

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Voyage: Spring 2014

Discipline: Writing

Course: ENWR 1559-501: Travel Writing (section 3)

Division: Lower

Faculty Name: Maria Adelman

Prerequisites: An introductory composition course. Some advanced essay writing/creative nonfiction experience helpful but not necessary.

Course Description

E.B. White's short trip to a childhood vacation spot resulted in the nostalgic essay "Once More to the Lake." George Orwell's years in Burma turned into the dramatic "Shooting an Elephant." The success of the travel essay lies not in the length or distance of the journey, but in its emotionally truthful translation into language. A 112-day journey around the world won't ensure exceptional writing, but it will provide the unique opportunity for the kinds of revelations that lie at the heart of a good essay. Pico Iyer once wrote, "All good trips are, like love, about being carried out of yourself and deposited in the midst of terror and wonder." Good writing, too, transports the reader. Our job as essayists is to impose structure on our observations without eradicating the sense of wonder and surprise that compelled us to write in the first place. Through the reading of contemporary travel writing, honing our observation skills and practicing the art of writing itself, we will learn how to construct our own travel "love stories." This is an intensive writing class – students should already have a good command of language and are expected to put in the work required to create original travel writing that makes intelligent, insightful observations and connections.

Course Objectives

1. To understand travel writing and nonfiction as genres.
2. To analyze the tools and strategies authors use to write successful creative nonfiction.
3. To learn how to observe carefully and intelligently.
4. To turn those observations into original, complex, insightful travel essays.
5. To learn how to provide constructive, critical feedback and turn such feedback into editorial improvements.

Assignment	Length	Percentage
Field Lab Assignment	500-750 (2-3 pages)	20%
Vignettes	300-500 words each (1-2 pages)	20%
Essay 1	2000-2600 words (6-8 pages)	20%
Essay 2	1200-2000 words (4-6 pages)	20%
Participation	--	20%

Field Lab

To arm us with the observation, note taking, and journaling skills we'll use throughout the trip, our field lab will take place at our first stop in Hawaii where we'll practice immersion writing. After traveling 30 miles south of Hilo, Hawaii, we'll arrive at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, a World Heritage Site. We'll begin our trip at Kilauea Visitor Center and then

explore Crater Rim Drive, stopping at several places along the way to gather observations and complete writing assignments in our field journals.

We will be outside and walking for much of the day, so be prepared with comfortable shoes and appropriate clothing. Weather can change very quickly at the National Park, so wear layers and bring rain gear. The park also recommends that you wear long, lightweight pants because falling on lava is like falling on glass. Additionally, bring lots of water and any food you might need. Note that field lab attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Please do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of our field lab.

Late Assignments

Assignments lose a 1/3 of a letter grade for every day late (i.e. A- to B+). That said, while I have attempted to coordinate due dates with our travel schedule, Semester at Sea is a unique classroom experience and we may decide to make changes as a class. If you foresee a personal conflict with a due date, then contact me at least 72 hours in advanced to discuss an alternative deadline.

Participation

Class participation is essential. This means attending class, diligently working on in-class assignments, carefully reading and reviewing peer work, completing homework, and engaging in class discussions, which requires close reading of the assigned essays. If discussions about readings fail to go well, I will require to written responses to all homework readings.

Attendance

Be here and be on time. After two absences, your participation grade lowers by a 1/3 of a letter grade for every class missed. Two lates equal one absence. If you're not in class, you are responsible for acquiring material covered in class and for completing any assignments given for the next class. Additionally, even if you are absent, assignments still must be submitted by class time on the date they are due – this includes workshop drafts.

Reserve Library List

Besides your field notes travel journal, there are no other required materials for this class, but the following writing guides will be accessible to you in the Semester at Sea library:

William Zissner
On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction
Harper Perennial
30th Anniversary Edition, May 2006

William Strunk & E.B. White
The Elements of Style
Longman
4th Edition, Sept. 1999

Grading

I have high expectations. An “A” is not given for simply completing work, but for completing *outstanding* work. If you aren’t satisfied with your performance at the beginning of the semester, you’ll have ample opportunity to improve if you’re willing to put in the effort.

A – An “A” paper is written with exceptional originality, depth, and clarity. It goes beyond the bounds of the assignment and sheds new light on a topic. It takes risks and makes insightful connections and intelligent observations. An “A” paper has few or no mechanical errors. Language is used skillfully – sentences are concise, language is precise. It is well organized – information or ideas flow logically and naturally, building smoothly from one section to another.

B – A “B” paper is a solid paper that makes some thoughtful and insightful observations. A serious attempt is made to articulate complex ideas, but the writing may not be skillful enough to fully accomplish this goal. While the paper is generally organized, some areas may be wordy, imprecise, or have awkward constructions.

C – A “C” paper fulfills the basic demands of the assignment. This paper may attempt to present thoughtful ideas, but weak prose (disorganization, mechanical errors) prevents clarity. Conversely, this paper may be written adequately at the sentence level, but is too simplistic or superficial, lacking the depth required for a college-level essay.

D – A “D” paper is consistently difficult to understand and hard to follow. It has mechanical errors, makes simplistic observations, and/or fails to have a central theme or topic. It may largely be filler or aimless rambling.

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].”

Unit 1: Theory

(A1) January 12: Introduction to Travel Writing

(A2) January 14: Taking Notes

Pico Iyer, "Why We Travel"

Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook"

Monte Reel, "How to Explore Like a Real Victorian Adventurer"

Judith Ortiz Cofer, "More Room"

(A3) January 16: Content Management

William Zinsser, "Content Management"

William Zinsser, "The Travel Article"

Anne Lamot, "Shitty First Drafts"

Vivian Gornick, excerpt from *The Situation and the Story* (3-26)

James D. Houston, "Where the Hula Goddess Lives"

January 17: Hilo, Hawaii

***(A4) January 19: Representing the Other**

Ship Vignette DUE

Carl Thompson, "Representing the Other" (153-167)

Carl Thompson "Women's Travel Writing Today" (195-198)

Paul Theroux, "Introduction: Being a Stranger"

William Zinsser, "300-Word Challenge"

(A5) January 22: Strangers

George Saunders, "The New Mecca"

Jan Morris, "Fun City: Las Vegas, USA"

January 24: Study Day

(A6) January 25: Description I

Annie Dillard, "Sight into Insight"

Annie Dillard, "Life on the Rocks"

William Zinsser, "Flunking Description"

Washington Irving, "The Voyage"

(A7) January 27: Description II

Field Lab Assignment DUE

Joan Didion, "Guaymas, Sonora"

Tom Wolfe, excerpt from *Yeager*

Sallie Tisdale, "Japanese Trains"

John Muir, "A Wind-Storm in the Forests"

Unit 2: Practice

January 29 – February 3: Yokohama, Japan & Kobe, Japan

(A8) February 4

Garrison Keillor, “Postcards”

***February 5: Japan Vignette DUE**

February 6–11: Shanghai, China & Hong Kong, China

(A9) February 12

Haley Sweetland Edwards, “Our Own Apocalypse Now” (from *The Best Women’s Travel Writing*)

***February 13: China Vignette DUE**

February 14–20: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

(A10) February 20

***February 21: Vietnam Vignette DUE**

February 22–23: Singapore

(A11) February 24

George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”

February 25: Study Day

February 27–March 4: Rangoon, Burma

Unit 3: The Personal Essay

(A12) March 5

***(A13) March 7: Essay 1 WORKSHOP**

***March 8: Burma Vignette DUE**

March 9–14: Cochin, India

(A14) March 15

March 17: Study Day

***March 20: India Vignette DUE**

***(A15) March 18**

Essay 1 DUE

(A16) March 20

Katherine Anne Porter, “St. Augustine & the Bullfight”

E.B. White, “Once More to the Lake”

March 21: Port Louis, Mauritius

***(A17) March 23: Vignette Workshop**

***(A18) March 26**

Vignette Re-writes DUE

Lynn Freed, “Keeping Watch”

Unit 4: Playing with Style

March 28–April 2: Cape Town, South Africa

(A19) April 3

(A20) April 5: Humor

David Sedaris, “Turbulence”

David Foster Wallace, “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” (aka “Shipping Out”)

***(A21) April 9**

Margaret Laurence, “The Very Best Intentions”

South Africa Vignette DUE

April 10–April 14: Tema/Accra, Ghana & Takoradi, Ghana

(A22) April 15

***(A23) April 17: Essay 2 WORKSHOP**

April 19: Study Day

***(A24) April 20:**

Essay 2 DUE

Laura Fraser, “Italian Affair”

Richard Selzer, “A Worm from My Notebook”

***April 22: Ghana Vignette DUE**

April 23-27: Casablanca, Morocco

(A25) April 28: Reading

May 2: Southampton, England