

English 211: Creative Nonfiction
Spring 2016
Memorial 301. Tues./Thurs. 10:20-11:30

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Course Description

This online course will introduce you to the dynamic and genre-bending field of creative nonfiction, what one practitioner calls “the practice of writing nonfiction in a dramatic and imaginative way.” Over the course of the next fourteen weeks, you’ll read and study it in its many forms, from the memoir and personal essay to literary journalism and “graphic” reportage (think comic books). And because creative nonfiction, as with all writing, is increasing going digital, you’ll not just read but also view, listen to and interact with a variety of works in electronic formats. As this is a writing course, you’ll put the pen – or cursor (and smart phone) -- to creating personal, narrative works of your own.

Course Objectives

- 1) To introduce you to the works of successful creative nonfiction practitioners and engage you in the study and craft of the genre in its many forms (and platforms).
- 2) To improve your critical and editorial skills, by asking you to consider our material and express your views in written and visual responses.
- 3) To give you instruction on and insight into how to create short works of creative nonfiction of your own.
- 4) To make you a sharper, more critical reader, viewer, and writer.

Required Texts/Materials

There are three required texts for this course (below). Absolutely rent or purchase used but make sure the edition of Zinsser is no older than the 6th. Other readings I’ll post to Blackboard, place on reserve in Reeves, hand out in class, or direct you to a source online.

- 1) Alexander, Elizabeth. *The Light of the World* (New York: Grand Central). 2015
- 2) Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home* (New York: Mariner). 2006
- 3) Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. (New York: HarperCollins).

You’ll also make a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation of a work of creative nonfiction, chosen from a list I’ll provide you. Note the presentation dates on the syllabus when selecting.

Digital Requirements

Google Classroom

You'll need to create accounts on Twitter and Prezi. More information on this later. In the meantime, please enroll in our Google Classroom, through which I'll be assigning prompts for your writing assignments (and through which you'll be submitting your work)

(<https://classroom.google.com/c/NDEwMjkwMTQ1>). The code to join is: sboklp8

Google+ Community

I'll be sending you an invitation to join this online discussion space, where we can carry over conversations from class, post additional food for thought, offer an insight that comes to us after class. Think of this as a place you visit to engage more deeply in the craft of creative nonfiction.

Attendance and Academic Honesty

Your attendance and active participation are crucial, for both the success of this course and for your final grade. You may be excused from one class session for a legitimate academic, medical, or emergency reason only; more than one absence, excused or unexcused, will result in an automatic lowering of your grade.

Any work you submit for this course must be your own. See the College's Academic Honesty policy in the Student Handbook on this issue.

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact the Academic Support Center, located in the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling [610-861-1401](tel:610-861-1401). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.

Note to English Majors: In preparation for creating an English Major Portfolio in your senior capstone seminar, please save both digital and hard copies of your work for this class, including drafts with peer and instructor comments.

Assignments and Evaluation

You will write four essays and create one visual essay for this course. They will account for the bulk of your final grade. To ensure that your papers receive the care and attention they deserve, I am asking that you visit the Writing Center before handing in your work. I will not read your paper before a Writing tutor has reviewed it with you (and, per Writing Center policy, has notified me of your visit).

So that you come to class ready to engage in lively and informed discussion, you will need to prepare a response to our assigned texts. Responses should be at least 300 words in length. I will provide you with a prompt, via Google Classroom. Due dates are noted in the syllabus. Your response is due to Google Classroom by the beginning of class.

You will also write five editor's letters and make a PowerPoint presentation/review of a work of creative nonfiction, selected from a list posted on Blackboard.

In assigning a grade to your written work, I will consider the following: a) the strength of your argument and the effectiveness with which you communicate it, b) elements of style and your command of grammar, and c) the extent to which you consider and incorporate useful comments from your workshop peers, editor, and Writing tutor, as well as my edits to your early drafts. Work turned in late will automatically receive a lower grade.

The evaluative weight of the various assignments for this course, for grading purposes, will be as follows:

Essays 1- 4	35%
Visual Essay	15%
Writer's responses to assigned reading (minimum 300 words)	25%
Editor's letters (minimum 300 words)	10%
Book Review	10%
Active participation in class discussion	5%

Blackboard

I have set up a shell for this course on Blackboard. I'll post our course materials here, including assignments, the syllabus, etc. You must enroll in Blackboard (blackboard.moravian.edu). The password: Bechdel

Conferences and the Writing Center

We will hold formally scheduled conferences during week 7. However, you are welcome -- and encouraged -- to stop by my office during regular office hour (Tuesdays, after class) and/or schedule individual conferences with me at any time. And don't forget to avail yourself of the help available at the Writing Center, whose tutors I am requiring you to consult for each of your major essays.

Schedule of Readings (see pages below)

Schedule of Readings (subject to change)

Week 1: What is Creative Nonfiction?

January 19 (Tuesday)

Review:

- Course syllabus

Read:

- Rogan, “How Much is This Old Thing Worth?”

January 21 (Thursday)

Read

- Bradway, “Defining Creative Nonfiction” (on reserve in Reeves)
- Gutkind, “The 5 R’s of Creative Nonfiction” (<http://tiny.cc/3y397x>)
- Zinsser, “Nonfiction as Literature” (*On Writing Well*, 95 - 99)
- Frazier, “Guard Evacuates Flooded Oregon Town” and Saker, “The Magic in Our Nature.” (attachment. Both pieces are in one document called “The Big Storm”)

View

- Moore, “What’s Creative about Creative Nonfiction?” (<http://tiny.cc/3z397x>)
- Harris, “What is Creative Nonfiction?” (look in Google Mail for an invitation to view this Prezi. Note: you must create a Prezi account to view).

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #1 in Google Classroom.

Week 2: Who Am I? The Memoir and Personal Essay

January 26 (Tuesday)

Read:

- Zinsser, “Writing about Yourself” (133 – 147)
- Bradway, “Memoir” (on Reserve in Reeves)
- Kingston, “No Name Woman” (on Reserve in Reeves, in *The Woman Warrior*, pp. 1 – 16). Also at: <http://tiny.cc/z0397x>
- Dybeck, “Field Trips” (<http://bombmagazine.org/article/2268/field-trips>)

View:

- Prezi, “Memoir”

Write

- Respond to Writer’s Response #2 in Google Classroom.

January 28 (Thursday)

Read:

- Zinsser, “The Audience” (25 - 32)
- Boomer, “The End of Small Talk,” *New York Times*
(<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/fashion/dating-the-end-of-small-talk.html>)

Listen:

- Sedaris, reading “The Drama Bug” (<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/23/drama-bug>)
 - Text also on reserve in Reeves, pp. 95 – 105, in *Naked*.

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #3 in Google Classroom.

Week 3: Visualizing Memoir and Personal Essay

February 2 (Tuesday)

Read:

- Zinsser, “Simplicity” (7-12)

View:

- Spearman, “April” (<http://www.alanspearman.com/April>)
- Bresland and Biss, “Dust Off” in *The Fiddleback*:
http://www.literaryorphans.org/rookery/TheFiddleback/?page_id=216

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #4 in Google Classroom.

February 4 (Thursday)

Workshop:

- Memoir/Personal Essay

Week 4: Where am I? The Place Essay

February 9 (Tuesday)

Read:

- Bradway, “Place Writing” (on reserve in Reeves)
- Zinsser, “Writing About Places” (116 - 132)
- Ehrlich, “The Solace of Open Spaces,” (on reserve in Reeves, pp. 1 – 15, in *The Solace of Open Spaces*).

View:

- “Mr. Plimpton’s Revenge,” Dinty Moore (link to Google Maps: <http://tiny.cc/sguryx>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #5 in Google Classroom

February 11 (Thursday)

Present book:

- Troost, *The Sex Lives of Cannibals*

Read:

- Zinsser, “The Lead and the Ending” (55 - 67)
- “Vowell, “What He Said There” (on reserve in Reeves, pp. 1 – 8, in *The Partly Cloudy Patriot*).
- Biss, “Time and Distance Overcome” (<http://tiny.cc/i4397x>)

View:

- Walking New York (series) (<http://tiny.cc/jqj97x>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #5 in Google Classroom
- Memoir, Final Draft Due

Week 5: Visualizing Place

February 16 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- Biss, *Notes from No Man’s Land*
- Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*

View:

- Pekar, from *Harvey Pekar’s Cleveland* (on reserve in Reeves)
- Bresland, “Les Cruel Shoes” (<https://vimeo.com/17548246>)
- Shoebridge and Simons “Welcome to Pine Point” (<http://pinpoint.nfb.ca/#/pinpoint>)

NOTE: When image of video appears, give the site a few minutes for data to load. Give yourself at least half an hour to view and interact with the video).

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #6 in Google Classroom

February 18 (Thursday)

Present book:

- Capote, *In Cold Blood*

Workshop

- Google Maps Essay

Week 6: Cultural Critique and the Twitter Essay

February 23 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- Pond, *Over Easy*

Read:

- Zinsser, "Writing About the Arts" (194 - 207)
- Bradway, "Critiques, Rants, and Reviews" (on reserve in Reeves)
- Heer, "I didn't create the Twitter essay genre" (<http://tiny.cc/o6397x>)
- Gilb, "Steinbeck" (on reserve in Reeves)
- Jamison, "Fog Count" in *The Oxford American*
(<http://www.oxfordamerican.org/magazine/item/466-fog-count>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer's Response #7 in Google Classroom

February 25 (Thursday)

Present book:

- Krakauer, *Into the Thin Air*
- Coates, *Between the World and Me*

Read:

- Zinsser, "Style" (18 - 24)
- Coates, "The Case for Reparations" in *The Atlantic*
(<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer's Response #7 in Google Classroom

Week 7: Conferences

Sign up:

- appointment via Google Calendar

March 1 (Tuesday)

No class

March 3 (Thursday)

No class

Write:

- Google Maps Essay, Final Draft Due

Spring Break (March 5 – 12)

Week 8: Visualizing Critique

March 15 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*

View:

- Radtke, "A Graphic Review of 'Invisible Beasts' in *Publishers Weekly* (July 7, 2014) (<http://tiny.cc/wu187x>)
- Unnamed author, "Invisible Beasts" in *Publishers Weekly* (July 7, 2014). (<http://publishersweekly.com/978-1-934137-80-2>)
- Video critique, Freeman and Singer, *Dimensions*, in *TriQuarterly* <http://www.triquarterly.org/issues/issue-149/dimensions>
- Graphic analysis: Silence (<http://www.enculturation.net/files/Smart-Media-Wagstaff-Graphic-Essay/Silence.htm>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer's Response #8 in Google Classroom

March 17 (Thursday)

Present book:

- Wolff, *This Boy's Life*

Workshop:

- The Twitter Essay

Week 9: The Graphic Memoir

March 22 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- Kingston, *Woman Warrior*

Read:

- Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Write:

- Respond to Writer's Response #9 in Google Classroom

March 24 (Thursday): Easter Break. No Class.

Week 10: The Non-traditional Essay

March 29 (Tuesday)

Present books:

- Moehringer, *The Tender Bar*
- Cahalan, *My Brain on Fire*

Read:

- Zinsser, “Clutter” (13-17)
- Toth, “Cinematypes: Going to the Movies” (on reserve in Reeves)
- Atwood, “The Female Body” (on reserve in Reeves, pp. 69 – 78, in *Good Bones and Simple Murders*).
- Write:
 - Respond to Writer’s Response #10 in Google Classroom
 - Twitter Essay, Final Draft Due

March 31 (Thursday)

Present books:

- Smith, *M Train*
- Colwin, *Home Cooking*

Read:

- Zinsser, “Words” (33 - 37)
- Sherman Alexie, “Year of the Indian,” from *First Indian on the Moon* (on reserve in Reeves, pp. 687 – 691, in Dillard, *Modern American Memoirs*)

View:

- Lindsay, “Greetngs! From My Dating Life”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i632uaOwbZE>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #10 in Google Classroom

Week 11: Visualizing Non-traditional

April 5 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- Sacco, *Palestine: A Nation Occupied*

Read:

- Hedges and Sacco, “Days of Slavery” (on reserve in Reeves)

View:

- Kalman, “May It Please the Court” (<http://tiny.cc/xb497x>)

Write:

- Respond to Writer’s Response #11 in Google Classroom

April 7 (Thursday)

Present

- Crews, *Childhood*

Read:

- Goldberg, "Devastating Disasters: Race in the Shadow(s) of New Orleans" (handout)

View:

- Goldberg, et. al., "Blue Velvet: Re-dressing New Orleans in Katrina's Wake."
(<http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/5/bluevelvet>)

Write:

- Non-traditional Essay, Final Draft Due

Week 12: Visualizing Your Personal Essay

April 12 (Tuesday)

Present books:

- Obama, *Dreams from My Father*
- Bryson, *A Walk in the Woods*

In-class assignment

April 14 (Thursday)

Present books

- Satrapi, *Persepolis*
- Donofrio, *Riding in Cars with Boys*

In-class assignment

Week 13: Workshop and *The Light of the World*

April 19 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- Bell, *The Voyeurs*

Workshop:

- Visual essay

April 21 (Thursday)

Present books:

- Williams, *Refuge*
- Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?*

Read:

- Alexander, *The Light of the World*

Write:

- Respond to Writer's Response #12 in Google Classroom

Week 14: Presentations and Wrapping Up

April 26 (Tuesday)

Present book:

- Walls, *Glass Castle*

Write:

- Visual Essay, Final Draft Due

Present:

- Visual essays

April 28 (Thursday)

Present:

- Visual essays