

Cedar Crest College

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Office Hours: T and TR., 1:00-2:00 p.m.; W, 11:00 a.m.-noon; and by appointment

Honors Creative Writing HON 194 (3 credits) Fall 2008

*Basically, if you want to become a good writer,
you need to do three things. Read a lot, listen
well and deeply, and write a lot.*

Natalie Goldberg

Writing Down the Bones

Texts:

Stephen Minot, *Three Genres*, 8th ed.

Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 5th ed. (If you already own Kirszner and Mandell's *Pocket Wadsworth Handbook*, you do not need to purchase this second handbook)

Your writing

On Reserve in Cressman Library: Billy Collins, "Inspired by a Bunny Wabbit"

Course Description/Format:

A workshop in the art and craft of poetry and fiction for students who are interested in writing for an audience. Students will analyze the works of established authors and learn strategies for developing their own material. Emphasis is on the process of creating original works.

During class time, we will write, read our work aloud, consider what others have written, and talk about such matters as structure, language, and style. Format: This class will be a workshop: your presence and your participation will determine its success.

This course fulfills the categories of ART, Arts and Society, and Self-Design in the old curriculum and ART in the new curriculum. It counts toward the Honors Program, the English major/concentration in writing, the English minor, the writing minor, and the Fine Arts concentration in creative writing.

Prerequisite: Member of Honors Program or permission of instructor.

Course Learning Objectives:

- To encourage the exercise of your creativity and your appreciation of others' creativity.
- To provide you with strategies for writing, editing, reading, and teaching poetry and fiction, approaches that you can use in this course and beyond.

Outcomes:

- Students will produce original creative work that demonstrates the mastery of various forms and devices.
- Students will demonstrate reading and analytical/critical thinking skills.

Course Requirements:

--**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is required. Please note: You are allowed two absences (this includes medical and sports absences, so plan your cuts carefully). There is no need to explain why you are taking the absence; simply make certain that I have any work that is due on that date. More than two (2) absences will affect your final grade; five (5) absences will result in a grade of **F**. Excessive lateness (fifteen minutes or more) and early departures will count as absences. If you think that you will have a serious time conflict, please let me know in the first days of the semester.

--**Readings** from textbooks and handouts.

--Short discovery **exercises**, written in class or prepared ahead of time for class discussion.

--**Drafts** of poems and fiction for workshops for Assignments 2-7: you will need to provide copies for the others in the class.

--**Seven "finished" assignments.** After Assignment #1, you will have a great deal of leeway in tailoring assignments to fit your needs. For example, one student may opt to write only poetry; another may choose to work on a novel and bring weekly installments to class instead of writing any poetry at all. The course should meet *your* writing needs; remember, however, that this sort of arrangement involves your taking extra responsibility. Please consult with me regarding changes in assignments, and plan and pace your work. Note, too, that even if you are working on a cleared substitution, you must still follow the schedule of due dates.

Your task will be to produce a series of original works over the course of the semester--and to present these pieces in our workshops. You will be expected to follow the workshop schedule for drafts on the syllabus. The polished copy of your work will be due one week after your workshop presentation.

--A self-evaluative paragraph, to accompany the final project.

--**Active participation:** discussion of readings and other students' writing. This is an extremely important part of the course and your class grade: All students must present their work to the rest of the class in the draft workshops and must take part meaningfully in peer-critiquing sessions. On occasion, you may also present final copies and further revisions.

Note: If you miss a class on a day when written work--draft or final copy--is due, your paper is still due on that date. The penalty for a late final copy or a missing draft will be the loss of one full numerical credit for the assignment in question.

Revising Your Work:

Option to revise your work: After I have scored your work and returned it to you, you have the option of submitting your work one more time. Again, your revision will be due at the following class meeting. You may present your work to the group (if you wish to do this, bring copies for everyone) or simply hand it in to me.

Extra-credit option: a response paper (1-2 pages) on a guest author.

Preparing Your Work:

--All work, including rough drafts for workshops, must be typed.

--You will need to provide copies of your work for the rest of the class.

--All work should be double-spaced. Use one-inch margins and a font size of 12 (This is a sample of size 12 font). Obviously, there may be exceptions to the rules for format (for example, the concrete poem).

--Proofread. And then proofread again. Using the spell checker is only the start. Read your work aloud to double-check for errors.

--Submit all work on time; late papers will affect the workshop and your individual and final grades.

--Do not wait to print your paper until just before it is due (Something will inevitably go wrong).

--You should begin planning your final project in late October.

--Keep a copy of everything that you write.

Conferences:

I will be happy to meet with you individually to discuss your work.

Grading:

Grading for Creative Writing assignments is generally holistic and uses a scale of 1-4, 4 being the highest score (and the equivalent of an A).

Because of the emphasis on the process of writing, I will not assign letter grades to individual papers. I will, however, make copious comments and use a system of numbers: **4** indicates excellent/outstanding work, **3** indicates satisfactory progress/good work, **2** indicates fair work, and **1** will serve as a warning about unsatisfactory work. I will give you a warning at the midpoint of the semester if it seems as though your work merits a grade below B-. The rubric for grading appears at the end of this handout.

Your **final grade** will depend on the quality of your written work, your progress, your attendance, and your participation in literary discussions and peer-critiquing sessions.

Additional Student Responsibilities:

Make-Up Policies: Because the course is conducted as a workshop, all assignments should be completed and presented on time. If you miss a class meeting on a day when work is due, you must still provide me with the work on that day and, time permitting, present the work in class on the first day that you return.

The Cedar Crest **Honor Code** and the **Classroom Protocol Code**, as stated in the Customs Book, will be in effect at all times.

Plagiarism, which is the appropriation of and uncredited use of another's work, is a serious offense. It does not matter if the work is by an established author, your best friend, or a blogger whose writing you find appealing. Plagiarism is theft; it is unethical. It is a waste of your time, integrity, and money and a waste of your classmates' and my time and energy. Plagiarism will result in a grade of **F** for the course.

College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their

professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Learning Center.

--Before you leave class on the first day, make sure that you have the phone numbers/e-mail addresses of two of your classmates; these will be your contacts for notes and make-up work if you miss a class.

--Please turn off your cell phone before the start of class.

--If you have a question about assignments, do not hesitate to ask. Chances are that one or two other people in the class will have the same question and will be grateful to you for asking.

Syllabus

Let's go

Come on

Let's go

Opening of "Junkman's Obbligato"

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Reading and writing assignments must be completed by the dates specified. For the poems and stories mentioned in each section, research and record the date.

Bring your textbook to every class meeting.

Please note that workshops need to be flexible; if changes seem to be appropriate, we'll revise the syllabus accordingly. Also note that workshops--our most important classroom activity--may require more time than the syllabus anticipates.

August 27

Getting Started

September 3

Read: TG, Preface for Students, ix-xii, and Chapters 25 and 26: "What Makes a Poem a Poem?" and "Plunging In" (be prepared to talk about one or two poems in Chapter 26 that especially appealed to you), 198-224

Read also: Billy Collins, "Inspired by . . ." (on reserve in Cressman Library)

* Assignment #1 due (final "polished" copy—this is the only assignment that won't have a draft workshop): This is a two-part assignment: in prose (one paragraph) or poetry, write about your favorite possession (but you may not say "I like it because . . ."); then write about a gift you received that you did not like at all (same rule applies). For our purposes later in the course, these should be concrete (a bracelet, a teacup, etc.), as opposed to abstract (such as love, understanding, revenge, etc.). Bring copies.

September 10

Read: TG, Chapter 27, "Sources," 225-35, and Chapter 32, "Free Verse," 280-290

* Draft workshop for Assignment #2: Poem

September 17

Read: TG, Chapters 28 and 29, “The Impact of Images” and “Using the Sound of Language,” 236-58

* Final copy of Assignment #2 due. Along with your polished copy, hand in workshop copies. If you wish to re-present your work, because you have made substantial revisions, bring copies for the rest of the class.

** Exercise: Choose an object from virtually anywhere/any category (an acorn, a paper clip, a car, etc.) and make a list:

1) Test it against all five of your senses

OR

2) Create a series of metaphors for this object

Your assignment is simply to create a list--continuing on to the next stage of a polished, fully developed poem is optional. This exercise is from Boisseau and Wallace's *Writing Poems*, 6th ed. Bring copies for the rest of the class.

September 24:

Read: TG, Chapters 30 and 31, “Traditional Rhythms” and “Stanzas: A Choice of Fixed Forms,” 259-79.

* Draft workshop for Assignment #3: Poem

October 1

Read: TG, Chapter 33: “A Sense of Order,” 291-99

* Final copy of Assignment #3 due

** Draft workshop for Assignment #4: Poem

Thursday, October 2 Poet and nonfiction writer Mark Doty will read his work at 7:00 p.m., in the 1867 Room.

October 8

Read: TG, Chapters 34 and 35, “Varieties of Tone” and “Poems for Self-Study,” 300-323

For class discussion, based on Chapter 35: Select a poem that you particularly like.

Read the poem as a reader and a writer: how has the author used some of the techniques and characteristics that we've covered? Then do a bit of background research on the poet and his/her other works.

* Final copy of Assignment #4 due

** Draft workshop for Assignment #5: Poem

October 15

Read: TG, Chapters 6, 7, and 8 “Fiction: The Freedom to Invent,” “Finding and Shaping Fresh Material,” and “Escapes” (Chapter 8 is actually a short story), 32-59

* Final copy of Assignment #5 due

** Bring an opening sentence for a story you might write.

October 22

Read; TG, Chapters 9, 10, and 11: “Viewpoint,” “Rwanda” (short story), and “The Making of a Story,” 60-83.

Draft workshop for Assignment #6 begins: a short story (minimum four pages). The idea is to present a developed, well-rounded character. Stereotypical characters (see almost any made-for-television movie) will not let you take your story very far. And stereotypical victim stories aren’t much fun to read or write. Need a prompt? Jerome Stern says that all stories are about someone looking for something. Have your character search for one of the objects that you wrote about for Assignment #1. Other possibilities: a trip to an unusual place (or a trip to an ordinary place that leads to an unexpected development), the arrival of an intriguing or troublesome visitor, or a surprising turn in a mundane job set in a workplace.

October 29

Read: TG, Chapters 12, 13, and 14: “Structure,” “Minding the Store” (short story), and “Creating Tension,” 84-106

* If you presented your draft on 10/22, your final copy is due today.

** Draft workshop for Assignment #6 continued

November 5

Read: TG, Chapters 17 and 18: “Dialogue” and “Characterization,” 123-142

Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants” (handout)

*Exercise: Create a dialogue (1-2 pages) that provides a story about these two characters: One person is getting off a bus; the other person is waiting outside the bus. No exposition allowed! The dialogue must do it all. This is one of John Gardner’s exercises in his *Art of Fiction*.

** For those who presented on 10/29, the final copy of Assignment #6 is due.

*** Workshop: if ready, begin bringing drafts for Assignment #7 (final project): short story, two short-short stories, sections of novel, or set of five poems

November 12

Read: TG, Chapters 15 and 16: “Setting” and “Obst View,” 107-22, and Chapters 22 and 23: “Gotta Dance” and “Style and Tone,” 166-181

* Workshop

November. 19

Read: TG, Chapters 19 and 20: “The Bank Robbery” (short story) and “Liberating the Imagination,” 143-54

* Workshop

November 26 No class meeting—Thanksgiving Break

December 3

(Nearly) Last Words

* Final project due (along with author’s preface/self-evaluative paragraph)--Presentations of final project. Also, bring a favorite poem or prose selection to read.

Rubric for Writing:

4 Superior/Outstanding

Work that uses an assignment as the occasion for a piece of writing imaginative and compelling enough to engage readers on its own terms. It presents an insight or viewpoint with enough fullness and support to command readers' respect, if not their assent. The treatment of content is fresh, not hackneyed, and the language is clear and vivid, not cliched. Superior work demonstrates a mastery of form and an understanding of sophisticated sentence structure, and needs little or no additional editing in terms of basic details of grammar, punctuation, and format. Superior work demonstrates creativity, along with an understanding of --and a sophisticated use of--devices and forms.

3 Good

Work that meets all of an assignment's expectations with competence. The work may lack the fresh thought or compelling development of 4-work*, but it demonstrates, nevertheless, its author's ability to respond intelligently to an assignment's demands, to structure and focus writing clearly, and to choose words accurately and effectively.

*In contrast to 4-work, 3-work may--despite its original thought--require a final editing that takes care of weaknesses in basics that detract from the content.

2 Fair

2-work shows evidence of attempting to meet the assignment's bare specifications, but lacks sharp focus, the full and purposeful development, or the stylistic awareness necessary for a higher grade. 2-work is clearly inadequate in at least one way. Although 2-work may demonstrate competence in one or more facets, one or two pervasive weaknesses will outweigh its strengths. Weaknesses may include failure to engage meaningfully an important aspect of the writing task or to maintain a focus, skimpy or illogical development, and/or repeated significant errors in grammar or idiom.

1 Poor

Work that does not respond acceptably to an assignment, 1-work may misunderstand or disregard the assignment's intent, lack any pattern or organization, or make enough errors in Standard English to make it difficult for a reader to follow the author's thought.

F Failure

The following will merit a grade of F: Failure to submit an assignment, incomplete work, work that disregards the assignment's intent, and, of course, plagiarism.

