“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”
— Maya Angelou

Welcome to An Introduction to Creative Writing: The Untold Story

**Required Reading**

*Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott
*Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*
*Sudden Fiction: American Short-Short Stories*
*Poems will be linked from internet*

**Course Summary:**

This course will experiment with the many forms of creative expression and discuss the fundamentals of creative composition including figurative language, sound, imagery, voice, and style. The class will consist of writing prompts, lively discussion threads, and an on-going class workshop where students can obtain feedback from their instructor and peers. By the completion of the course, students should have completed 2-3 poems and 2-3 short stories or personal essays that show attention to form as well as individual style and voice.

**Grading Options**

You have three options:
1) No Grade Requested (NGR): - this is the default option
2) Credit/No Credit (CR/NC): Your attendance will determine your grade.
3) Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass): Your attendance, participation in discussions, written work, and participation in workshop will account for 100% of your grade.

*Please Note:* If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.
### The Breakdown if you choose a Letter Grade

- 40% - Careful and considerate weekly critiques of your peers’ work
- 30% - Weekly participation in discussion threads
- 30% - Completion of a significant piece in each genre

### How This All Works

We will create an encouraging, invigorating community where we will discuss the craft of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction and each other’s work in thoughtful, kind, and critical ways. I expect each student to be present in the conversations and dialogue we create through our assigned readings and to be equally invested in the work of their peers. The most unique aspect of this course will be the convergence of different backgrounds, aesthetic preferences, and perspectives. The course will unfold like this: at the beginning of each week I will give you a writing prompt for you to consider as you work to create a piece to submit for peer feedback. In addition to writing a piece, you are also expected to complete the weekly reading assignments, which include reading approximately five-seven poems, 2-4 stories or essays and one chapter on writing from *bird by bird*. You will participate in a discussion thread and write a short critique on approximately three of your peers’ pieces. I want you to feel creatively stimulated and supported by like-minded, invested writers. Push yourself to step outside of the box and write the piece you’ve always wished you could write.

### The Discussion Thread

Reading creative writing is essential to writing creatively. An old professor of mine used to say, “Read fifty poems, write one. Read 10 stories, write one.” Of course, that might seem excessive. But it gets to the heart of the importance of reading. Each week you will read 5-7 poems or 3-4 stories/essays and write a response in the discussion thread. Rather than do a close reading of the piece, I’ve asked specific questions related to whatever craft aspect we are focusing on each week based on the assigned readings. Please also feel free to write a personal reaction to the work as well. Everyone should post at least one short paragraph (4-6 sentences minimum) a week. You are welcome to read and comment on the responses of others as often as you’d like! Though it’s not required, this is an important step in creating a writing community and hearing everyone’s individual voice. I will read every response and answer and ask questions when I see an opportunity. This should be a collective effort from all us.

### Posting Your Work for Peer Workshop

A writing workshop is meant to support one another’s efforts with positive and critical feedback. Students will gain knowledge about their own work by reading the
feedback of their peers, as well as through their own careful consideration of the work of others. Each week there will be six threads (A, B, C, D, E and F). You will post your piece to one of these forums by Wednesday evening at 9 PM Pacific Time. Only three writers can post in a forum, so if a forum is full, please post in a different one. Once you've posted your piece, other students will read and comment on your work. If you'd like to go into a thread and read and respond to work outside of your thread, that's fine. I’d just like to keep the feedback relatively even so that everyone is getting the same amount.

**Posting Your Work in the Instructor’s Thread**

I will respond to three pieces (one in each genre) and one revision (in the final week) throughout the course. Once you’ve decided which piece you’d like my feedback on, post it in the Instructor’s Forum and I will respond to your work. The work you choose to submit to me can be written at any point in the course. If you decide during Week 8 you’d like me to see your poem from Week 2, that’s perfectly fine, just post it for me. Please do not post two pieces in one week. I’d like to be able to give everyone’s work the time and attention it deserves. Please post your work by 9 PM Pacific Time on Thursday Evenings.

**Responding to Your Peers’ Work**

You are expected to act as a Lead Commenter and write a critique on the pieces in the forum you posted to. Say you posted your piece in Thread A. You are then responsible for writing a careful, considerate critique of the other pieces in Thread A. Please vary which thread you post in weekly so that you can respond to a variety of your classmates’ work. In poetry, consider the form, the music, how the linebreaks function. Is the poem one long, extended metaphor? Does it employ similes to make comparisons? Does it rhyme? If so, does the rhyme feel natural or forced? In prose, who are the characters, what is the perspective or point of view? What is the narrative shape? How does time function to order the world? Of course, tell the writer what you like about the piece (hearing praise is extremely important!) and give helpful, useful suggestions on how the piece can be improved during the revision process. Consider these helpful questions as a guide:

**Diagnostic Questions:**

Prepare a critique for each piece considering the following questions:

1. What can we observe/ what do we know about this piece?
2. Who is the speaker/protagonist/antagonist of the piece, what does he/she/it say or want?
3. What is this piece about?
4. What tone(s) and/or point of view does this piece use?
5. What is the pattern or structure of the poem or of the narrative?
6. What is the writer’s intention?
7. What are notable examples of imagery/sounds/figurative language?

**Formatting Your Work**

Your work must be typed in standard font (Times New Roman, Garamond, Goudy Old Style are best) 11 of 12 pt. left justified (unless the justification is part of your poem’s formatting) for poetry and double-spaced for prose. Fonts that are too funky or too large tend to distract the reader from the work at hand.

**The Weekly Schedule**

*Friday Evening*

* New Week Posted
* Check the prompt thread for your weekly writing prompt and begin writing, if you wish.
* Begin reading assigned reading and chapter for the next week.

*Monday & Tuesday:*

* Discussion thread will be open. The conversation will be on going until the deadline. Your weekly response should be posted in the response forum by Thursday evening at 9 PM Pacific Time.

*Wednesday:*

* Post your work for peer comments in one of six threads (A, B, C, D, E and F) by 9 PM Pacific Time. Up to three students are welcome in each forum. Once 3 pieces have been posted, you must choose a different forum. This is done so you can experience and read the work of different people each week. (You have until Thursday at 9 PM to post in the instructor thread)

*Thursday & Friday*

* Please read and comment on the pieces in your thread. You will be reading around two-three pieces a week and should write a kind, helpful response to each piece discussing what you like and what you think can be improved upon. Refer to the Diagnostic Questions above for a guide. All comments should be made by Sunday evening and should be at least a short paragraph long (around 5 sentences).

*Saturday & Sunday*

The weekend can be used to finish commenting on your peers’ pieces or to begin next week’s reading or writing assignments. It won’t be logging into the classroom
on the weekends very much, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t! Feel free to get a jump-start!

**Important Note**

We all have busy lives and sometimes our daily responsibilities will take precedence over coursework. Please do what you can, when you can. If you miss a discussion one week or don’t have time to write, please don’t worry! You can always go back and add to a discussion. A minimum of three pieces (and one revision) should be written to obtain credit, so don’t feel pressure to write every week (unless you want to!). Most important here is the feedback you can give to your classmates. An online course is a unique experience as there are people coming together from all walks of life. The most valuable thing you can give to each other is your perspective. Please take the responsibility to each other’s work most seriously. The minimum I expect you do is to comment on one forum of peer work a week. Everything else can wait if you’re busy. As always, if you have any problems or questions please don’t hesitate to ask!

*Tentative Weekly Schedule* (schedule may change depending on number of students)

**Week 1: Introductions and Beginnings** *Be sure to post in the welcome thread*

Lecture: *The Elements of Craft: Image, Imagination, Figurations, Voice*

Reading Assignments:
- bird by bird: “Getting Started” (pg. 3)
- “A Story About the Body” by Robert Hass (link), “Rosary” by Robert Kelly (pg. 176 Short-Short) “Living Like Weasels” by Anne Dillard (pg. 148 Touchstone Anthology)

Writing Prompt: “A Story About”

**Week 2:** Lecture: *The Short Story: Point of View, Setting, and Narration*

Reading Assignments:
- bird by bird: “Plot” (pg. 54)
- “Say Yes” by Tobias Wolff (pg. 74 Short-Short) “No One’s Mystery” by Elizabeth Tallent (pg. 46 Short-Short) “The Signing” by Stephen Dixon (pg. 205 Short Short)
- “Moving Pictures” by Charles Johnson (pg. 190 Short-Short) “Cathedral” by Raymond Carver (link)

Writing Prompt: From Situation to Plot (54)

**Week 3:** Lecture: *The Short Story: Creating Characters and Conflict*

Reading Assignments:
- bird by bird: “Dialogue” (pg. 64)
- “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff (link) “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” by Joyce Carol Oates” (link) “Mother” by Grace Paley (pg. 3 Short-Short)
- “Turning” by Lynda Sexson (pg. 70 Short-Short)
Writing Prompt: The Interior Landscape (147)

**Week 4:** Lecture: *Memoir: Techniques of Memory*
Reading Assignments:
bird by bird: “Finding Your Voice” (pg. 195)
Writing Prompt: Memory Speaks

**Week 5:** Lecture: *Personal Essay: The Here & Now*
Reading Assignments:
bird by bird: “Broccoli” (pg. 110)
“Pain Scale” by Eula Biss (pg. 28 in Touchstone Anthology), “Consider the Lobster” by David Foster Wallace (pg. 525 in Touchstone Anthology), “Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan (pg. 514)
Writing Prompt: Incorporating Research

**Week 6:** Lecture: *Across the Genres*
Reading Assignments:
bird by bird: “The Moral Point of View” (pg. 103)
“Portrait of My Body” by Phillip Lopate (pg. 299 Touchstone) “Things I Did to Make it Possible” by Francois Camoin (pg. 129 Short-Short) “There are Birds Here” by Jamaal May (link) “Trying Four-Leggedness” by Rebecca Hazelton (link)
Writing Prompt: Imitation is Flattering

**Week 7:** Lecture: *Poetry: Form & Structure*
Reading Assignments:
bird by bird: “Looking Around” (pg. 97)
“A Supermarket in California” by Allen Ginsberg
Writing Prompt: Image-ine Me

**Week 8:** Lecture: *Poetry: Sound & Experimentation*
Reading Assignments:
bird by bird: “Shitty First Drafts” (pg. 21)
Writing Prompt: The Persona Speaks
**Week 9:** Lecture: *Revision & Revisioning*
Reading Assignment:
bird by bird: “Writer’s Block” (pg. 176)
Writing Prompt: Revision Exercise/Post a Revision and the original draft (or selection) for side-by-side feedback

**Week 10:** Lecture: *Conclusions and Farewells*
Reading Assignment:
bird by bird “How Do You Know When You’re Done?” (pg. 93) and “The Last Class” (pg. 225)
Writing Prompt: *Post a final piece that you are most happy with and include a 3-paragraph process letter about your writing process, strengths/weaknesses, how you’ve grown throughout the last 10 weeks, and anything else you’d like you share.*

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
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