

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Voyage: Fall 2013
Discipline: English
ENWR 2559: Introduction to Creative Writing
Division: Lower Division
Faculty Name: Sarah Jane Sloane

Pre-requisites:

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Creative writing students will practice writing strategies, techniques, and structures, and will learn the basic elements of craft in writing fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. By also reading examples of these genres, students will complement their writing practice by seeing how contemporary writers have navigated shoals similar to their own struggles with craft. In addition to reading short stories, poems, nonfiction, travel writing, and essays on craft, students will be expected to complete several substantive writing exercises as well as a final project. Writing workshops will be the centerpiece of the course, with required background readings tied to some of the countries we visit. The course will be divided evenly among practice in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, with students electing to specialize in one of these genres for their final project. Students are expected to keep a writer's notebook where they transcribe and reflect on their experiences and questions about travel around the Atlantic Rim in each port we visit. The Field Lab will give students a chance to write in different genres, doing a structured set of exercises to stretch them as writers.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To practice writing in multiple genres and for multiple audiences
- To read with a sensitivity to language and an awareness of the rhetorical and technical devices used by contemporary writers
- To develop close reading skills
- To connect Semester at Sea ports with specific creative writing exercises
- To learn how to compose a single sustained piece of writing of more than ten pages

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Do all the reading assigned

Over the next 23 class periods, we will be discussing selections from seven books, and the pace of that reading is rapid. Read each book selection thoroughly, taking notes according to what you find interesting, according to what might be useful to you on the exams. Amplify some of those notes according to prompts offered by your professor, as described below. Remember

to read carefully the book selections related to your genre analysis, also explained below.

COMPLETE THE FIELD EXPERIENCE

In addition to exploring the port(s) assigned, listening to lectures, and practicing close observations, students are required to take field notes and develop them into work in a genre or genres, as discussed in class.

KEEP A FIELD NOTEBOOK

For each port we visit, you should bring your field notebook and take notes on what you see in terms of sights, relationships, events, and dialogues overheard. This field notebook probably will become the basis for the three genres you must practice.

GENRE ANALYSIS ESSAY

Based on in-class readings and discussion, and reserve readings, write a three-to-five page paper in which you explain to your readers how to write in a particular genre. For example, you might write a “Letter to a Young Nonfiction Writer,” and, drawing on the materials in the genre you have selected, you may have a set of observations and advice for the reader. These will be posted on the class’s intranet page.

THREE GENRE WRITING

During the course of the semester, as guided by your professor, you will be required to write three works, creative nonfiction and fiction pieces of at least five pages, and three poems of at least one page each. One of these will be discussed in the class’s writing workshops, and all must be turned in for a grade.

FINAL PROJECT

Students are required to write one longer piece, usually an amplification of a piece written in your field notebook or one of your three-genre writing projects. This will be your primary work for the class, where you showcase everything you have learned about one specific genre, and turn in a final piece that demonstrates your new understanding and knowledge of a genre. Hybrid pieces are accepted after consultation and approval by your professor.

GRADING AND EVALUATION

Students will be graded based on their creativity, originality, seriousness of purpose, inventiveness, and adherence to the conventions of Standard Written English—except in the service of an experiment or innovative writing. Students are advised to consult with their professor before they turn in such an experiment for a grade.

FIELD NOTEBOOK AND FIELD EXPERIENCE (20%)

Students will be graded based on the length and quality of their field notebook, with notes taken not only during the field experience but also during other port visits. Students are also expected to keep notes on every port we visit. Notes should be thorough, insightful, and based on concrete observations or detailed mullings.

GENRE ANALYSIS ESSAY (10%)

Students must demonstrate an understanding of each of the three primary genres under study, based on close readings of the texts required for class. For example, those who elect to write about fiction must include references to John Gardner, James Joyce, and Annie LaMott. The essay should be framed as a letter to new writers of the genre, in kind like *Letters to a Young Poet*, but with clear references to class readings. Students will be graded on their understanding of audience, ability to include relevant selections from class readings, and liveliness of prose.

THREE GENRE WRITING

Students should demonstrate that they understand and have mastered the basic conventions of each of the following genres.

FICTION (10%)

POETRY (10%)

NONFICTION (10%)

FINAL PROJECT (25%)

Students must demonstrate a thorough understanding of one genre, in their extended piece of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry.

PARTICIPATION (15%)

Students will be graded not only on their cheerful and fulsome participation in class discussions and workshops, but their written responses to their peers in workshops will also be taken into account.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: John Gardner

TITLE: *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*

PUBLISHER: Vintage

ISBN #: 978-0679734031

DATE/EDITION: 1991

AUTHOR: Rainer Maria Rilke

TITLE: *Letters to a Young Poet*

PUBLISHER: Modern Library

ISBN#: 978-0679642329
DATE/EDITION: 2008

AUTHOR: Elizabeth Bishop
TITLE: *Geography III*
PUBLISHER: Farrar, Straus and Giroux
ISBN #: 978-0374530655
DATE/EDITION: 2001

AUTHOR: Anne LaMott
TITLE: *Bird by Bird*
PUBLISHER: Anchor
ISBN#: 978-0385480017
DATE/EDITION: 1995

AUTHOR: James Joyce
TITLE: *Dubliners*
PUBLISHER: Dover Thrift Editions
ISBN #: 978-0486268705
DATE/EDITION: 1991

AUTHOR: Tahir Shah
TITLE: *The Caliph's House: A Year in Casablanca*
PUBLISHER: Bantam
ISBN#: 978-0553383102
DATE/EDITION: 2006

EDITOR: Lee Gutkind
BOOK TITLE: *Keeping It Real: Everything You Need to Know About Research and Writing Creative Nonfiction*
PUBLISHER: WW Norton
ISBN 978-0393330984
DATE/EDITION: February 2009

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

A1- August 27: Course Introduction and In-class writing

A2-August 29: Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*, the following essays: Writing, Getting started

Short assignments, Shitty first drafts, Perfectionism, School lunches, Polaroids

August 30-September 1: St. Petersburg

A3- September 3: Selection from John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction*.

September 4-7: Copenhagen

A4- September 9: James Joyce, *Dubliners*.

September 10-12: Antwerp

September 13-15: Le Havre

A5- September 17: James Joyce, *Dubliners*.

September 18: Arrive & Depart Galway

September 19: In Transit

September 20-21: Dublin

A6- September 23: John Gardner, Selections from *The Art of Fiction*.

September 25-27: Lisbon

September 28-30: Cadiz

A7- October 1: Selections from *The Caliph's House*

October 3-6: Casablanca

A8- October 7: Selections from *The Caliph's House*

A9- October 9: *Letters to a Young Poet*.

A10- October 12: Writing Workshop

October 13-16: Tema

A11- October 18: *Letters to a Young Poet*.

A12- October 21: *Letters to a Young Poet*.

October 23-27: Cape Town

A13- October 28: Writing Workshop

A14- October 31: Elizabeth Bishop, *Geography III*

A15- November 2: Writing Workshop—Final Project Draft

A16- November 5: Writing Workshop—Final Project Draft

November 7-9: Buenos Aires

November 10-12: Montevideo

A17- November 13: Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*, the following short essays: Character, Plot, Dialogue, Set design, False starts, Plot treatment, How do you know when you're done?

A18- November 15: Selections from Lee Gutkind, *Keeping It Real*.

November 16-18: Rio de Janeiro

A19- November 20: Selections from Lee Gutkind, *Keeping it Real*.

A20- November 22: Writing Workshop—Final Project.

A21- November 25: (enter Amazon) Read Annie LaMott's *Bird by Bird*, the following essays: The writing frame of mind; The moral point of view; Broccoli; Radio Station KFKD; and Jealousy.

November 27-29: Manaus

A22- December 1: (exit Amazon) Writing Workshop—Final Project

A23- December 3: Writing Workshop—Final Project

A24- December 10: A Day Finals

FIELD LAB

Proposal #1: Rabat, Memory, and Writing

Explore the sights of Rabat and practice place-based writing: a series of exercises in three genres, from three temporal points-of-view.

Starting with an hour long train ride from Casablanca to Rabat, students will be asked to practice a three-part, daylong set of exercises in creative writing. The day is organized around three ways of observing Rabat—as *a particle*, *a wave*, and *a field*—a series of exercises or practices itself loosely based on tagmemic linguistics. Students must practice writing in three genres—poetry, fiction, or nonfiction—during the day.

Particle/Poetry

This observational practice is related to Modernist ideas of seeing the “thing” itself, exactly as it is. Students will write in their notebooks about the hour long train ride from Casablanca to Rabat, taking down every detail, writing a description of someone they see on the train, observing the train itself, and looking at what is passing by outside the train. This writing is confined to what is happening in the moment, what is immediately present. It is designed to help students become good observers. We will review the ways in which poems are patterned, their metaphors and returns, what language can do, how it can flex.

Wave/Nonfiction This writing practice demands that students look at an event, an object, a place, or a person as it, he, or she exists across time. In other words, this exercise asks students to look at something *historically*, from when it began to where it will eventually go. We will do this exercise in Kasbah des Oudaias, the oldest part of the city, imagining its origins and its future. We will enter the kasbah through the Almohad gate of Bab Oudaia, built in 1195, and proceed to walk along the Rue Jamaa. Reference will be made to Shah’s *The Caliph’s House* and the principles of good nonfiction writing we can see operating in that book—and, with luck, in our own work, too.

Field/Fiction This third writing practice requires students not only to observe something closely in the present, and explore how it changes over time, from its past to its future; this prompt requires students to explore how something compares to all the other somethings in the same field, or species. For example, you would not only minutely study an oak tree, describe that oak tree’s life from acorn to ultimate decay, but for field/fiction you would describe oak trees generally—pin oaks, gray oaks, dead oaks, etc. We will go to the Museum of Archaeology, ask you to find an exhibit or artifact that you like, describe it in relation to all the other artifacts or exhibits like it, and write the first draft of a story related to it. Structure, pacing, dialogue, and the general components of fiction will be reviewed.

On the train ride home and for homework based on the day’s travels, students will expand their draft of poetry, fiction, or nonfiction into a finished product.

Proposal #2: Imagining Dublin

Explore firsthand the literary history of Dublin and see the places of James Joyce’s *Dubliners*.

The day will begin at the Dublin Writers Museum at No. 18 Parnell Street. Students will get a general sense of the rich literary tradition of the city. A guided tour of the museum by the curator will be included. Following our general tour of the literary lights of London, we will go to 35 North Great George’s Street, to the James Joyce Center. Getting our audio tour materials there, we will commence on a two-hour walking tour of the sites of *Dubliners*, listening to recordings of the stories as we seek the places where they are set. We will eat our lunch along the way. In the afternoon we will go to the National Museum of Ireland to see and write about the bodies perfectly preserved in peat bogs, such as the Celtic nobleman whose perfectly manicured hand is still

preserved, hundreds of years later. We will end our day at Oliver St. John Gogarty's (the name of a friend of James Joyce and WB Yeats), a pub where traditional Irish music is played from 2:30pm to 2:30am every day.

Students will take notes throughout the entire day, and will be evaluated both on their participation on the trip and on the eight-to-ten-page stories, linked poems, or nonfiction essay they write related to what they heard and saw. Their creative work will be graded based upon its originality, creativity, and knowledge of the conventions of contemporary poetry, fiction, and nonfiction.

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

AUTHOR: Sarah Jane Sloane
TITLE: *The I Ching for Writers*
PUBLISHER: New World Library
ISBN #: 978-1577314967
DATE/EDITION: 2005

AUTHOR: Paul Bowles
TITLE: *The Stories of Paul Bowles*
PUBLISHER: Harper Perennial
ISBN #: 978-0061137044
DATE/EDITION: Special Edition, 2006

AUTHOR: E.M. Forster
TITLE: *Aspects of the Novel*
PUBLISHER: Mariner Books
ISBN #: 978-0156091800
DATE/EDITION: Any edition/Original is 1956

AUTHOR: John Gardner
TITLE: *On Becoming a Novelist*
PUBLISHER: Norton
ISBN#: 978-0393320039
DATE/EDITION: 1999

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS

AUTHOR: Gregory Spatz
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: The Teachable Talent: Why Creative Writing Can Be Taught
JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: *Poets and Writers*
VOLUME: 40(5)
DATE: Sept/Oct 2012

PAGES: 102-110

AUTHOR: Natalie Goldberg
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: We are Not the Poem
BOOK TITLE: *Writing Down The Bones*
PUBLISHER: Shambhala Library Edition
ISBN#: 978-1590307946
DATES: 2010
PAGES: 40-42

AUTHOR: ?
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: Markets
JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: *Writer*
VOLUME: 125(8)
DATE: August 2012
PAGES: 43-47

AUTHOR: Francine Prose
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: Going Native
JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction*
PUBLISHER: Norton
DATE: 2005
PAGES: 356-367

AUTHOR: Lee Gutkind
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE:
JOURNAL/BOOK TITLE: *Creative Nonfiction: How to Live It and Write It*
PUBLISHER: Chicago Review Press
DATE: 1996
PAGES:

AUTHOR: Lee Gutkind
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: The Creative Nonfiction Police
BOOK TITLE: *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction—from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything In Between*
PUBLISHER: Da Capo Lifelong Books
DATE: 2012
PAGES: 32-42

AUTHOR: Dinty Moore
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: Writing the Memoir Essay
BOOK TITLE: *Crafting the Personal Essay: A Guide for Writing and Publishing Creative Non-fiction*

PUBLISHER: Writer's Digest Books
DATE: 2010
PAGES: 26-37

AUTHOR: Robert Boswell
ARTICLE/CHAPTER TITLE: Process and Paradigm
BOOK TITLE: *The Half-Known World: On Writing Fiction*
PUBLISHER: Graywolf
DATE: 2008
PAGES: 27-46

AUTHOR: Gotham Writers' Workshop and Alexander Steele
Chapter Title: Fiction: The What, How, and Why of It
BOOK TITLE: *Writing Fiction: The Practical Guide from New York's Acclaimed Creative Writing School*
PUBLISHER: Bloomsbury
DATE: 2003
PAGES: 1-24

AUTHOR: Susan Stewart
CHAPTER TITLE: Metaphor and Music
BOOK TITLE: *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making*
PUBLISHER: University of Chicago Press
DATE: 2011
PAGES: Not available

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

HONOR CODE

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University's honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager's Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: "On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment." The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed "[signed]."