

CW 2100: Intro to Poetry & Prose

Fall 2018

Professor: Peter Markus

Mondays/Wednesdays 3:30-5:15

105 Wilson Hall

Office Hours: Mon/Wed 5:15-6:15 and/or by appointment

Contact Email: markus@oakland.edu

Course Description:

In this course, we will *play* with words, shaping them into lines and sentences, poetry and prose. We'll investigate this idea of writing as play (and work as well) while we explore the power of our words using cross-genre exercises and writing techniques. Students will participate in class discussion, group work, and writing workshop; they will also be responsible for developing a critical vocabulary with which to approach both the reading material and classmates' work.

Class Overview:

Why read poetry? Why write poetry? What's the point and purpose of story, of the imagination, of the made up? These are just a few questions to get us started as we begin the journey that I hope will be this class.

This is an introductory workshop and studio class set to explore the power and pleasure of reading and writing poetry and fiction. We'll be reading all types and styles of poetry and prose (fiction and non-fiction) that exist in the world as a way of expanding our experience and exposing us to new ways of seeing and saying and being in the world.

The world is a mysterious place, a world shaped by the things in it, though of course the world doesn't always make sense to us until we make the time to sit down and pick up a pen and begin to wonder our way through it in order to see it in a new way.

To see what we think we see, to find out what we know about the things that we don't, to discover what we really know about what we think we know, to put it all into words. Emerson wrote: "Every word was once an animal." The Word, in other words—our language—as a living, breathing thing.

Studio Sessions:

Studio time will be mainly our generative time, time devoted to the act of creation: world making and word shaping. We will read the poems and stories of other writers to help inspire the poems and stories that are ours to write. We'll look at other writers to help us discover the kinds of writing that excites us, engages us, and makes us feel the sensation of being fully alive. All I ask of you is to be open to what you might not at first understand. Don't be afraid of what might seem or feel new and strange (both what you read and also what you write).

Workshop Sessions:

Workshop time will be the time, once we get rolling and have work to look at and talk about, that we look at and talk about the poetry and fiction that you have generated during our studio time. We'll talk about workshop expectations and workshop etiquette in class, but essentially we'll be looking at what makes the writing powerful along with what makes it not as powerful as it might possibly be. What are its pleasures? How did it engage us? Or, what in it made us turn away? You want the reader to stay locked in. Once they look away the poem or story has lost. Be specific. This is true in your own writing and well as in how you learn to respond to the writing of others. Be generous and be of course honest (knowing how to be honest without being a jerk is its own kind of art).

Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- improve their writing skills
- explore and discover an individual voice and style
- engage critically with creative texts in multiple genres
- develop critique skills for in-class workshops of peer work
- gain an understanding of core elements of the writer's craft
- demonstrate the ability to produce writing that is original
- practice skills to present a live reading of their work
- receive personal feedback and mentoring from professional writer

On Grading:

Your grade will be based on a number of factors, among them: attendance, completion (on time) of all assigned readings and workshop responsibilities, class participation, and your general presence and conduct during both the studio and workshop sessions. Some of these factors, such as attendance, are quantifiable; other factors, it should be noted, rely on subjective judgment, namely mine. The founding principle of the workshop model is grounded in the belief that by helping others to find ways to make their writing better, we are also bettering ourselves. The workshop method is an opportunity for the student writer to develop his abilities and strategies as a reader, editor, and critic.

Breakdown of Grades:

33% Attendance/Attitude/
Presence/ Participation/
Pearls/ Presentations/

33% Midterm Poetry Portfolio (due at mid-semester).

33% Final Fiction Portfolio (due on our Final Exam day).

All work turned in for workshop and for both mid-term and final portfolios must be typed.

Attendance:

Every absence after your second absence will result in the lowering of your final grade by a third of a grade (i.e. with 3 absences the highest grade you will receive in this class is a 3.7; 4 absences the best grade possible will be a 3.4, etc. on down the line).

Plagiarism:

“Good poets borrow. Great poets steal.” So said the poet T.S. Eliot. It’s true, you’ll hear me say it often: all poems and stories are written in conversation with other poems and stories. That said, if you put your name above words that I can prove are not your own there will be consequences to such actions.

Required Books:

A Book of Luminous Things (edited by Czeslaw Milosz)

The Poetry Home Repair Manual by Ted Kooser

The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry (edited by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux)

Our Sudden Museum by Robert Fanning

Sudden Fiction (edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas)