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ENG 2001-001: Creative Nonfiction

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Emily Dickinson’s advice to poets and writers of her time, and ours, was “Tell all the truth but tell it slant—.” This little four-beat line is as complex as it is simple—what is the truth after all, and what’s that word “slant” mean anyway? How reliable is memory and how trustworthy is language to give us accurate information? And in writing that means most to us as both readers and writers, are we really after information—Emily sure wasn’t—or are we perhaps in pursuit of something more enduring, perhaps of experience itself that scars us like no data can? But how can we report the world (“tell all the truth”) and create it (“tell it slant”) at the same time? What the heck is “creative nonfiction” anyway?

The only way we can answer this last question is by reading a lot of contemporary essays to see how others have tried by example to define this term and by trying to define it ourselves by our own writing.

Requirements:
1. 5 finished essays of 5-8 pages each or roughly 40 pages of creative nonfiction
   a. all work will be revised several times
   b. the essays must exemplify at least three modes of creative nonfiction (e.g., nature, travel, memoir)
2. class participation
3. conferences with me
4. a final portfolio, due the last day of class
   a. five completed essays
   b. a 3-5 page critical self-evaluation

Grades:
Your final grade will be based on your overall performance in the class. I will pay particular attention to your growth as a writer and especially to your willingness to revise and keep revising. Your contributions to class discussion are also very important because part of your job in here is to provide a sympathetic yet critical response to the work of your fellow writers. I also expect you to read independently and from time-to-time to share with the class an essay you’ve discovered.

Most of all, make your writing important to you.