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ENG 2003-002: Creative Writing: Poetry

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English 2003-002: Creative Writing: Poetry

Dr. Miho Nonaka

Time: 2-2:50 p.m. MWF Class Location: Coleman 3159

Office: Coleman 3050 Mail Box: Coleman 3155 Phone: 581-6121 Email: mnonaka@eiu.edu

Office Hours: MW 1-2 p.m., 3:15-3:45 p.m., F 1-2 p.m., and by appointment

Course Objectives: This is an introductory course for writing poetry. We will begin the class by reading the works of established poets and investigating their methods and motivations. It will involve learning how to describe certain features of language (voice, imagery, rhythm, stanzas, line breaks, etc.). Then we will workshop your poems by applying what we have learned from the reading. We will explore each poem carefully by discussing what works (for example, showing rather than telling, specific feelings conveyed through concrete images), what doesn't work (rhyming, preaching, generalizing, the use of abstract language or clichés), and how to make the poem clearer and stronger. We will seek to create a workshop climate that is supportive and encouraging, yet at the same time, allows for pointing out potential improvements and directions for future growth. I hope for animated and wide-ranging discussions based on both respect and honesty.

Texts:

Vendler, Helen, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*

Webb, Charles Harper, ed., *Stand Up Poetry: An Expanded Anthology*

Xeroxed handouts and electronic resources

Policies:

* Your attendance is important for everyone, but especially for you. If you miss more than 3 classes, I will lower your final grade by a letter. If you miss 5 or more classes, you will either drop the course or accept an F for the semester. As outlined in the student catalogue, I will consider an absence excused only for “reasons of illness, emergency, or university activity.” Unexcused absences are pretty much all others—oversleeping, hangovers, finishing papers for other classes, out-of-town trips (especially on Fridays), etc..

* I expect you to arrive ready to participate in discussion. Since the format of this class is primarily a workshop, participation is crucial. The quality as well as the frequency of your contributions affect your participation grade. If you have great attendance but rarely speak up in class, it will be difficult to get an A or B for your participation grade. Your written comments on your peers' works will also constitute an important part of the grade. You must type your comment to receive credit. Print your comment at the back of each poem, or on an individual sheet of paper (in other words, don't print your comments on several poems on the same sheet), so that I can pass your comment on to the person who wrote the poem. Include your name, the title of the poem and its author. I will collect your typed comments at the end of each workshop.

* If you are absent, you are still responsible for knowing the material, completing all of the readings and turning in any assignments for that day. I recommend getting several classmates' phone numbers and email addresses so that you can keep up. Do not email me to ask for an “update” on missed assignments.

* Late comers (who arrive after 10 minutes) will receive partial absences, and must see me after class so I can mark their attendance. Every 3 instances of tardiness will count as 1 absence. Leaving the

class early will be treated in the same manner.

* All assignments are due on the dates specified. You must also turn in your typed comments on the poems on the day they are workshopped. **If you miss the workshop, don't turn in your late comments to me, but directly to the peers who wrote the poems.** Lateness will result in a lower grade. I will not accept assignments via email.

* In-class writing assignments must be turned in by the end of class, and cannot be made up at a later date.

* All assignments must be typed and printed in black ink. You are responsible for saving copies of all work you turn in. Make sure to keep the old drafts of your poems. You will have to include the earlier version of every poem (with my comments still attached) in your final portfolio, along with the revised version, so that I can clearly see the changes you have made. You will be graded on the progress you make as a poet through the course; you will not receive a grade on each poem you workshop the first time.

* Cell phones must be turned off before coming to class and kept out of sight in our classroom at all times.

Assignments:

Over the semester, along with completing writing exercises, you will compose poems, a number of which you will present to the class and revise.

You will be assigned a presentation in which you will choose a poem by a contemporary poet. Bring enough copies of the poem for everyone, provide some background, offer your own observations and insight, and then lead the class in discussion by asking several analysis questions. It should take 15-20 minutes, including the class discussion. Keep the background information minimum, though; I am more interested in your interpretation of what the poet is trying to do through his/her particular use of language. **The poem must be less than 20 years old** and published in a book or a nationally recognized literary magazine. Alternately, you may choose a poem from *Stand Up Poetry*, as long as it has not been discussed in class. Consult with me about your choice to prevent any overlap.

A midterm exam will cover basic terms and poetic concepts from reading assignments (Vendler's *Poems, Poets, Poetry*) and class discussions. **Make sure to take good notes!** They will come in handy when preparing for midterm.

There will be no final exam; at the semester's end, you will instead submit a portfolio which should include a preface stating what you have learned in class and your goal for future writing, 6-8 of your best revised poems with previous drafts to show your progress.

Note: I reserve the right to alter or revise class policies and requirements for the course.

Workshops:

* You are responsible for providing copies of your poems for workshop discussion: one copy for me, and one each for everyone else in class. I will make a list of your last names, and for the most part, we will workshop alphabetically according to the list.

* We will start by having you read your poem out loud (or you may ask someone else in class to do it). While your peers discuss your work, you must remain silent. At the end of discussion you respond to

the critique and have the option of asking for more feedback on specific parts that the class may have overlooked. Take notes on what is said in order to help you revise later.

* We will begin our critique with a general opinion of the work. Example: "I like the simplicity of the poem; the writer's honesty and passion for its subject come across clearly." Or: "The poem has a lovely melody to it. But I want the poem to 'show more and tell less' by putting some of its ideas into tangible images. The lack of images makes the poem less interesting." Or: "Although I enjoy the mysterious atmosphere of the poem, I often don't know what exactly is happening in the poem." Or: "There are so many great, vivid images. The line breaks are a little distracting, though. Some lines are very long, while others are very short." Or: "I love the idea and emotion woven through this poem, and I believe that you can make it more powerful by replacing the abstract words and clichés with something more concrete and original." We will then move on to more specific/editorial comments. Example: "The last two lines of the third stanza are awkward to read; the wording needs to be changed." Or: "Some poems work well without much punctuation; however, this one would be easier to read with some periods."

* Make an extra effort to define what a poem is doing well; at the same time, address problems honestly and unapologetically. False praise does not help the writer in any way but stunts his/her progress. Never give or take criticism personally. When taking criticism, be open-minded, but remember that what you revise is ultimately your decision. Listen carefully to your peers' remarks and use what is most helpful to you.

Grading:

Participation (your attendance, participation in class discussion, and both spoken and typed comments on your peers' poems): 20%

Writing assignments (may include in-class exercises and quizzes): 10%

Presentation: 15%

Midterm exam: 15%

Portfolio: 40%

Note: I do not keep a running tally of your current grade from day to day, so please don't ask. You should keep your own record of your participation and all of your assignments.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated. I will follow the English Department policy on plagiarism:

"Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work" (*Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including a grade of "F" for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources."

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Course Calendar

This is a tentative schedule, which will evolve as the class progresses. Changes will be announced in class. All the readings come from Vendler's *Poems, Poets, Poetry* unless otherwise specified.

Week 1

M Aug 25: Introduction

Homework: Read Emily Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died," "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass," "After great pain, a formal feeling comes -," "There's a certain Slant of light" and write down your observations

W Aug 27: Discuss Dickinson

Homework: Write a poem in Dickinson's style.

F Aug 29: Share your Dickinsonian poems *Last day to ADD courses*

Week 2

M Sep 1: No class; Labor Day

W Sep 3: Discuss chapter 1: "The Poem as Life"

F Sep 5: Discuss chapter 2 "The Poem as Arranged Life"

Week 3

M Sep 8: Chapter 2 "The Poem as Arranged Life"; in-class writing exercise

Last day to DROP a course with No Grade/No Charge

W Sep 10: Poem #1 due; chapter 3 "Poem as Pleasure"

F Sep 12: Chapter 3 "Poem as Pleasure"; workshop

Week 4

M Sep 15: Workshop

W Sep 17: Poem #2 due (for individual conference); workshop

F Sep 19: Chapter 4 "Describing Poems"; workshop

Week 5

M Sep 22: Conference

W Sep 24: Conference

F Sep 26: Conference *Last Day to Withdraw*

Week 6

M Sep 29: Poem #3 (revision of poem #2) due; chapter 4 "Describing Poems"

W Oct 1: Workshop

F Oct 3: Workshop

Week 7

M Oct 6: Chapter 5 "The Play of Language"; workshop

W Oct 8: Poem #4 due; workshop

F Oct 10: No class; Fall Break

Week 8

M Oct 13: Workshop

W Oct 15: **Midterm**

F Oct 17: Workshop

Week 9

M Oct 20: Workshop

W Oct 22: Poem #5 due; workshop; presentation

F Oct 24: Workshop

Week 10

M Oct 27: Workshop

W Oct 29: Poem #6 due; workshop; presentation

F Oct 31: Workshop; presentation

Week 11

M Nov 3: Workshop; presentation

W Nov 5: Workshop; presentation

F Nov 7: Poem #7 due; workshop; presentation *Last Day for W for Course Withdrawal*

Week 12

M Nov 10: Workshop; presentation

W Nov 12: Workshop; presentation

F Nov 14: Workshop; presentation

Week 13

M Nov 17: Poem #8 due; workshop; presentation

W Nov 19: Workshop; presentation

F Nov 21: No class

Week 14

M Nov 24: No class; Thanksgiving Break

W Nov 26: No class; Thanksgiving Break

F Nov 28: No class; Thanksgiving Break

Week 15

M Dec 1: Workshop; presentation

W Dec 3: Workshop; presentation

F Dec 5: Poem # 9 due; workshop; presentation

Week 16

M Dec 8: Workshop

W Dec 10: Workshop

F Dec 12: **Final portfolio due**; last class day