San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
ENGLISH 240: Poetry Workshop
Spring 2022

Instructor: Prof. Alan Soldofsky
Office Location: FO 106
Telephone: 408-924-4432
Email: alan.soldofsky@sjsu.edu
Office Hours: M, W 3:30 – 5:00 PM
(Due to the Pandemic, office hours will be held at outside locations or remotely on Zoom; by appointment)
Class Days/Time: M 7:00 – 9:45 PM
Zoom Link: https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1474202
Classroom: On Zoom and CL 111; For a limited number of in-person local students
Credit Units: 4 Credits

Course Description
English 240 is an MFA-level poetry workshop in which students write, revise and complete new poems. The course will include regular discussions of poetics and the theory and craft of poetry, as well as an examination of trends in contemporary poetry in the United States and internationally. Students will also learn to how finish revisions of poems to potentially include in their thesis manuscript and to potentially to submit for publication in small magazines, literary journals, and Websites. The course may be taken four times for credit (toward the MFA degree).

Thematic Focus: Poetry for Hard Times—Taking Risks: Poetry of Protest, Resistance, and Empowerment

The Workshop is intended to further develop each class members’ abilities to write poems that take risks, that stand up for social change, and meditate on ways to promote environmental justice through forms of poetic art. In the workshop, we will practice using good strategies for generating and revising poems. The class will also require you to consider your work in light of issues of the poet's craft, and to articulate your individual sensibility in a time of peril. Though the central text will be class members’ poems, students will also be asked to read and respond to the work of contemporary poets, as well as to essays on the craft of poetry, especially to the poetry of healing, resistance, perseverance through grief, to find forms of empowerment. The class will include some attention to the fundamentals of prosody, as well as best practices for writing in "non-metrical” forms. We will give close attention to a poem’s syntax and lineation,
form, structure, and image—in how the poem produces its meaning. The Workshop will be taught as a hybrid virtual/in-person class. We will use Zoom and Canvas to facilitate workshopping poems both inside and outside of class. Each class member will complete a portfolio of at least 8 poems, and also give an in-class presentation. During the semester students will read a diversity of recent books of poetry by poets whose work includes a concern for social and environmental justice. We’ll read these works together selected from a larger reading. Students will lead discussions of the books/poets who they are reading, in class and on Canvas.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Course Goals:

- Complete a portfolio consisting of (depending on length) of eight finished (revised) original poems. Including poems written for Poetry Prompts #1, #2, and #3. #4 is optional extra-credit.
- Explore varied modes and forms of contemporary poetry—from modern takes on traditional forms to experimental postmodern poetry.
- Workshop early drafts poems on Canvas; to receive peer comments and comment on peers’ poems throughout the semester.
- Workshop peers’ poems in class on a weekly basis, using Canvas as the space for each week’s poetry workshop worksheet.
- Investigate the art of syntax in poetry and its relationship to the making of the poetic line, reading Carl Phillip’s book The Art of Daring.
- Investigate recent collections of poems by mostly younger and contemporary poets whose work engages issues of climate change, the environment, immigration and/or other social justice matters.
- Write a 2,500 – 3,000-word analysis paper in which you analyze one of the poet’s poetry collections from the Recommended Reading list, whose work you have become interested in investigating. Your analysis should include some close reading/craft analysis of at least one poem in the collection; a discussion of signature characteristics of the poet’s work; mode and style of the poems; themes, approaches to topical subject, etc. (if appropriate).
- Give a 10-minute poetry analysis/close-reading presentation in class, discussing Carl Phillip’s craft analysis of a poem from an assigned reading from the The Art of .
- Give a 10-minute poetry analysis/close reading presentation, analyzing the craft a poem by one of the poets whose collection(s) you are reading for your longer poetry book analysis paper.

English Department Students Learning Goals

This course supports several of the English Department’s Student Learning Goals. The Department of English and Comparative Literature seeks to foster the intellectual development of its majors by encouraging study of literature and writing—whether creative, technical, or other professional writing. The Department strives to make its majors familiar with a wide range of works of British, American, and World literature, including folk and popular forms; and with the nature of the canon and of canon-formation, including issues of culture, history, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.
Learning Objectives:
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

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<tr>
<th>Student Learning Objectives:</th>
<th>Skills/Knowledge Acquired:</th>
<th>Activities:</th>
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| SLO 1: Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to write and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (poetry). | 1. Students will learn to apply the craft of poetry writing in free verse and traditional meters and forms. | 1. Write and revised at least eight original poems.  
2. Apply close-reading and knowledge of poetic craft to completing revisions of original poems. |
| SLO 2: Students will demonstrate high-level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (poetry). | See above. | See above. |
| SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing. | 1. Recognize trends in contemporary creative writing (poetry).  
2. Identify developments within poetry, and the development of individual authors and schools/styles of writing.  
3. To effectively analyze and apply the elements of poetic craft (diction, syntax, image, form, etc.) to make revisions of one’s own poems and offer constructive criticism to peers in workshopping their poems. | 1. Give an in-class close-reading/craft presentation discussing a poem from The Art of Syntax.  
2. Give a 10-minute poetry analysis/close reading presentation, analyzing the craft of a poem by one of the poets whose collection(s) you are reading from the recommended reading list.  
3. Write a 2,500 – 3,000-word analysis paper in which you analyze one of the poet’s poetry collections from the Recommended Reading list. |
| SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts. | 1. Close read peers’ poems and essays  
2. Evaluate strengths (successes) and weaknesses (problems) in peers’ poems as well as published poems by notable authors. | 1. Workshop peers’ poems weekly.  
2 |

Required Books
Recommended Reading

You are also required to choose one of the following poetry collections to read closely and to analyze one or more aspects of craft used in representative poems. You are also required to give a class presentation based on a close reading and craft analysis of one or two of the poems in the collection (if the poems are shorter). And to make a case study about the poems in the collection you’ve chosen.

Victoria Chang, The Trees Witness Everything (published April 2022)
M.K. Chavez, Dear Animal
Rita Dove, Playlist for the Apocalypse
Camille T. Dungy, Trophic Cascade
Tongo Eisen-Martin, Blood on the Fog
Forrest Gander, Twice Alive
Martin Espada, Floaters
Lara Gularte, Fourth World Woman
Terrance Hayes, American Sonnets for My Once and Future Assassin
Yusef Komunyakaa, Everyday Mojo Songs of Earth: New and Selected Poems 2001 - 2020
Nate Marshall, Finna
Craig Santos Perez, Habitat Threshold
Katie Peterson, Life in a Field
Carl Phillips, Then the War: Selected Poems 2007 - 2021
Diane Seuss, Frank: Sonnets
Alan Soldofsky, In the Buddha Factory (Links to an external site.)

ON-LINE RESOURCES:

| Course Homepage on Canvas URL | Update to date course information, syllabus, class activities, worksheets, reading/writing assigned, instructor and student blogs, presentation notes and slides, etc. |
| Academy of American Poets URL | Large resource with thousands of poems, essays, biographies, weekly features, and poems for special occasions. www.poets.org |
| The Poetry Foundation URL | Publisher of Poetry magazine, an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in American culture. A large website containing thousands of poems, biographical essays, teaching ideas, blogs, and archived issues of Poetry. http://www.poetryfoundation.org/ |
Overview of Workshop Procedures
This class is conducted primarily as a writers’ workshop, which requires active student participation. For the workshop, students will write (and revise), new poems (or essays) for other class members to read and discuss on the Canvas course site. The instructor will moderate the workshop discussion. All students are expected to actively participate as critics except when their own work is under discussion. In class we will also discuss poems published in works from the assigned and recommended readings lists, and on the weekly PLAYLISTS on Canvas.

The poems you post should be single-spaced, with a double space between stanzas. Out of respect for yourself and your classmates, please observe the courtesy of proofing your poems before post them. Please follow standard conventions for usage, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. If you deviate from conventional textual practice for aesthetic reasons, you must be able to defend your work to the instructor.

All poems submitted to the workshop must be your own original work (no translations), and written for this course exclusively. You may not hand in any poem you wrote for another course.

Etiquette for Student Writing Groups and Class Workshop Discussions

- When you comment on peers’ work, mention what you find to be the strengths as well as offer constructive criticism of the work.

- When your poem(s) are being discussed in the class workshop, listen politely or ask permission to ask a question to clarify what a class member is explaining. Do not interrupt to defend your poem. You will have the opportunity to clarify or explain your intentions in the poem following the critical discussion. Remember, if your poem is published online or printed in a journal, you will not be present to explain the poem.

- As an author whose writing is being discussed, you will want your peers’ comments to be helpful for revising your poems. Please keep this in mind when you offer your “take” on others’ poems in the classroom Workshop or post comments on Canvas.

- SJSU respects students’ diversity and privacy. A poetry workshop should be a safe space. What happens in the workshop is not to be discussed publicly without other participants’ explicit permission. Do not submit work or make (or write) comments that will intentionally cause offense or hurt to another student (or instructor). Remember, the criticism in a workshop is not personal. It is about the work, not the author.
• If such purposely offensive or hurtful work or comments are found, the instructor will first discuss it with you, then remove the poem or comment from the Canvas Workshop Discussion. If you persist in posting knowingly and purposely offensive material that is intended to disrupt the Workshop, you will receive 0 credit for work. Poets often address sensitive issues or challenge readers’ sensibilities and mores in their poems. If you have written something that you think might possibly offend someone else in the class, check with the instructor before you post it. If you post potentially offensive or hurtful material, you are encouraged to include a “trigger warning.” And check with the instructor before you post the work.

• If you do not abide by these etiquette guidelines, you will receive one warning from the instructor. If you do not follow the etiquette guidelines after you have received one warning, warning the instructor may ban you from attending the class. (You would have to complete the course requirements online via Canvas, where your comments will be strictly monitored.)

Seminar Presentations
Each student will give in-class presentations during the seminar. Notes, slides, and other handouts and materials for these presentations are required to be posted in Canvas the Wednesday before the presentation date. (Fulfills SLO’s 3,4.)

• Present the close-reading and analysis of poems from an assigned segment of Carl Phillip’s The Art of Daring. Be sure to include Phillip’s as well as your own close reading/analysis a poem(s) Phillips reads in his book. (As scheduled in Canvas.)
• Present a short close-reading and annotated analysis a poem(s) from the poet whose collection you are investigating for your case study (fourth unit) assignment. Post links to sample poems from the poet’s book(s) on Canvas when it’s your week to present. Some or all of your close reading can be included in your analysis paper of this collection.
  Examples: How does a particular poem's imagery embody or dramatize its concerns or themes? How is rhythm working to enhance or reinforce the poem’s emotion? How do the line lengths or line breaks add to or intensify the poem? How is a particular poem's rhetoric or poetic structure or form used to express its subject or theme? (You may post the text of this presentation on Canvas to receive comments.)
  o For extra credit: In a second presentation should also include a poetry writing prompt you’ve created for yourself (and can share), based on a craft or formal technique of interest to you that you find is characteristic or a “signature” this poet’s work. (Could include approach to punctuation, type of syntax, line break, diction, imagery, figurative language, etc.).
Required Writing

Poetry Prompts
Complete poems based on the first three poetry prompts, to include in your poetry portfolio. Prompt #4 is optional—can be included in your portfolio for extra credit.

Prompt #1: Wild Centuries (from Poets & Writers Magazine, *The Time Is Now* [blog])

“You are a hundred wild centuries // And fifteen, bringing with you / In every breath and in every step // Everyone who has come before you,” writes Alberto Ríos in his poem “A House Called Tomorrow,” in which he challenges readers to consider their place in building a better world. In the poem, fitting for the new year, Ríos writes about the weight of the past, then sounds a hopeful note: “Look back only for as long as you must, / Then go forward into the history you will make.” Write a poem about your relationship to the past—your connection to the “wild centuries” of history as well as your own personal past, from early childhood to recent years marked by the private and public transformations of time. Try to include your own revelations along with the inspiration that propels you forward into a new tomorrow. In the poem use a pattern of repetition of words or phrases that propel the poem forward.

Prompt #2: Unrhymed Sonnet & Blues Stophes – Confronting Your Fears for the Future; Resisting Closure

Climate futurist Alex Steffen, host of the “Snap Forward” newsletter says “Yes, California and the world are in bad shape.” And that “We have this idea that the world is either normal and in continuity with what we’ve expected, or it’s the apocalypse, it’s the end of everything — and neither are true… It’s not apocalyptic. If you can wake up and go to work in the morning, you’re not in an apocalypse, right?” Steffen calls what we’re in now “trans-apocalyptic.” Our lives are now defined by “constant engagement with ecological realities” [draughts, floods, wild fires, climate change]. Steffen says. “It is extremely stressful, emotionally, to go through a process of understanding the world as we thought it was, is no longer there.” And “there’s real grief and loss. There’s the shock that comes with recognizing that you are unprepared for what has already happened.”

In her recent *NY Times Magazine* article, Elizabeth Weil, who interviewed Steffen, writes, “I found Steffen’s sweeping, dark pronouncements comforting. He at least had language and a functional metaphor to describe what was going on… Relinquishing the idea of normal will require strength, levelheadedness, optimism and bravery, the grit to keep clinging to some thin vine of hope as we swing out of the wreckage toward some solid ground that we cannot yet see.”

Write an unrhymed American sonnet or blues poem in which you describe—in the first part or first stanza—a few details about things that you miss from the pre-trans-apocalyptic or pre-pandemic past, which were once for you part of your “normal.” Then in the second part or second stanza (or blues refrain), describe a few details about things which represent for your “new normal.” End the poem with a detail about finding the grit to overcome what you fear most about the future.
Prompt #3: Environmental Research Poem--Creating an Extended Metaphor

For this poem, research a particular natural or social phenomenon, as Forrest Gander has done for his "The Redwoods" poem sequence. Write a poem in which you present your research findings, allowing the material to be read both literally and as a metaphor (or allegory) for something more personal and/or social or emotional, which is implied by the poem but not mentioned explicitly. Or if mentioned explicitly, only in the most general way.

Prompt #4: Environmental Waka of Zuititsu (Optional for Extra Credit)

Compose an environmental or socially conscious poem in “waka” form. See examples from Victoria Chang

Or alternatively, compose an environmental or socially conscious poem in tercets (three-line stanzas). Use the same first word in line-1 of the first stanza as the first word in the last line of the last stanza. Write the poem based on specific personal observations of an environmental issue in your home town (or region); or based on an environmental or environmental justice problem you have studied and which affects you personally. See Rachel Hadas’s poem “Smoke” as an example.

Poetry Portfolio
By the end of the semester, you will submit a completed portfolio of at least 8 revised and completed poems, which are of publishable quality. These are poems you may wish to submit to publications (print and digital) and/or include in your thesis collection. (Fulfills SLO’s 1, 2.)

Poetry Workshop Discussion on Canvas
Post your praise and constructive criticism of peer’s poems in the Workshop Discussion on Canvas. You are required to post a comment at least 10 times during the semester. And reply to a comment at least 5 times during the semester. A good post should be about 250 – 300 words, including some close reading/quoting from the poem(s) on which you’re commenting. A good reply should be about 100 – 150 words. (Fulfills SLO’s 1, 2, 4.)

Art of Daring Presentations on Canvas
Each class member is required present and lead at least one Art of Daring in-class Discussion—and reply to five Discussion posts on Canvas. The weekly Discussion Blogs will be used to extend the classroom discussion of these sections from Carl Phillips’ book, Discussion presentations should include slides and or notes, some of which contain close reading/quoting lines from the poems covered in the presentation. (Fulfills SLO’s 3,4.)

Poetry Collection Discussion on Canvas
Each class member is required to contribute a minimum of five posts on the weekly “Poems for Inspiration” links on Canvas—and post at least five replies. (Fulfills SLO’s 3,4.)

1-Unit Credit Enhancement:

Case Study of a Poetry Collection
Make a case study and analysis of a poetry collection you’ve chosen from the Recommended Reading list. You should write on a collection by poet who you see as a potential influence on your own work. Include the following in your case study:

- An analysis of the “signature style or literary characteristics” of the poet’s work in this collection; poetic forms and modes contained in the collection; use of metaphor and/or other types of figurative language; types of rhetoric; range of subjects and themes, etc.
- Include a write up of the analysis of individual poem(s) you’ve previously presented in class.
- An analysis of the audience for this book:
  o Where individual poems in the book were previously published (in journals, etc.).
  o Information about the status/reputation, etc. of the publisher that publishes/distributes this collection.
  o Brief annotated bibliography of reviews (or essays) about this collection—if available. (Summarize what the reviewers have to say.)
  o Describe how select individual poems in the collection address issues of “hard times,” read from the perspective of the ongoing pandemic, social justice, political, and environmental crises we’re experiencing.
  o Put the collection into context in terms the poet’s biography. (Is this a first book, prize-winning book, tenth book, shift from previous style, etc.?)
- Create a poetry prompt (or assignment) you can give yourself (and others) based on the poet’s work in this collection.
  o Include poem(s) you’ve written in response to this prompt.
  o Write a brief (250 – 500 word) analysis of how your poem(s) respond to the prompt you’ve created. And how your poem(s) work as an imitation or homage to this poet.

The case study can be submitted as a folder in Canvas, with files containing the individual components—clearly labeled—inside it. (Fulfills SLO’s 3,4.)

**Credit Hour Requirements:**

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

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 has integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

**Due Dates**

You will turn in the poems in two sets: The instructor will provide you with critical comments and a grade-in-progress for the first set.

- **Poems Set 1 Due:** March 21 (a minimum of 4 completed poems, including Poetry Prompts # 1 and 2).
• Poems Set 2 Due: May 16 (at least 8 completed poems, including any Set 1 revisions, and a second set of 4 (including Poetry Prompts # 3 and #4).
• Poetry Collection Case Study—draft: April 27.
• Poetry Collection Case Study—final draft: May 16.

Grades
• 60% -- Final poetry portfolio.
• 10% -- Participation in the weekly workshops; in class and on Canvas.
• 10% -- Art of Daring seminar presentations including presentation slides, notes, handouts, etc.; also comments on Canvas Discussion.
• 10% -- Craft analysis close reading presentations, including presentation slides, notes, handouts, etc.; also comments on Canvas Discussion.
• 10% -- Case study of poetry collection paper. (One-unit enhancement.)
• 10% -- Extra Credit presentations or writing projects (TBD).

A NOTE ON GRADES: 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 (stanzas).

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.

University policy requires Graduate Students to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA to remain in good standing in their degree program.

In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs, stanzas, or poetic form. Grades issued will represent a full range of student performance and will adhere to the following SJSU academic standards of assessment. 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

University Policies

Academic integrity
**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. Repeated instances of plagiarism will result in a student’s expulsion from the University. You commit plagiarism by:

1. Buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper or creative work;
2. Hiring someone to write a paper or creative work;
3. Building on someone’s ideas without providing a citation;
4. Or copying from another source or using a source too closely when paraphrasing.

In other words, submit only your own work. To learn how to cite sources accurately and forthrightly, consult your handbook.

The instructor reserves the right to revise the requirements and to notify students of such revision in a timely manner, e.g., “subject to change, announced at least one class meeting in advance. Students should know that the University’s [Academic Integrity Policy is available at](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). 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 Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person’s ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU’s Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

**More University Policies**
The link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as additional information on academic integrity, accommodations, etc.

[http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/)
**Course Calendar**

We will conduct an on-going poetry workshop in class until the end of the semester. Poems to be workshopped should be uploaded our Canvas course Workshop Discussion We will workshop students’ poems (one poem at a time) mostly in alphabetical order—except when students have been very active submitting work. Please upload poems as Word files (.doc format or .docx) to Canvas in the appropriate week’s Workshop Discussion. Seminar readings presentations and poem analysis presentations will be assigned by the instructor for the first part of the semester.

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<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Jan. 31:</th>
<th>Orientation; introductions. Course syllabus review. Screening of “You and I Are Disappearing” episode from Poetry in America, PBS. Discussion: Poetry Prompt #1. Individual poems linked via Canvas (Week 1).</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Feb. 28:</td>
<td>POETRY WORKSHOP: Response to Poetry Prompt #2 (Continues) Art of Daring Discussion: pp. 43 – 53. Close Readings of Poems from Recommended Reading List: TBA</td>
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<td>March 28 – April 1:</td>
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<td>Spring Break</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>April 11:</td>
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| POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues.  
Close Readings of Poems from Recommended Reading List: TBA |

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<tr>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>April 18:</th>
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| POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues.  
*Art of Daring* Discussion: pp. 103 – 112.  
Close Readings of Poems from Recommended Reading List: TBA  

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<th>Week 13</th>
<th>May 2:</th>
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| POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues.  
*Art of Daring* Discussion: pp. 115 - 125  
Poem Close Readings of Poems from Recommended Reading List: TBA  
Craft/Analysis Paper Draft Workshop.  
Donald Justice prosody analysis exercise (handout) |

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<th>Week 14</th>
<th>May 9:</th>
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| POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues.  
Close Readings of Poems from Recommended Reading List: TBA  
Craft/Analysis Paper Draft Workshop. |

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<th>Week 15</th>
<th>May 16:</th>
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| POETRY WORKSHOP: Concludes.  
Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA  
Poetry Collection Case Study due May 16.  
Last Discussion Posts due May 20. |