

Welcome to Eng 71/Section 3/Creative Writing!

Spring 2021

This class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays--12:00-1:15...

"The more you read, the more you will write. The better the stuff you read, the better the stuff you will write"-- Annie Dillard.

The shortest short story Ernest Hemingway ever wrote is one of his best—and only six words long: “For Sale: Baby shoes, Never Worn.”

From the fireside glow of bygone days to our modern living rooms brimming with technology, storytelling keeps us company, helps us understand our worlds, feel our humanity, travel to far-away places. Since childhood, many of us have imagined stories as an avenue out of our mundane, ordinary world into extraordinary lands and adventures. But how has the art of the story (particularly short stories and their telling) mesmerized us so thoroughly throughout the ages? Why do they matter? What do they tell us about our humanity? Why do we want to create our own stories?

Multi--genre spoken-word Poet Phillip Kaye gives us ideas for storytelling [here](#).

The Class Structure:

Mondays: ON YOUR OWN. Check and read the weekly Canvas post. Read the assigned reading and be ready to discuss it on Zoom during class time tomorrow.

Tuesdays: (scheduled meeting time.) Discuss reading I posted

Thursdays: (scheduled meeting time.) WRITE, WRITE, WRITE! I will hold Zoom meetings online both days with the expectation that on Tuesdays, we discuss readings and on Thursdays, we WRITE. Yes, during class time. Yes, as a group but individually. Every single week.

Please make sure you pay attention to deadlines. You need to find a CLA reading to attend, so don't let that part creep up on you. Keep reading the book of your choosing all semester as well.

Course Description

In this course, we will study the main genres of creative writing to prepare you for upper-level creative writing courses. We will also help you develop your figurative language skills to “dress up” your own writing and make it more appealing to others. But, most importantly, we will write--AND READ--a lot!

But, this will be an unusual class in terms of form. We will be starting each week with a focused idea, then reading an assigned reading for discussion on Tuesday during our Zoom meeting, and on Thursday, you will write.

All the while, you will be reading one of these books to prepare for your final essay on this book due the last week of class.

READINGS: (choose one, but read all for reference)

Lamott, Anne. [Bird By Bird](#), Anchor, 1995.

Hass Robert. [Twentieth Century Pleasures](#), Ecco Press, 1997.

Rich, Adrienne, *Arts of the Possible*, Norton, 2002.

King, Stephen, [On Writing](#), Scriber, 2000.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should understand the following:

- the basic techniques and terminology of fiction writing
- the basic techniques and terminology of creative nonfiction writing
- the basic techniques and terminology of poetry writing

- critical reading skills for critiquing fiction, essays, and poetry, both one's own and peers
- a workshop method of critiquing creative writing
- the importance of revision within the creative writing process

ASSIGNMENTS

These objectives will be accomplished and evaluated through the following work:

- 100 pts: examination essay of published works (1 essay) from one of these books of your choice (100 pts). **WORK ON READING THIS ALL SEMESTER.**
- 50 pts: your report of a [CLA event](#) at SJSU (100 pts)
- 500 pts: ten discussion posts (500)
- 100 pts: 2 peer reviews (100)
- 100 pts: 2 polished, revised pieces ready for publication
- 100 pts: your final Adobe Spark Portfolio: (200 points) which includes 3 pieces from your work all semester submitted in Adobe Spark as a portfolio
- 50 pts: Create a [Submittable](#) account, Submit one piece. Submit a screenshot for a grade.

MORE ON THE ASSIGNMENTS:

10 Discussion Posts (50 points each=500)

2 Polished Revised Pieces ready for publication (100 points)

CLA Report (100 points): You are required to attend one outside event during the semester. You will need to turn in a one-page report on the event.

FINAL BOOK REPORT

(You may turn in either of theses at any time up until the last regular class period.)

2 Peer Reviews (100 points): Workshops borrow elements from the artist studio, where students work with an artist, practicing their craft, sharing their works in progress with the teacher and fellow students and receiving feedback with an eye toward revision.

For the workshop critiques, the grade will be based on the quality of the critiques you are handing in, as well as your spoken input during the workshop. I look here for insightful and valuable criticism that goes beyond a simple reaction to the work. Note, too, that if you're not in class, you can't participate in a workshop beyond posting your critique, and you will not receive full credit for that workshop. Attendance can affect this grade as well.

Try to use the "pat/slap" method of critiquing -- your commentary on the work should give both positive as well as negative feedback, and present any negative comments in as positive a manner as possible. I also expect criticism to be concrete and specific: anyone responding "Well, I liked it" or "I didn't like this paragraph" will immediately be asked the question: "Why?"

When you're critiqued, in turn, please remember to take any negative feedback as being intended to help you -- remember that your fellow students are critiquing your work, not you personally.

ADOBE SPARK PORTFOLIO (100 points): This is the heart of the class. At the final regular class of the summer, you will turn in a chapbook containing **THREE REVISED WORKS FROM YOUR DISCUSSION POSTS**. The expectation here is that your 'final' revisions will be more substantial than simple proofing or correcting of spelling/grammatical mistakes. Failure to turn in your portfolio at all will obviously result in 0 points and failure of the course. Grading of the portfolio will be based primarily on the strength of the final revisions against the previous version, but I will also be looking at adherence to proper manuscript form. I want to note that I will *not* be comparing your work to the work of anyone else in the class. I'm looking for the improvement you personally have made from the draft you turned in to the workshop to the final product, as well as seeing you integrate skills and knowledge gleaned from the material presented to you.

Create a Submittable Account (50 points)

General Contact Information: 650-269-1288/sherri.harvey@sjsu.edu

I'm available to you as a resource for this class, and will try to respond to your emails (usually the best way to get hold of me) or phone calls as soon as possible, and, if needed,

to make time to meet with you at your request. Should you email me, I typically will respond within one working day of receiving the message (and often sooner). *If you do not receive a reply from me, assume that for some reason I did not receive the message and send it again.* The excuse “but I sent you an email about that...” will not be accepted.

I would suggest you obtain the phone number or e-mail address of a few other students in the class so that you can check with them on what was missed during any class that you're unable to attend.

Class Policies & Expectations:

Participation: Please keep up.

What is participation? I expect that each student will engage in our workshop discussions, as well as any additional lecture material. The more you have input into the class, the more we'll all learn. I much prefer not to call on people and force them to respond -- that is *not* class participation. Of course, if you're absent, you can't participate at all. I don't expect everyone to be “on” each and every class day -- we all have our off days -- but I do expect regular participation from each student. **THIS MEANS READ** what is assigned and be ready to talk about it.

Late assignments: Late assignments or failure to bring required material to class will make it difficult for all students. Therefore, stories or assignments turned in late will not be accepted.

Conduct: Respect is the key. Your attitude is an important component of participation. Your attitude should not be confrontational, nor should you put down other students' work or opinions, whether through too-aggressive argument or through use of humor at other students' expense. Like any critical conversation where participants bring different experiences to their understanding of the issues, ours will undoubtedly generate strong emotions, reactions, questions, affirmations, and disagreements. Healthy dialogue requires careful listening, respect for other people's perspectives, and a willingness to examine our own assumptions. We must feel free to disagree--but disagreement needn't imply dismissal of other perspectives. I encourage you to keep an open and inquisitive mind and realize that intellectual discomfort is not always a negative thing. Our goal is

not agreement, but *understanding*. Understanding is a process that may first require some unlearning of old habits and ways of seeing the world.

TABOOS AND ADMONITIONS:

Given that my own stories have contained pretty much everything, I'm open to nearly anything in the way of content or subject matter or genre. But... given that the focus for this class is on writing good, publishable fiction, here are some exceptions and guidelines:

- Avoid blatant erotica. You *can* sell erotica -- there's a thriving market for it, in fact. But I don't want to see it in this class. Sexual content must be integral to the story and not be intended to titillate or shock the audience. *If your story needs copious amounts of sex to make someone read your story, you haven't done your job as a writer.* Who gets to decide if you're overstepping the bounds here? I do...
- Avoid gratuitous violence. A certain amount of physical confrontation is fine in a story, but again it must be integral to the plot and not glorified for its own sake or the sake of shocking the audience. *If your story needs copious amounts of violence to make someone read your story, you haven't done your job as a writer.* Who gets to decide if the violence is gratuitous? I do...
- Avoid gratuitous profanity. I have no personal taboo against 'bad language' in your work -- we're all 'adults' here, and I've certainly used coarse and frank language in my own writing when appropriate. If characterization and plot require such, fine, but as with sexual content and violence, *if you're using profanity because it's the only way you can shock the audience, you're not doing your job as a writer.* Who gets to decide if there's too much foul language? Yes, you're right... I do.
- No game/media fan fiction (Buffy, Harry Potter, Star Trek, Star Wars, D&D, etc) or fan fiction of any popular book/TV/movie series. Why? 1) there's a very limited market for this type of fiction, and in fact it can be construed as violating the copyright of another person; 2) it assumes a knowledge from its readers that the general audience doesn't possess; 3) part of learning to become a writer is the process of creating unique characters, worlds, and settings -- this aspect is lost (or at the very least, much diminished) in writing fan fiction.

- As they say in every book, all characters are fictional -- please do not use the names of your classmates, friends, family, etc. unless you have 1) a very good reasons and 2) have obtained their permission to do so.

Plots I prefer not to see at all because they are clichés:

- Anything with vampires or zombies -- they have both been used to utter death, if you'll pardon the pun.
- "...And it was all just a dream..." -- and thus the entire story was entirely pointless.
- the re-telling of a Shakespearean plot in the present time, the future, the past, or an alternate universe
- re-telling of the movie you just saw with the names and sundry details changed
- the historical character transplanted into another time (as in, the serial killer turns out to be Jack the Ripper or Adolf Hitler)
- the person lost in a virtual reality (can you say The Matrix?)
- the hard-boiled, wisecracking detective with a drinking/drug problem
- 'surprise' endings and 'joke' endings -- these rarely-to-never work.
- the "abused child as excuse" story -- abuse in childhood as the excuse for the character turning out to be a serial killer, rapist, etc. This is overdone.
- The "abused child/wife who gains his/her revenge" story. Again, it's been done thousands of times.
- The "I'm a young person who uses a lot of drugs" story -- done so often that it's no longer either poignant or amusing.
- The "I have cancer but my faith saved me" story or its many variations -- sorry, but miracles make for bad fiction.

If you think you have something like this that nobody has ever seen before, ask me first.

Plots you *can* use but must be very careful with (especially since many of them require a much longer form than the short story to work well):

- The 'plot-less' literary story (there's a difference between an exploration of character and just moving your characters around randomly...)
- time travel (the paradoxes will eat you up... and the basic plots have already been used to death)

- alternate histories (you'd better have done your research, it had better be something people actually know, and you'd must be able to make it interesting. Please leave Hitler and Caesar alone.)
- The “Civil War” story, or any other popular time period (again, you'd better have done your research, and you must find a period that people will be interested in)
- Police Procedural mysteries (these can be interesting when well done, but you'd better know the real procedures... and have some interesting characters to boot.)
- The “It’s all a Big Conspiracy” story (not everyone is as paranoid as you think, and again you'll need a fresh, interesting conspiracy)
- Terrorists from the Middle East -- there absolutely are terrorists from the Middle East, as we know all too well... but *everyone's* writing about them, so unless you can do it better...
- Spy stories (unfortunately for writers, Russia has imploded and left us without a handy adversary... and James Bond is old and tired)
- The ‘Haunted House’ or ghost story (a familiar subject for horror writers, but... It's difficult to come up with new and interesting angles here. Shirley Jackson did it best long ago in the "Haunting of Hill House." And there are only so many Indian burial grounds...)
- Dragons, elves, wizards, dinosaurs, mutants, cute and cuddly aliens or familiars: these have been (over-)used so many times that you're advised to avoid them unless you have some absolutely new twist and you *really* know the genre inside and out.

Student Honor Code. The work you will do for this course is subject to the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code is a commitment to the highest degree of ethical integrity in academic conduct, a commitment that, individually and collectively, the students at Northern Kentucky University will not lie, cheat, or plagiarize to gain an academic advantage over fellow students or to avoid academic requirements. It should go without saying that plagiarism will absolutely not be tolerated. Plagiarism will result in an “F” for the work in question or even an “F” for the course depending on the severity of the offense.

Important Final Note: By deciding to stay in this class, you are agreeing to all parts of this syllabus. In fairness to everyone, the syllabus must apply equally to all students without exception. However, this syllabus may change in response to class needs during

the course of the semester; should that occur, you will be notified of the change in writing, and the change, if at all possible, will be in your favor.