

CA/T Community Classes (CCC)

Creative Writing | Columbia University



Carson McCullers, Columbia Writing alum

COURSEBOOK

Fall 2021

INFORMATION

CA/T Community Classes are free, non-credit creative writing seminars and workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction and cross-genre. Taught by MFA Writing Program students at 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, and affiliates and all School of the Arts alumni.

Classes meet once weekly for four to six weeks, beginning on Monday, October 25th, through Friday, December 10th. Classes are six weeks unless otherwise specified, and **all** classes this semester will meet **remotely over Zoom**.

HOW TO REGISTER:

Classes are first come, first served. You may register for up to two (2) CCC courses a semester. The registration period will close on Friday, October 22nd. Classes are capped at 12 students. Those that fill up will be specified as **waitlist only**.

To choose your classes, please fill out the [Fall 2021 Registration Form](#). The CCC coordinator, Rachel Raiola, will contact you by Sunday, October 24th, only if you have been assigned a class, or later if you are moved off a waitlist.

More information is also available at our website, <https://arts.columbia.edu/cat/CCC>.

If you have any further questions about registration, please email CCC coordinator, Rachel Raiola, at soa-writing-ccc@columbia.edu. If your question pertains to a specific course, please reach out to the instructor.

COURSE LIST

FICTION

YOUR LIFE, BUT MAKE IT FICTION | Sri Izzati Soekarsono

Tues. 4:00pm-6:00pm

BFBS: RECENT WRITING ON FRIENDSHIP | Hannah Maureen Holden

Thurs. 12:00pm-2:00pm

POETRY

I DREAMT I WAS THE MOON: INVESTIGATING TROPES IN POETRY

| Rhoni Blankenhorn

Wed. 10:00am-12:00pm

ECOPOETRY WORKSHOP | Selden Cummings

Wed. 2:00pm-4:00pm

THE POETICS OF FUTILITY | Zachary Erickson

Thurs. 4:00pm-6:00pm

POETRY IS EVERYWHERE: EXPERIMENTAL WRITING PRACTICES |

Sophia Torres-Ulrich

Fri. 10:00am-12:00pm

UNTANGLING EKPHRASIS | Emmett Lewis

Fri. 2:00pm-4:00pm

CROSS-GENRE

CROSS-GENRE WRITING | Nora Tomas

Tues. 6:00pm-8:00pm

TRAUMA WRITING: A WORKSHOP | Kelsey Myers

Thurs. 2:00pm-4:00pm

LAW AND LITERATURE | Emma O'Leary & Tiffany Troy

Sun. 7:30pm-9:30pm

FICTION

YOUR LIFE, BUT MAKE IT FICTION

Sri Izzati Soekarsono

Tues. 4:00pm-6:00pm (no class on November 2nd for Election Day)

Dates: November 9th—December 14th *late start!*

Living in a new country—especially for students far away from home—brings forth a surge of new meaning (or disruption) to life and so much more. What to do with all these thoughts and emotions? Let's write them into a story.

Expressive writing has been found to result in improvements to both physical and psychological health in non-clinical and clinical populations. This half-seminar, half-workshop (open to all, but designed for students far away from home) will borrow expressive writing practice as a way to both channel our emotions and milk our life for art; to turn our lives somewhere else into something that isn't just meaningful but also creative.

We'll learn how to untangle our intricate thoughts and feelings and infuse them into a short story, while exploring the role of observations and self-reflection in both self-therapy and fiction-writing process. In each two-hour meeting, we'll work through a series of expressive writing exercises that focus on, but are not limited to, your specific experiences, from which you'll generate fictional narrative arcs that you will later use to write your short story. We will also talk about fiction elements such as: beginnings and endings, point of view, characters, scene, and dialogue.

Readings will include Jhumpa Lahiri, Michelle Zauner, Celeste Ng, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

BFFS: RECENT WRITING ON FRIENDSHIP
Hannah Maureen Holden

Thurs. 12:00pm-2pm

Dates: October 25th—November 19th *4 weeks!*

My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante, a captivating story spanning decades and hundreds of pages, begins with the moment in which one young girl reaches for the hand of a girl in her neighborhood. “This gesture changed everything between us forever,” writes Ferrante. In this four-week generative fiction writing class, we will explore literary techniques that authors use to craft vivid, stirring friendships. We will explore how authors approach key moments in friendships such as first meetings, confidences and betrayals, and departures and reunions. Through discussion and in-class exercises, we will discover how we might use these techniques and themes to produce our own narratives about friendship. We will study brief excerpts by Ferrante, Colson Whitehead, Lorrie Moore, Kazuo Ishiguro, and many more.

POETRY

I DREAMT I WAS THE MOON: INVESTIGATING TROPES IN POETRY Rhoni Blankenhorn

Wed. 10:00am-12:00pm (no class on November 24th for Thanksgiving)
Dates: October 25th—December 10th

“since the thing perhaps is
to eat flowers and not to be afraid”
— E.E. Cummings, *E.E. Cummings: Complete Poems 1904-1962*

A trope is a word or expression used in a figurative sense; a common theme or device. While tropes can be useful in that they quickly communicate information to a reader, they often edge towards cliché. But if tropes are taboo, boring, uninteresting, and unoriginal, why do writers continue to invoke imagery such as the moon, birds, and flowers in poetry? How do writers make use of tropes to elicit emotion, exaggerate meaning, and make us laugh? How can we as writers become less afraid of being cliché and instead explore the possibility of cliché with curiosity? How do we use tropes with intention?

In this class, we will examine, discuss, and debate how to embrace and challenge tropes, and how we might uncover new ways of engaging with popular poetic imagery. We will identify different methods of employing tropes by turning to writers such as Louise Glück, Emily Dickinson, Paisley Rekdal, and Hanif Abdurraqib. Our interrogations will evolve into generative writing exercises, and students will come away with practical tools with which they can experiment with tropes in their own work.

ECOPOETRY WORKSHOP

Selden Cummings

Wed. 2:00pm-4:00pm (no class on November 24th for Thanksgiving)
Dates: October 25th—December 10th

In his essay “Why Ecopoetry,” John Shoptaw writes: “Ecopoetry is nature poetry that has designs on us, that imagines changing the ways we think, feel about, and live and act in the world.” Considering Shoptaw’s definition, how can we understand ecopoetry against a modern backdrop of global warming and environmental destruction? Can ecopoetry truly change the way we perceive and behave, or is the term merely a reductive label that distracts from the real aims of poetry?

To answer these questions, we will trace the history of nature poetry, from the flowery, sensual rhetoric of Keats, to Dickinson’s secular appreciation of the natural world, from environmental philosophies explored in the work of Whitman and Shiki, to the vivid personalized nature metaphors of Neruda and Graham. We will explore distinctions between nature poetry and ecopoetry, all the while attempting to define the term ecopoetry as it relates to clashing values across radically different communities and time periods.

In order to better engage with the mindset of specific writers from different cultures and eras, students will be asked to employ the formal choices of the poets we read into their own work, which we will workshop throughout the term. In other words, students will assimilate ecopoetic concepts into their poetry, creating poems according to the styles and time periods we visit, from the 19th century up until the present day.

THE POETICS OF FUTILITY

Zachary Erickson

Thurs. 4:00pm-6:00pm (no class on November 25th for Thanksgiving)

Dates: October 25th—December 10th

What do poets do with their exhaustion? —with their fear that there is nothing more to write, or that there is nothing more that they *can* write? This mixture of terror and ennui—everything from “Do my scribblings matter to Almighty Zeus?” to “Will I ever get *published?*”—is actually immensely fruitful for our writing. Investigating the dynamic of exhaustion and creativity in the work of some of our favorite poets and in our own writing will be the objective of this half-seminar, half-workshop course.

During the first class, we will look at some examples from T.S. Eliot, Jorge Luis Borges, and from your instructor’s own poetic plodding; for the next two classes, we will split into two groups and share and discuss your favorite poets’ dead ends and your thoughts on your own. In the following two classes, we will workshop our own poems of futility, and, in the final meeting, we will see where we can go from there.

Bring your roadblocks, your poems of boredom, and your poets who were almost failures; we’ll have lots of fun with them. Feel free to email me at zre2001@columbia.edu with any questions.

POETRY IS EVERYWHERE: EXPERIMENTAL WRITING PRACTICES

Sophia Torres-Ulrich

Fri. 10:00am-12:00pm (no class on November 26th for Thanksgiving)

Dates: October 25th—December 10th

In this course, students will focus on how artists find inspiration in their everyday lives. Using original exercises that reimagine writing techniques such as erasure, collage, and ekphrasis, students will learn how to draw poetics from the exterior world. Students will also practice their own version of note taking by recording and photographing details about the world around them. In order to fine tune their poetic sensibility, students will learn how to write from the intersection of art, experience, and sense. The writing in this course will mostly consist of in-class writing exercises; students should be prepared to share at least one or two of the poems written in class or based on class topics. The goal of these mini workshops is for students to create and revise new forms of poetry that feel uniquely their own.

To further discuss how poetry can be inspired by experience we will read various source texts from poets such as Gertrude Stein, Audre Lorde, and CA Conrad. Students will learn how to create poems out of objects, bedrooms, sounds, conversations and much more!

UNTANGLING EKPHRASIS

Emmett Lewis

Fri. 2:00pm-4:00pm (no class on November 26th for Thanksgiving)

Dates: October 25th—December 10th

An ekphrastic poem is generally understood as a literary description or commentary on a work of visual art. While description and commentary offer an entry point, ekphrasis can also go much further. Throughout history, engagement with other art forms has helped literature to break through assumed limitations and disrupt generic boundaries. This course is interested in complicating and expanding the ways in which poetry relates to other art forms, in content and form.

We'll explore a different art form each week, uncovering techniques that might be applied to or translated into writing by focusing on particular interactions between writers and artists in each medium. We might look at the way Gertrude Stein uses language to convey a Cubist perspective, or how Nathaniel Mackey extends jazz into his poetry and prose.

This course aims to offer participants multiple entry points through which they might bring their writing into conversation with art in other mediums (or vice versa), opening potential routes for investigation and springs of inspiration. Authors we may look at include John Ashbery, John Berger, Anne Carson, Geoff Dyer, Langston Hughes, John Keats, Nathaniel Mackey, Gertrude Stein, Natasha Trethewey, Cecilia Vicuña, William Carlos Williams, and Raúl Zurita.

There will be regular in-class writing and there may be limited, recommended outside reading. Participants will be invited to submit their own ekphrastic work, and the final two classes will be spent workshopping your pieces.

CROSS-GENRE

CROSS-GENRE WRITING

Nora Tomas

Tues. 6:00pm-8:00pm (no class on November 2nd for Election Day)

Dates: October 25th—December 10th

How much of a piece of nonfiction can be made up before it stops being nonfiction? Or inversely, how much of a piece of fiction can be based in fact before it's no longer considered fiction? What does a fictional essay look like? What about a nonfiction poem? What goes into our classification decisions? How does this affect our writing?

This six-week course will explore writing that exists between genres or outside of genre, focusing on its relationship to truth. We will discuss how writing between genres and embodying different genres can be helpful in our work. Additionally, we will also look at how a variety of authors have navigated these boundaries. This course will require some outside reading and listening, and will include in-class writing exercises.

We will read excerpts by authors such as Anne Carson, Maggie Nelson, Karen Green, Moyra Davey, Leslie Feinberg, and Claudia Rankin, among others. All materials will be provided.

TRAUMA WRITING: A WORKSHOP

Kelsey Myers

Thurs. 2:00pm-4:00pm (no class on November 25th for Thanksgiving)

Dates: October 25th—December 10th

Some of the most effective writing is the most deeply personal—and yet, when we approach the subject of writing about trauma in the setting of memoir or personal essay, writers are often met by stigma. This workshop seeks to strip away the stigma from trauma writing and provide a safe space for those with trauma to express themselves through writing—whether to conquer their own personal demons, to reach those who have been through similar things, or simply to tell their story on their own terms.

Our primary goal will be to reach the traumatized parts of ourselves and learn how to express them in a way that's both understood by the reader and helpful to the writer. This class is designed to be intimate, and our first class will be spent setting up rules and guidelines that we decide upon as a group so that every member of the class feels as though the class is a safe environment.

Please be ready and willing to workshop difficult material dealing with trauma—both in terms of writing it and reading it. Potential students are encouraged to put aside preconceived notions of writing and reading about trauma and enter the class with an open mind. Doubt and uncertainty are welcome here. This class is designed to show that there is no one answer to the question of “how do we write about trauma?”—that each answer is unique to each individual, and as such, there can be no universal answers.

Students will be expected to bring short pieces (no word count minimum) of creative nonfiction or fiction to be workshopped by the class. We will discuss how to best give and receive feedback before we dive in. At the end of the class, students will be asked to turn in the writing they feel is the best or most personally fulfilling work they've done over the course of the class.

LAW AND LITERATURE
Emma O’Leary and Tiffany Troy

Sun. 7:30pm-9:30pm
Dates: October 25th—December 10th

In this class, we will explore literature about the law.

We’ll read widely, drawing from Roman rhetoric (Camus, Sophocles, and Catallus) to the contemporary, and look at how rhetoric shapes the dramatization of trials in an adversarial legal system and how facts and memory jive with a search for deeper truth and justice.

Readings include: excerpts from Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” Kafka’s “The Trial,” stories by Deborah Eisenberg, Flannery O’Connor, Charles Yu, selections from *In Cold Blood* and *Crime and Punishment*. We’ll also watch some movie clips: Clarence Darrow’s “A Plea for Mercy,” *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *Erin Brockovich*, and *My Cousin Vinny*.