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ENG 2000-001: Intro to Creative Writing

Charlotte Pence

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ENGLISH 2000: INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING
SPRING 2016
3 CREDIT HOURS

Dr. Charlotte Pence
Email: cpence@ciu.edu
Office: 3745 Coleman Hall
Office Hours: MW 1:00-3
(and by appointment)

Course Information:
MW 3:00-4:15
Section: 001
Room: CH 3150

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- *Imaginative Writing*, 4th edition edited by Janet Burroway
- *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg
- Access to a printer to print additional reading assignments found on D2L.
- A writer's notebook of your choice. (Bring to every class.)
- Three-ring binder or folder to keep all of the workshop pieces and handouts.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This introductory creative writing course will introduce students to reading for craft and writing creatively across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres. Students will participate in workshops of their creative work and read writing in each genre.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- a. Students will develop skills in craft analysis by discussing, reading and writing across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres.
- b. Students will develop the ability to produce and revise original creative work across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres.
- c. Students will develop the ability to analyze their creative work in the context of a tradition across poetry, fiction, nonfiction and dramatic genres.
- d. Students will hone their ability to critique creative work in a creative writing workshop.
- e. Students will develop skills to effectively present their creative work produced for this course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

One poem, one play, one short story, and one creative nonfiction essay will be submitted to the class over the course of the semester. These works should have seen a

number of drafts before submitting to workshop. Please use a standard font such as Times, and in the right hand corner include your name, the date, and the assignment's genre. Also, note that it is your responsibility to make copies of your work for your peers.

A writer's notebook is key to the writing process and a requirement for this course. Most weeks, I will provide writing exercises. Some of them will be turned in and some of them will not be. All of the writing exercises will either raise your awareness about key craft elements and/or help you practice craft elements that can be used for one of the four major writing assignments. We will also write in class together, so always bring the notebook to class. Most writers I know carry a notebook with them at all times to record images, bits of dialogue, poem ideas, etc., so this is a good habit to acquire. I encourage all of you to try to write at least six lines a day in this notebook since a writer is simply one who writes often. I will collect these notebooks twice during the semester and grade based on completed exercises and regular entries.

"A writer is a reader moved to emulation." —Saul Bellow

Reading will be one of the major ways that we learn about the craft and find inspiration. I may include a few pop quizzes if I do not feel as if the class is keeping up with the reading. These quiz grades will be factored into the participation portion of your final grade.

One of the joys of this class is experiencing the vibrancy of contemporary writing. While we will be reading a diverse array of writers from many different decades (and centuries), we will focus on contemporary writers to better understand what is happening now in this field. Also, to help give us a sense of the writing community—and to be a part of it—we will **participate in two literary events**: Lions in Winter and the English Studies Conference. More details about both events will be discussed in class. We also have the good fortune of having class visits from three writers. All of these experiences—the readings, the literary events, and the guest speakers—will serve to immerse you in the active community of contemporary writers.

Also, I'd like to point out that contemporary writing, especially nonfiction, is an art that addresses both the quiet moments of our lives and the tragedies of our lives. Be aware that readings in this class may hit upon emotional ground for some of you. Please come see me if you'd like to talk about this more in private.

Workshops will encompass half of the in-class work that we will do. For each workshop, you are required to write editing and revision suggestions on each piece of writing before class. During workshop, I will randomly ask a few students to read their comments in full, which should address at least three strengths and three weaknesses. (These comments will factor into the participation grade.)

If you are being workshopped, you will need to bring copies for every person in the class. No emailed material will be allowed. Since our class size is somewhat large, you will choose one genre that you will not workshop with the class, such as poetry, fiction, drama, or

nonfiction. You will still turn in the work to me, though, on the last workshop day. We will individually meet to discuss that work.

We will discuss proper workshop etiquette in class, but the general guideline is to braid together honesty, specificity, and kindness since one without the others will not serve the writer. Also keep in mind that material for workshop should have undergone at least two to three revisions before bringing them to us for suggestions. Not everything you write will be wonderful and not everything you write will be horrible. These are the extremes. What is more likely is that you will write something that lies somewhere in between—and we will help each other move the work in the direction the work wants to be moved.

A final portfolio will be submitted for the **final exam**. The manuscript needs to be submitted in a black paper folder (no three-ring binders). Within this manuscript, include in this order—a title page, an epigraph, a table of contents, one revised poem, one revised play, and either the story or creative nonfiction essay revised. Everything needs to be hole-punched and placed in brads so that I can read the work easily and so that nothing gets misplaced. I would like the original work submitted directly behind each revision. Please note: it is your responsibility to keep your work throughout the semester.

In addition to the above material, also include a two-to-three page critical introduction on what you wanted to revise, why, and how you went about the process with each piece. Also, mention at least three specific examples from other works that we read that influenced your decisions. For example, did you decide that you wanted to include research in a way similar to Traci Brimhall? Did you decide that you wanted to create character through the nuance of dialogue like Richard Bausch? Don't simply state the fact, but provide examples such as the sentence or passage that was your model. It's this type of influence that I am interested in: specific craft moves rather than explanations of a literary kinship.

An alternative final exam option would be to submit three different finished works in three different genres that explore the same subject or obsession, such as the same personal anecdote but presented three entirely different ways. Your two-to-three page critical introduction for this option would explore what you learned about each genre by doing this approach. What did you find had to change based on the genre? What did you notice translated well in one genre but not in another? Which genre best fulfilled your intentions and why? These and any other points you'd like to address would all be a part of the introduction. All other requirements, such as formatting, would be the same for this final portfolio.

"I want the reader to feel something is astonishing. Not the 'what happens,' but the way everything happens."—Alice Munro on the short story

Participation is critical in this course. The time we spend together is our opportunity to expand our views on what is literary writing, to build a writer's community, and to learn the craft behind the art. In *Mystery and Manners*, fiction writer Flannery O'Connor reflects on the value of writers interacting with one another. She says that unless the writer "has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication, and communication suggests talking

inside a community.” At the end of the semester when I reflect on your participation, I will consider not only how often you contributed to class discussions, but the quality of those comments. I will also consider your seriousness with in-class writing assignments, your workshop responses, and any pop-quizzes if given, in the participation grade as well.

Finally, one of the more challenging aspects to writers is being able to shut off the world in order to write. Therefore, we will practice mindfulness in class. Text messaging (even once) and other distractions such as checking email in class (again, even once) will result in a failing participation grade for the semester. Since cultivating a supportive and challenging writers’ community is critical to our growth as writers, participation counts as 20% of your grade.

Attendance, punctuality, and meeting deadlines are all part of the writing life. There are days you may not want to write, but writers write—when they feel inspired or not. Coming to class is part of your obligation to your creativity and to your writing community. To help build a writers’ community, the course depends upon everyone’s active participation and attendance. Therefore, missing five courses will lower your final grade by five points. Six absences will lower your final grade by ten points. Seven absences will result in failure of the course. To allow adequate time for class discussion and in-class writing, arrive on time. Being late twice (or leaving early twice) will be considered an absence. This attendance policy applies to all students regardless of the reason for the absence. The only exception will be school-sanctioned events for which I receive prior notice, in writing, from a university administrator. Finally, if you arrive without the day’s reading in front of you, you will be counted as absent.

Also, I do not accept late work, which includes occasions when you are absent. If you must be absent, you may email me your work before the class to receive credit for it. Also, if you miss a day that you are workshopped, you will simply miss your workshop. (Twenty-five points will also be deducted from your participation grade for each missed workshop.) The reason for this strict policy on not accepting late work is to help build discipline as writers. Procrastination can be the creative killer to writers, so I am trying to take the option of “later” off the table.

“A poem is an event, not the record of an event.”

—Robert Lowell

GRADING

Assignments are proportioned as follows:

Poem	(5 %)
Play	(5 %)
Short Story	(10%)
Creative Nonfiction Essay	(10%)
Analysis of two attended events (Submit first class day after the reading)	(10%)
Writer’s Notebook Pre-Midterm	(10%)

Writer's Notebook Post-Midterm	(10%)
Class Participation, which may include pop quizzes	(20%)
Final Manuscript/Final Exam	(20%)

Grading scale is as follows:

A = 90-100 B = 80-89 C = 70-79 D = 60-69 F = 0-59

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>) . Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be dealt with according to university policy, which can be found on the Office of Judicial Affairs pages. First offense will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs and **will result in a grade of F** for this class. I think we all know what plagiarism is by now: the willful “appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work” (from *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*). In sum, do your job, which means do your own work.

Students with disabilities

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible. All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583.

The Student Success Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

“Poetry is a verbal means to a nonverbal source.”
—A.R. Ammons from *A Poem is Walk*

COURSE SYLLABUS

**Please note that the following syllabus may be altered. I will email to your D2L account when I post any changes. Be sure to check both the syllabus and your D2L before each class.*

**I will refer to Writing Down the Bones as "Bones" and Imaginative Writing as "I.W." in the following syllabus.*

Monday 1/11 Introduction to class and syllabus review.

Focus on Poetry: Sound Sense, Imagery, and Specificity

- Wednesday 1/13 **Reading due:** From IW pp. 15-19 and 307-310, Collins p. 41, Hoagland p. 320, Belieu p. 323. From Bones pp. 1-13.
Work due (All exercises will be done in your writer's notebook unless otherwise stated.): Exercise 2.1 on p. 19 from I.W.
Focus: Image
- Monday 1/18: NO CLASS: MLK OBSERVED
- Wednesday 1/20 **Reading due:** From IW pp. 20-23, Lee p. 10, Komunyakaa p. 42, and Alexie p. 154. From Bones pp. 14-22.
Work due (in notebook): One of the freewrites on p. 20 from Bones.
Work due TYPED and PRINTED: Type a vivid passage of fiction or creative nonfiction (at least 5 sentences long.) Underline any specific details. Now, rewrite the passage (on a new sheet of paper) but ruin it by replacing the specifics with generalizations and judgments. Bring both pages to class.
Focus: Specificity
- Monday 1/25 **Reading due:** Handout of selected poems and Bones pp. 26-33
Work due: Choose one detail in one of the poems. How does that one detail contribute to the poem as a whole? Please be as thorough as possible and see if any element of that specific detail is echoed in other aspects of the poem, however tangential.
Work due (in notebook): One of the freewrites on p. 21 from Bones.
Focus: Specificity
- Wednesday 1/27 **Reading due:** Excerpts from Lions in Winter authors on D2L and pp. 34-35 from Bones.
- Friday and Saturday Lions in Winter Literary Festival 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Attend at least one craft talk and one evening reading.
- Monday 2/1 CLASS REPURPOSED: ATTEND LIONS IN WINTER

Submit your one page essay about what you attended at Lions in Winter via Dropbox on D2L.

- Wednesday 2/3 **Reading due:** Hamby p. 86 from I.W., plus handout with poems by Plath, Brooks, Hopkins, Harrington; pp. 36-37 from Bones.
Work due TYPED and PRINTED: Write a brief, freeverse poem, no shorter than ten lines, no longer than fourteen. (If you have an older poem, that's fine, too.) Once the poem is presentable for workshop, enter the poem into an online foreign language translator. Bring to class one copy of the translated poem and one copy of the original. Be sure that these two versions are on separate pages and both typed.
Focus: Sound Sense
- Thursday 2/4 FYI: Journalism professor will read from his nonfiction *Monster Trek: The Obsessive Search for Bigfoot*, at 6 p.m. on Feb. 4 in Buzzard Auditorium. (This is not required.)
- Monday 2/8 **Workshop** 6 poems
Reading due: Bones pp. 38-42.
(I use the editing symbols found on p. 383 of IW. Try to use them as well.)
- Wednesday 2/10 **Workshop** 6 poems
Reading due: Bones pp. 43-47.

Focus on Playwriting: Dialogue

- Monday 2/15 **Reading due:** "Voices from the Other Room" by Richard Bausch (D2L) and Chekhov pp. 341-352 from I.W.
Work due: Focus on one of the two pieces. How is tension built through the dialogue? How does what the characters say tell us about who they are? Are the characters always being honest in their dialogue or are there moments in which they are seeming to say one thing, but really saying something else? Are there moments when they're even lying to themselves? Pick out a specific moment in the dialogue and explain how it contributes to the story as a whole.
- Wednesday 2/17 **Reading due:** "Drama Format" p. 367 and essays on the genre pp. 329-331 and pp. 335-339 from I.W. Plus the short play by Molly Campbell pp. 131-134 from I.W. From Bones pp. 52-54.
- Monday 2/22 **Play due:** Co-write a short play (2-3 pages) where all action occurs in dialogue. Details of the assignment are on D2L.
Workshop 2 plays

Wednesday 2/24

Workshop 4 plays

Reading due: pp. 55-56 from Bones

Focus on Fiction: Character Development and Plot

Monday 2/29

Reading due: "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin (arguably one of the best stories ever written. Enjoy this gem!) Link found on D2L or here: <http://swcta.net/moore/files/2012/02/sonnysblues.pdf>

Plus, essays on the genre: pp. 259-267 from I.W.

Work due: In your writer's notebook, reflect on one of the characters in Baldwin's story. Describe what the character is like. Then point to specific moments in the story that helped you understand the character. Is there a particular action, a particular line of dialogue, a particular physical characteristic that really helped solidify your understanding of the character? Which one? How so?

Focus: Character Development

Wednesday 3/2

Guest lecturer: Fiction writer Adam Prince

Reading due: "Christians" by Tom Franklin found on D2L. and pp. 77-78 from Bones.

Work due: In your writer's notebook, discuss what is the conflict of this story and how is it given shape? What are some of the tricks you see Franklin using to pull you along and keep you interested in the story? How does the tension increase?

Work due 2: After reading Bones, list at least 10 stories that you retell.

Focus: Plot

Participation grades will be entered as this is mid-term season. They are not permanent and are intended to provide feedback on your class performance at this time.

Monday 3/7

Reading due: "Don't Do This" by Jerome Stern found on D2L and "Self Reliance" by Edith Pearlman pp. 285-289 from I.W.

Writing due: Read pp. 66-67 from Bones.

Work due: Do the exercise from Bones.

Attend reading given by Mark Lewandowski, creative writing professor from Indiana State University **in the Edgar Room of the Booth Library.**

Optional: after the reading, he will give an informal craft talk where attendees will try some writing prompts at 5:30 in the English department's conference room.

Wednesday 3/9

Work due: Post your outlines on D2L. (Assignment is online.)

Comment on at least three outlines. Spread your comments around so that everyone's ideas receive some comments.

Monday 3/14 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Wednesday 3/16 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

*The students being workshopped on Monday will submit their stories via D2L email by midnight on Friday, 3/18.

Monday 3/21 **Workshop 3 stories**
Reading due: Fiction format on p. 294 from I.W. and pp. 68-69 from Bones.

Wednesday 3/23 **Workshop 4 stories**

Monday 3/28 **Workshop 4 stories**
Reading due: pp. 70-71 from Bones.

Focus on Creative Nonfiction: Form and Research

Wednesday 3/30 **Reading due:** Essays on the genre found on pp. 225-236 from IW., Atwood p. 245-247, and Chabon p. 251-255.
Work due: In your notebook, do either exercise on p. 255 of IW.
Focus: Form

Monday 4/4 **Reading due:** Examples of the braided essay and the collage essay available on D2L. From Bones pp. 143-146.
Writing due: Exercise on p. 87 of Bones.
Focus: Form

Wednesday 4/6 **Reading due:** Two examples of the lyric essay: Traci Brimhall and Claudia Rankine. Both found on D2L
Writing due: First read pp. 99-100 from Bones. Then fill one page with notes from this town.
Focus: Research

Friday 4/8 Attend at least two panels at the English Studies Conference or present creative work in one panel. Write a two-paragraph report on what you did. In the first paragraph, describe the event. In the second paragraph, discuss what you learned. Turn this report in by Monday's class at 4:15.

Monday 4/11 In lieu of class, submit your report on the English Studies Conference.
Reading due: From Bones pp.127-134.

- Wednesday 4/13 Guest speaker: Jordan Zandi. Zandi will workshop two CNF essays and three poems.
Reading due: Choose one chapter from *Bones* to read.
Writing due: Atmospheric research. Assignment details on D2L.
- Monday 4/18 Workshop 3 essays
Writing due: Exercise on pp. 87-89 of *Bones*. (Try to incorporate one of these new combinations into your essay.)
Reading due: From *Bones* pp. 103-104.
- Wednesday 4/20 Workshop 3 essays
- Monday 4/25 Workshop 3 essays
 Discuss final portfolio requirements
 Reading due: From *Bones* pp. 108-110.
- Wednesday 4/27 Workshop 1 essay
 Discussion: Synthesizing the Genres. Arrive prepared to discuss one element that you found is needed across all genres. Also, be prepared to discuss one technique that improved your writing. Please bring an example from your work where you incorporated that technique and a model from a published author's work.
Work due: Jot down answers to all questions in your notebook.
Small group workshop: Revised work. **Bring three copies of one short passage** that you want another set of eyes on.
Work due: Writer's Notebook Final Check
- Thursday 4/28 (Optional) Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: Hear U.S. Poet Laureate, Juan Felipe Herrera, read in Champaign-Urbana. I will arrange carpooling for anyone interested. Let me know if you'd like to go by Tuesday 4/27.

Other recommended chapters from *Bones*:

If you are having trouble writing: p. 138

If you are feeling isolated: p. 140

If you are unsure what to do after a workshop: p. 154, 157, and/or 162

Final Portfolio Due Date

By Thursday, May 5th at 2:30.