

English 71 Section 02
Introduction to Creative Writing
Fall 2020

Instructor: Robert F. James

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Classroom and Times: Online (Fridays a.m.)

Office: Faculty Offices Bldg 106

Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description: Introduction to Creative Writing (English 71) is a 3-unit lower-division course designed, adopted, implemented, and administered by the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San Jose State University in accordance with the University's General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts. The course will involve both the reading and production of poetry, creative non-fiction, and short fiction. Students in this class will read and discuss published works—contemporary and historical—of poetry, creative non-fiction, and fiction. Students will produce original works of poetry, creative non-fiction, and fiction in response to works by published authors that students will use as models. English 71 will explore the traditions of poetry, creative non-fiction, and fiction as they have evolved over the last few centuries. Students will examine these traditions in the light of understanding the historical and cultural contexts from which they have arisen.

In addition to the reading and writing assigned weekly in the course, each student is required to keep a reading response notebook or journal. These notebook activities are designed to help students stretch their imaginations, to learn literary genres and forms, and to experiment with responses to the published models of creative writing.

Describing how writers read, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison writes: "Writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and ready for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that imagination evokes. Both require being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision. Writing and reading mean being aware of the writer's notions of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability."

The course will be taught using a combination of discussion and writing workshops. In the discussion, published works of creative writing will be closely read and analyzed. In the writing workshops, creative work by class members will be analyzed and critiqued for revision. Students are required to participate in all workshops dedicated to the discussion of class members' writing.

Students will demonstrate the ability to

- 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
- 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches

to British, American, and World Literature.

- 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
- 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
- 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

ENGL 71 GE Learning Objectives:

- Decipher and understand the form and content of assigned literary works;
- Comprehend the historical and cultural contexts of assigned literary works;
- Recognize the accomplishments of and issues related to writing by men and women representing diverse cultural traditions;
- Acquire through both individual and collaborative/workshop efforts of a written and oral nature the skills necessary for reading, discussing, analyzing, interpreting, and—most importantly—emulating and writing works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction;
- Communicate such skills with clarity and precision;
- Develop an appreciation of literary works as expressions of human intellect and imagination, and as representations of diverse human cultures;
- Develop the ability to write literary works that express intellect and imagination and that represent diversity in human cultures;
- Respond to literature through clear and effective communication in both written and oral work;
- Read and respond to texts with both analytical acumen and personal sensibility;
- Appreciate how literary works illuminate enduring human concerns while also representing matters specific to a particular culture;
- Write works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction that are of interest and value to the writer, to other students in the course, and to a diverse reading audience.

Texts: We will use handouts from the professor and class manuscripts for texts

Writers Groups

1. The class will be divided into small writing groups of up to four or five students. The groups will meet weekly when feasible to provide you an informal environment to read and comment upon each other's newest works-in-progress.
1. Groups are urged to meet outside of class during the semester to critique rough drafts.

1. Groups will also communicate when writing activities are assigned so the members can compare their results with each other.

Workshop

1. Class members' work will be discussed in the workshop according to a designated order.
1. When your writing is being discussed, remember you are not the text you have turned in; the text has a life and identity of its own. You merely wrote it or it chose itself to be written by you. The criticism and/or praise your text receives is not criticism or praise of you but of your work.
1. When your work is being discussed, "listen" carefully. You will not be given an opportunity to defend or explain your text. You must assume that the readers in the group are sympathetic and intelligent. You also must assume that your readers who may see your work in a book or periodical will not have the opportunity to converse with you about it. Everything that it is about should be apparent to anyone who reads it carefully.
1. As a critic in the workshop, you are responsible for helping your classmates see both the strength and weakness in their work. You should be even handed. Ideally, one half of the discussion of any work should be praising it, the other half criticizing it.
1. Also remember that each person in the workshop, including the instructor, has his or her own taste in literature. To help each other learn to write more professionally, try to distinguish between that which you like and/or dislike because it's an issue of taste as opposed to what might be an issue of craft.

TURNING WORK IN

Students will turn work in on a weekly or a regular basis. The work turned in must be properly formatted, posted, or turned in on time.

Students will receive brief written commentary on each piece turned in. However, you will get more in-depth assistance from the instructor in one-on-one conferences than you will from the instructor's notes. You will get work back in approximately one to two weeks after you have turned it in. You may revise any work you do and turn it in again for discussion and/or for a new grade.

Readings: As an "introduction" to the various types of creative writing, the course will include a fair amount of related reading. We will be reading a novel, short stories, essays on the experiences of being a writer, and various handouts (primarily of poetry and other short stories as needed, which prevents students from having to purchase more texts). A

creative-writing class dies without student participation, so it is imperative that everyone do the readings assigned and come to class prepared to discuss their opinions, feelings, and observations relating to the texts.

Grading: Final Portfolio = 100%

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| Poetry Collection | 20% |
| -Poem 1 | 4% |
| -Poem 2 | 4% |
| -Poem 3 | 4% |
| -Poem 4 | 4% |
| -Poem 5 | 4% |
| -Poetry Anthology (Credit/NC) | |
| Short Stories (Fiction) | 20% |
| Nonfiction | 20% |
| Personal Poetics Essay | 20% |
| Class Participation | 20% |

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*. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment 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; and F=failure.

Portfolios: All students are required to keep maintain a portfolio throughout the course. The completed portfolio will constitute 100 percent of the student's grade and will contain the following: five original poems (originals, revisions, final drafts); a poetry anthology including 10 poems of the student's own choosing; one short story (original, revision, final draft); one work of creative nonfiction (biography, autobiography, literary journalism, etc.); copies of all criticism for peer workshop; and one personal-poetics essay, which constitutes the course's final exam. Additional items may be required as the class progresses.

Attendance: Students are expected to participate regularly in all aspects of the course. On-line students must check in regularly for assignments and to participate in discussions.

Plagiarism: To plagiarize is to use the ideas or writing of another as one's own. In the world of creative writing, this transgression is absolutely unforgivable. If you plagiarize, you not only will fail this course, but also will be referred to the university for disciplinary action.

DSS: Students requiring assistance should contact the Disability Resource Center (Admin. 110) at 924-6000. Please advise the instructor of any special needs as soon as possible.

Workshop: Most students have never participated in a creative-writing workshop, and it can be a daunting idea even for the most thick-skinned individuals. You will be asked to write material to which you feel emotionally attached, then submit that work for public dissection and criticism. Paramount in the workshop environment is trust. It is my job to make sure our workshop environment is perceived as "safe space." As such, there will be no mean-spirited criticisms, disrespectful comments, personal attacks, etc. Remember what your mother said: "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." When your work is being critiqued, don't take it personally: it's the work, not the writer being discussed. You cannot "defend" your work, nor can you lash out at perceived wrongs during discussion. It is the role of the instructor to insure a healthy workshop environment. We'll discuss further the workshop concepts as the semester progresses.

Pandemic Considerations

Workshops are traditionally an in-person experience. The issues surrounding the pandemic make traditional instruction impossible. As such, we will work more on the creation of original works more so than the workshopping of those pieces. The goal of the class will be to respond to assignments via Canvas when tasked. And we will try to hold some Zoom workshops as well, though they likely will be a bit on the clunky side. We will all do our best to make it work, so be patient, flexible, and creative not only in your writing, but also in your interactions with your peers.

Assignments

Week 1: Aug 21

- a) Introduction and Syllabus Review
- b) Freewriting
- c) Small-group assignments
- d) Goal: Developing a Personal Aesthetic

Course Assessment Prompt: Initial Draft

Introduction to Poetry: Haiku and Tanka

Week 2 : Aug 28—Poetry

Forms: Haiku, Tanka, Pantoum, Villanelle, Free Verse

DUE: Haiku and Tanka

Week 3: Sep 4

Poetry Workshop: Haiku and Tanka

DUE: Pantoum

Week 4: Sep 11

Poetry Workshop: Pantoum

DUE: Villanelle

Week 5: Sep 18

Poetry Workshop: Villanelle

ASSIGNED: 50 Dramatic Moments Exercise

Week 6: Sep 25 — Creative Nonfiction

Introduction to Creative Nonfiction: Tone, Voice, Theme

Autobiography (Exercise)/Biography (Exercise)

DUE: 50 Dramatic Moments Exercise

Week 7: Oct 2— Creative Nonfiction

DUE: Autobiography Assignment and Biographical Figure Initial Research

Week 8: Oct 9

Creative Nonfiction Workshop: Autobiography

DUE: Biography Assignment

Week 9: Oct 16

Creative Nonfiction Workshop: Biography

Week 11: Oct 23—Fiction

Writing Opening Lines, Revising Opening Lines, Small Group Workshop

DUE: Original Opening Line

Week 12: Oct 30

Small Group Workshop

DUE: Flash Fiction Story (-250 words)

Week 13: Nov 6

Original Short Fiction Workshop

DUE: Short Story (Full)

Week 14: Nov 13

Original Short Fiction Workshop

DUE: Micro Fiction (5 Sentences)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 16: Nov 27

Original Short Fiction Workshop

Final Instruction

Dec 4:

a) Portfolios Due

b) **1-PAGE FINAL ESSAY DUE.** No late papers will be accepted.

c) Portfolios will be made available in the English Department (FO 100)

"Do not hurry; do not rest." —Goethe