include a cover letter (a synopsis of the overall project, the theme of this particular piece, literary models/influences, specific areas you're looking for help, things you're trying or changes made as a result of feedback, intended audience, etc.) that allows us to be the best possible readers for your work. Pieces submitted for workshop should be complete and polished.

You will be graded on your written and oral feedback to your peers, as learning to critique develops editing, teaching, reading and literary citizenship skills. Constructive discussion will consider the author's intention and focus on dramatizing the theme of a piece, developing its characters (both people and place), and determining the specific sub-genre, form, and structure it demands. Bring (do not email later) 2 typed copies of a 300 to 500-word response letter (one for the author, one for me). It should analyze the writing in relation to our craft discussions/readings and make constructive editing and reading suggestions.

Post your work and critiques in the Discussions section on Canvas, where you will also find Workshop Protocol.

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

You will also do short, two-page experiments with the narrative and craft strategies we're studying. Depending on time, there may be opportunity to share them for group feedback.

PRESENTATIONS

You will read, analyze and occasionally lead discussion of the text. Their purpose is to inspire your own writing, give us a shared vocabulary of craft and theory, and demonstrate some of nonfiction's possibilities. You will not love every reading, but you can learn from every reading and contribute to the discussion of what it teaches about strategy and craft. Plan to give a researched, ten-minute talk about or a close read of one of the required texts, breaking down techniques we can use to write creative nonfiction.

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

1-Unit Enhancement: Attendance at Literary Readings & Written Responses

During the semester, you are required to attend two readings by published authors (who have published at least one book) in the greater Bay area. The Center for Literary Arts here at SJSU is the premiere reading series of Silicon Valley, and the 2019-2020 season will host some of the most exciting voices in contemporary American literature. Additionally, the Bay Area is one of the world's great literary regions. Readings are listed in the Sunday editions of the *San Jose Mercury News* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and in *Metro*.

You are to write a short review essay (1,000 – 1,500 words) about each of the readings you attended, analyzing language and structure (giving the titles and quoting specific lines/passages). Turn in each review within one week of attending said readings. Each review

essay will be peer-reviewed by another student in the class and supervised by the instructor. Finally, you will revise each essay, incorporating comments from the peer reviewer and the instructor.

You may include secondary sources or commentaries the author has published about their work (documented in conventional MLA-format for research papers). Look for examples of the author's work you heard read by getting their books, or finding their work on reputable websites. Should you be unable to attend two readings live in-person, you can find full-length streamed recordings of readings given at UC Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and other Bay Area universities and universities around the nation.

CLASS PROTOCOL

As this is graduate school, the expectation is that you will come to class on time and prepared, readings in hand, participate actively in discussion, and submit polished work when due. We all play a role in creating an environment where we are comfortable taking artistic risks, speaking honestly, and disagreeing collegially. That means listening respectfully to each other, engaging with different ideas/points of view, and being intentional in our use of written and spoken language. Personal attacks and offensive or inappropriate language will not be tolerated.

The use of laptops or cell phones is forbidden while class is in session.

As a writer, you must become very disciplined about setting your own deadlines and sticking to them. Late work will not be accepted. If you need to change your workshop date, it is on you to find a classmate willing to swap.

OFFICE HOURS

Feel free to visit me during my office hours. As I live in Oakland, I will only be on campus the day of class; however, I am happy to come down early or stay late. Email me to schedule. If you are absent, please contact one of your classmates to find out what you missed.

ATTENDANCE

Is mandatory, because your contributions are fundamental to English 242's course objectives. If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than one class, please contact me with the proper documentation as soon as possible.

PAPER FORMAT

Unless non-traditional formatting is central to the experience of your piece, manuscripts should be professionally formatted (one-inch margins, double spacing, page numbers). Points will be subtracted for improper formatting.

GRADING INFORMATION

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. Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

1. 40% workshop submissions
2. 20% short assignments
3. 20% verbal and written critiques
4. 10% presentation
5. 10% literary event reviews

DETERMINATION OF GRADES

The Department of English and Comparative Literature reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

SCHEDULE

1/23	Intros. The genre. Our interests. In-class writing exercises. MFA Open House, 6:30 PM Reading
1/30	Creative Responses to Miranda (xi-xx, 1-74) Round Robin Workshop
2/6	Creative Responses to Miranda (76-150) / FACILITATOR: CLA: Tommy Orange, 7 PM Reading & Conversation
2/13	Creative Responses to Miranda (151-208) CLA: Faith Adiele, 4 PM Reading & Conversation – MEET and sit together in the Steinbeck Center Room, MLK Library
2/20	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: Round Robin Workshop
2/27	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: Round Robin Workshop CLA: Jamel Brinkley, 7 PM Reading & Conversation
3/5	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: WORKSHOP Round 1: AWP San Antonio
3/12	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: WORKSHOP Round 1:
3/19	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: WORKSHOP Round 1:
3/26	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: WORKSHOP Round 1: CLA: Naomi Shihab Nye, 4 PM Craft Lecture, 7PM Reading (CCA Spring Break)
4/2	NO CLASS - SJSU Spring Recess March 30-April 3
4/9	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR: WORKSHOP Round 2:
4/16	Creative Responses to Alison / FACILITATOR:

	WORKSHOP Round 2:
4/23	WORKSHOP Round 2:
4/30	WORKSHOP Round 2:
5/7	NO CLASS
5/14	MAKE-UP CLASS / FINALS WEEK Revisions DUE