EGL 63 — An Introduction to Creative Writing: Facing the Blank Page

“The work of the eyes is done. Go now and do the heart-work on the images imprisoned within you.”
— Rainer Maria Rilke

Instructor: Matthew Siegel

Wednesdays, 6:30 – 9:30 pm
10 weeks, April 1 – June 3

Course description:
Even though this is an “introductory” course, you should consider it an immersive one that is appropriate for both the beginning and experienced writer. We will all be learning from one another regardless of our previous experience in creative writing classes. We will be considering many different approaches to writing, examining not only contemporary poetry and fiction, but also essays on the writing process. Since the topic of this course is “facing the blank page,” we will discuss our apprehensions about writing openly as well as share different strategies to produce work. The first segment of the course will be focused on poetry and the second on prose, with some overlap. Our classes will focus on review of the texts, as well as in-class exercises, sharing, and commentary.

Course Grading
You have three options:
1.) No Grade Requested (this is the default option)
2.) If you elect to Credit/No Credit, attendance will determine your grade
3.) If you elect to obtain a letter grade, your final portfolio will account for 100% of your grade.

Workshop Principals
The first principal of workshop is kindness. Just about anything can be said in a way that engenders community and continued artistic efforts. We want each member of our group to go home each evening energized and eager to write and read more. Remember that we are giving comments to real life, flesh-and-blood human beings who are going to really pay excessively close attention to the things we are saying about the work at hand. We should do our best to refer to the speaker or narrator of the piece, rather than the writer (more on this in class). Remember that when you're commenting, that you're not just making the piece as you want it, but that you're working to help the writer write their story. To the writer being workshopped: try not take every single thing that every person says seriously. Listen, of course, to the things people are saying, but know that there is no way you are going to please everybody. One of the best parts about workshop is learning who your best readers are and focusing on those comments above the others. Remember that a good story is something different to each of us.
Portfolio
Each student seeking credit in the course will compile a final portfolio of work written during the course and must include both revisions as well as a brief written statement on where they are in their writing life.

Course Schedule:
Pre-course work: selections from *A Poet’s Glossary* and “How to Read a Poem” by Ed Hirsch, Clifton/Kinnell clips, “Little Lion Face” by May Swensen, “Speaking in Figures” by Mark Doty, and stories by Paley, Baxter, Keret, Carver, and LeGuin

Week 1: Ice breakers, review pre-course writing exercises, etc, discuss readings. What do we talk about when we talk about writing? Brief exercises.
HW: *The Making of a Poem* sections on Pantoum and Villanelle and Optional: “Metaphor: A Poet is a Nightingale” by Ed Hirsch, additional poems. Read Amy Tan - “Jing-Mei Woo” and Willa Cather - “A Wagner Matinee” and respond to writing prompts.

Week 2: Review readings, share. Read and discuss “Popular Mechanics” by Raymond Carver and “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway.

HW: *Double Portrait* by Brittany Perham and two stories by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Optional: “The Sonnet” from *The Making of a Poem*

Week 4: Workshop round 1 set 1

Week 5: Workshop round 1 set 2
HW: selections from *Self Help* by Lorrie Moore. “Brownies” by ZZ Packer. “Souls on Ice” by Mark Doty

Week 6: Workshop round 1 set 3. Round 2 set 1 submits.
HW: “Cowboys Are My Weakness” by Pam Houston and “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” by Ursula K. LeGuin
Optional: from *On Writing* by Raymond Carver and “Letter to Max Brod” by Franz Kafka (Norton).

Week 7: Workshop round 2 set 1
HW: Read and comment on packets. Letters 1-3 of *Letters to a Young Poet*. Write.

Week 8: Workshop round 2 set 2
HW: Read and comment on packets. Write. Letters 4-7 of *Letters to a Young Poet*. Write.

Week 9: Workshop round 2 set 3
HW: Read and comment on packets. Write. Letters 8-9 of *Letters to a Young Poet*. Write.

Week 10: Workshop round 2 set 4
HW: Write.

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
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