

CA/T Community Classes (CCC)

Creative Writing | Columbia University



Carson McCullers, Columbia writing classes alumna

COURSEBOOK
Fall 2018

INFORMATION

CA/T Community Classes are free, noncredit creative writing seminars and workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction and cross-genre. Taught by MFA Writing Program students in Columbia University's School of the Arts, these classes are designed to facilitate discussions of literary pieces and provide a space for feedback on student work.

These courses are open to **all** current Columbia and Barnard students, staff, affiliates and all School of the Arts alumni.

Creative Writing for Justice is open to formerly incarcerated Columbia students and affiliates of the Center for Justice and the Directly Impacted Group (DIG).

Classes meet once weekly for four to six weeks.

*

HOW TO REGISTER:

You may register for up to two (2) CCC Creative Writing courses a semester.

To choose your classes, please visit: [Fall 2018 Registration Form](#)

If you have any further questions, please email CCC coordinator, Nadia Ismail, at: writingcats@gmail.com

COURSE LIST

FICTION

FINDING YOUR CHARACTER'S VOICE | Elly Graff

Thur. 6-8pm

NSFW: WRITING EFFECTIVE SEX SCENES | Rachel Gilman

Sun. 1:30pm-3:30pm

STORYBOARDING THE SHORT STORY | Reid Sharpless

Sun. 11:15am-1:15pm

POETRY

ALL MY PRETTY ONES: THE PURSUIT OF THE FATHER FIGURE IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY | Mitchell Glazier

Fri. 3:30-5:30pm

CROSS-GENRE

THE ART OF REVISION | Adin Dobkin

Wed. 6:30-8:30pm

THE BLACK COMEDIC VOICE | Brianne Baker

Fri. 4:45-6:45pm

WORD VOMIT: A GENERATIVE CROSS-GENRE WRITING LAB | Haley Walker

Tue. 4:30-6:30pm

FINDING YOUR VOICE IN THE MODERN WORLD | Ian De Monico

Sun. 3:45-5:45 PM

CREATIVE WRITING FOR JUSTICE | Samantha Barron, Marcelle Shehwara, Abigail Lauren Ronner

Mon. 7:30-9:30pm

FICTION

FINDING YOUR CHARACTER'S VOICE

Elly Graff

Thur. 6-8pm

Dates: Nov. 1-Dec. 6 (no class Nov.22 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 403

“Each work of fiction has its own distinctive voice and the challenge for the writer—at times a challenge that evokes intense anxiety—is to discover and to refine the voice that is unique to that work.” (Joyce Carol Oates, *A Study of Short Fiction*).

What is voice in fiction, really? Can you point to any place in writing and say (with confidence), there, that’s the character’s voice? How do you create and choose the right voice for your character and story? This course is designed for students to investigate these questions through weekly group-based discussions based on short story readings. Our aim is to gain skills in cultivating character’s narrative voices as a lens through which the reader experiences the story. We will make deliberate creative choices in relation to character, setting and plot. Through class discussion and writing exercises, we will explore the ways we can create characters whose inner and outer “voice” is consistent in pattern, word choice, rhythm and attitude. Readings include short stories by Sagnik Datta, Craig Davidson, Eliza Robertson, Eden Robinson, and Justin Taylor. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to submit “short-short” stories or scenes for workshop with a focus on their chosen character’s narrative voice.

NSFW: WRITING EFFECTIVE SEX SCENES

Rachel Gilman

Sun. 1:30pm-3:30 pm

Dates: Oct. 28-Dec. 2 (no class Nov. 25 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 411

Since 1993, *Literary Review* has honored an author who has written a terrible sex scene in an otherwise good novel—not exactly the most distinguished of awards. If you are going to portray sex in your work, how can you do it well? In what ways do writers who are successful employ the use of details, senses, and character to create sensual scenes in their pieces? Is there a difference between the erotically charged and pure, marketed erotica?

In this course, we will do close, in class readings of sex scenes in literary fiction writing from the last fifty years and discuss what elements we feel are working effectively to create images and elicit emotions for readers. These pieces will come from the work of writers of historically underrepresented sexual narratives and relationships (LGBTQIA community, BDSM, asexuality). We will also see how these techniques might establish principles or ideas to apply to our own writing. This will further be explored through useful writing exercises that can be used outside of writing the erotic, too!

Readings may include work from Mary Gaitskill, James Baldwin, Rebecca Schiff, James Salter, Diriye Osman, and Ali Smith, among others. By the end of the course, students will have a thorough understanding of how to write powerfully about sex without the use of clichés. They will be expected to turn in a short piece of their own prose that involves a sexual encounter or subject matter – we as a class will work to establish an understanding of what our mutual, exploratory comfort zone for diving into this historically “taboo” topic is during our first meeting.

STORYBOARDING THE SHORT STORY

Reid Sharpless

Sun. 11:15am-1:15pm

Dates: Oct. 28– Dec. 2 (no class Nov. 25 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 411

A storyboard is a series of quick-n-dirty sketches that illustrate how the text of a screenplay translates to the frame. The aim of this course is to shamelessly steal this previsualization tool from the world of film and put it to work for short fiction.

Here's our experiment: what happens when you write a short story and translate it into a series of sketches? And what happens when you invert the process—create a series of sketches and translate them into short fiction? What holds constant between the two? And what new narrative angles and techniques emerge in the act of translation?

In this course we'll examine the limits and potentials of medium in storytelling through the two experiments outlined above. We'll supplement our inquiry with brief surveys of (very) short fiction, illustration, and animation—investigating what is possible in the blurred space between visual and textual narrative and how whatever we find there might translate to established and emerging forms of storytelling.

Course readings may draw from authors such as Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, James Thurber, Donald Barthelme, and Ottessa Moshfegh. We'll also examine storyboards and illustration from popular film (e.g. *Star Wars*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Psycho*) and sequences from contemporary animation studios (e.g. Studio Ghibli and a few of the studios behind Cartoon Network programming).

Collaborative projects are encouraged. No drawing or short fiction experience necessary, though to get the most out of this course, you should ideally be able to: 1) draw a passable stick figure, or else a crude anthropomorphic animal or object of some kind; or 2) assemble found images into a narrative montage.

POETRY

ALL MY PRETTY ONES: THE PURSUIT OF THE FATHER FIGURE IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Mitchell Glazier

Fri. 3:30-5:30pm

Dates: Nov.2-Dec. 7 (no class Nov.23 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 411

“It doesn’t matter who my father was; it matters who I *remember* he was.”

–Anne Sexton

Father or figure? Phantom or muse? A fusion of texts will light our way. Interviews with Anne Sexton, excerpts from Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel*, Sharon Olds’s *Satan Says*, Robert Hayden, Lana Del Rey, Colette Inez, Beyoncé, and Rita Dove will help to chip at the marbled monolith.

Narratives of power and pursuit will be explored to lead debate and discussion. In modern art, what can the “daddy” mean? By studying a selection of poets each week, students will draw independent conclusions using text-based analysis and taboo table-talk.

Weekly, the class will be provided a mixed-media packet to guide critical thinking and investigation. Each meeting, students will bring an additional out-of-class text to share in group discussion. Assignments will include reading responses and creative writings to be explored in a workshop setting.

The class will end in a final gallery-style reading and presentation of generated creative work. A commemorative class chapbook will be created to memorialize our sleuthing and soothsaying.

CROSS-GENRE

THE ART OF REVISION

Adin Dobkin

Wed. 6:30-8:30pm

Dates: Oct. 31-Dec.5 (no class Nov.21 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 403

“If it sounds like writing, I rewrite it.”

–Elmore Leonard

Scarcely any writers publish work that resembles their first drafts. Dorothy Parker wrote sentence by sentence, working on each until it was just so before advancing to the next. Vladimir Nabokov started on index cards and went through countless variations of his books. Claire Messud thinks of revisions as a process of “creative destruction,” where the writer whittles down the first draft into its cleaner (and substantially shorter) form. Writers revise five times, ten times, one hundred; by cutting out individual sentences and creating ransom notes from their original draft or by deleting sentences until they’ve found a golden number; they revise once they finish a paragraph, a chapter, or an entire book. Revisions don’t follow a standardized process for every person, but are instead gradually found and formed, sometimes in a concerted way, other times blindly. In class, we’ll look at a broad range of private papers, first drafts, and published texts from writers like James Baldwin, Sylvia Plath, and Hannah Arendt, among others, exploring their process in creating some of our most iconic written works. Additionally, we’ll converse with contemporary writers, learning about their thought process as first draft was molded into polished copy. Through these dialogues, students will develop strategies to build revisions into their writing process; will learn ways in which to look at their work with fresh eyes; become comfortable working from imperfect first drafts; and ultimately understand the limits of the revision process (in other words, when you’re no longer making your work any better). Students should bring a first (second or third) draft of a work they’d like to use as a source text for their revisions at the start of the first class.

THE BLACK COMEDIC VOICE

Brianne Baker

Fri. 4:45-6:45pm

Dates: Nov. 2-Dec. 3 (no class Nov. 23 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 403

The black experience, while varied, has, as a common thread, a humor that consistently manages to transcend the tragic. This humor is nuanced--not always a laugh-out-loud, knee-slapping funny--but an irony, an unflinching gaze at often uncomfortable truths. In this class, we will explore that humor, and we will work to articulate the uses of comedy in the black community, including, among others, its utility as catharsis, as escape, and as retribution. We will discuss the ethics of mining the black experience for comedy, asking ourselves the questions: How far is too far? What subjects, if any, are off limits? Ultimately, we will work toward an understanding of how we can engage with black humor in our own writing. Is it an inherent skill or one that can be developed? Who has access to the black comedic voice? How can someone who is not black-identifying responsibly engage with black comedy in their own work?

We will read works by Zadie Smith, Paul Beatty, Colson Whitehead, Roxane Gay, Samantha Irby, Trevor Noah, and Phoebe Robinson, among others. We will also explore the black comedic voice in works beyond the prose form, from Black Twitter threads to popular memes, from stand-up comedy routines by the likes of Richard Pryor, Dave Chappelle, Hannibal Buress, Leslie Jones, Sasheer Zamata, and others, to sketch comedy like *Key & Peele* and *In Living Color*, and films and television shows like *Friday*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Martin*, *Atlanta*, and *Insecure*.

Each week, we will complete writing exercises to practice effective ways of engaging with our own comedic voices. By the end of the course, students will compose a full-length comedic piece in the form of a short story, essay, short script, or stand-up routine. This course is open to students of all racial identities.

WORD VOMIT: A GENERATIVE CROSS-GENRE WRITING LAB

Haley Walker

Tue. 4:30-6:30pm

Dates: Oct. 30-Dec. 4 (no class Nov. 6 for Election Day - vote!)

Dodge 413

“So then, sometimes you are not out of ideas. Sometimes you are afraid of the idea you have... Which is to say, sometimes you need to be destroyed.”

—Alexander Chee

We’ve all been there, mentally frozen and staring at a blank Word document for the good part of an hour. This cross-genre workshop will get at the root of writer’s block — self-censorship — and destroy it. Through in-class free-writing and take-home exercises, we will break down the anxiety of putting pen to paper. Some of what we write will be utter garbage, *and that’s okay*. We often forget that the backspace exists; there is no need to knock out a masterpiece in one keystroke. Through supplemental readings (first drafts from Plath, Hughes, and maybe even you), viewings (live content and single-take videos), and listening (demos and messy lo-fi music), we will discover the beauty of raw generation. We will also write — a lot. Exercises such as making erasure poems, rewriting song lyrics, and scribbling gibberish to a timer will all provide fodder for later work, helping us break the cycle of *not* writing. Throughout the course, you will produce at least 30 pages of “word vomit”, 10 of which you will present and/or turn in as examples of ideas you might use in your later writing.

FINDING YOUR VOICE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Ian De Monico

Sun. 3:45-5:45 PM

Dates: Oct. 28-Dec. 2 (no class Nov. 25 for Thanksgiving)

Dodge 411

An introductory writing course that helps students new to creative writing gain a tighter grasp on their view of the world, critical perspective, and creative voice. Students will take writing prompts based on “hot topics”—including some articles and videos from the media with unique or salient viewpoints—and use their chosen genre to bring their ideas, feelings, and observations into a coherent form. Students will also hone their craft by reading and discussing texts from writers such as Barthes, Didion, and Dumas—all of whom developed powerful personal voices by observing and commenting upon their worlds.

This class will require engagement with multiple forms, giving students the widest possible array of analytical and creative tools. Students will gain expertise in channeling their ideas, feelings, and ruminations upon current events and ideas into well-rounded pieces in their preferred form. The final assignment—a revised portfolio of three or more works—will showcase development in the form and content of students’ writing.

Tentative readings include excerpts from:

- Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*: selections
- Joan Didion, *Sentimental Journey*
- Aracelis Grimay, *Teeth*
- Henry Dumas, “Ark of Bones”
- Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*

CREATIVE WRITING FOR JUSTICE

Samantha Barron

Marcelle Shehwarra

Abigail Lauren Ronner

Mon. 7:30-9:30 PM

Dates: Oct. 29-Dec.10 (no class Nov. 5 for academic holiday)

Dodge 407

Creative Writing for Justice serves formerly incarcerated students within the Columbia community. This creative writing course will emphasize the importance of structure and form, and their relationship to content, and equip students with transferable skills that can be applied to writing in any discipline. In-class writing activities will support lessons and give students the opportunity to explore new ways of thinking through writing. Students will be introduced to rhetorical characteristics and writing styles from various fields to help them better understand the writing process. In addition to excerpts from novels, short stories and poems, students may be asked to comment on or respond to pieces taken from any of the social sciences.

Students are encouraged to work with teachers on fiction, non-fiction, and poetry submissions for *Dispatches*, a new Columbia magazine featuring work by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated artists. Enrolled students will also have the opportunity to join the Incarcerated Artists Project (IAP) as editorial board members for *Dispatches*. These classes are open to formerly incarcerated Columbia students and affiliates of the Center for Justice and the Directly Impacted Group (DIG).