

R. Clifton Spargo
r.spargo@yale.edu

English 123, Summer 2021
T, Th 1:00-4:15

Introduction to Creative Writing

The creative self is fundamental to the way we find meaning and purpose in the world. The best fiction, poetry, and drama draw on everyday habits of imagination that make interaction with others possible and fruitful. At the same time, literature and creative writing develop basic skills of the imagination, converting them into practices that enhance our engagement with others and refine our perception of the world around us.

Good creative writing is a practice of imagination, appreciation, critical awareness, imitation, and experimentation. It is developed in conversation with the models of fine writing that precede us, through experiment and exercises. Students will read, assess, and sometimes imitate exemplary pieces of fiction, poetry, and drama. We'll focus on how writers do what they do, as well as the why and what of specific techniques, literary modes, and strategies of language. In this seminar our writing will also be developed by attention to the work of our peers and through close analysis and revision of the work we ourselves generate.

This seminar is a blend of guided discussions of literature and craft, writing exercises, and zoom workshops. The syllabus is divided into three units – focused respectively on our three genres, fiction, poetry, and drama – each unit concentrating on the elements specific to the relevant genre. Students will complete regular creative exercises, guided by prompts, and each course unit will culminate with a longer creative piece of fiction, poetry, or drama. The work produced during the course will be discussed in writing workshops, which is to say, in guided discussions of peers' work that will help us develop a better understanding of the choices we make as writers and of the many options, techniques, and strategies available to us. At the end of the course, students will submit a portfolio of revised work.

Assignments include readings in the respective genres, writing exercises (in-class or assigned in advance), and final unit submissions for each genre.

Attendance: Attendance at every class is mandatory. This class is discussion driven with much of our creative work also done during sessions. You have to be here daily for the entire class time to draw the benefits of this course. A single absence drops you half a letter grade considerably.

Texts: All texts will be made available on Canvas.

Unit 1: FICTION

- 6/30 **The Structure of a Story**
Openings, Endings, Rise and Fall, & Crisis
 Readings: Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find";
 (excerpt); Raymond Carver, "Why Don't You Dance?"; Grace Paley, "Wants"
Fiction Exercise #1 (in-class): a) working with endings; b) working with
 openings.
- 7/2 **Dialogue, Characterization, & Point of View**
 Readings: Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"; Katherine Anne
 Porter, "Rope"; George V. Higgins, from *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*; Sandra Cisneros,
 "One Holy Night"
Fiction Exercise #2: Dialogue (due by 7/1, 5:00 p.m. on Canvas)
Fiction Exercise #3: Character Sketch ((due by 7/2, 10:00 a.m. on Canvas)
- 7/7 **Action, Plot, & Scene**
 Readings: Deborah Eisenberg, "Transactions in a Foreign Currency"; Joy
 Williams, "Rot"; Z.Z. Packer, "Brownies."
Fiction Exercise #4: Horror Scene
Fiction Workshops
- 7/9 **Style & Voice**
 Readings: Lan Samantha Chang, "Water Names"; Teju Cole, from *Open City*.
Fiction Workshops
- 7/9 **Unit #1 Submission: Short Story** (5-6pp.) due on Yale Canvas

Unit 2: POETRY

- 7/9 **Sound and Line**
 Readings: Elizabeth Bishop, "The Filling Station"; Ted Hughes, "The Jaguar."
- 7/13
- 7/14 **Image, Event, & Form**
 Readings: Robert Frost, "The Silken Tent"; Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"; Denise
 Levertov, "In Thai Binh (Peace) Province"; Jorie Graham, "For Mark
 Rothko" and "Pieta"; Thylia Moss, "Tornados"; Tracy K. Smith, "Sci-Fi"; Anne
 Carson, "Reticent Sonnet"; Susan Firer, "He is Trying to Get Home from the
 Store,"; Carl Phillips, "And If I Fall."
Poetry Exercise #1 in-class.

7/15 **Poetry Exercise #2 Sonnet**

7/16 **Telling Story in a Poem**

Readings: Robert Frost, "Home Burial"; Ted Hughes, "Crow's fall"; Mark Doty, "Homo Will Not Inherit"; Joy Harjo, "Grace"; Anne Carson, "Saturday Night as an Adult."

Poetry Exercise #3 Ekphrasis

Poetry Workshops

7/20 **Unit #2 Submission: Set of 3 Poems Due**

7/21 **What Poetry Sees**

Readings: James Merrill, "Voices from the Other World";

Poetry Workshops

Unit 3: DRAMA

7/21 **Dramatic Structure**

Readings: Samuel Becket, from *Waiting for Godot*.

7/23 **Character, Monologue, Dialogue**

Readings: Eugene O'Neill monologues; watch monologues from *Jaws*, *Justified*, *True Detective*, etc.

Drama Exercise #1 Monologue

7/25 **Drama Exercise #2 Dialogue**

7/28 **Thinking in Scenes & Dramatic Tension and Action**

Reading: Deborah Margolin, *Turquoise*.

Drama Workshops

7/28 **Unit #3 Submission: Scene/ One-Act Play Due.**

7/30 **Drama Workshops**

7/30 **Final Portfolio Due** (details to be announced).

Note: Readings and assignments subject to change with notice from instructor.