

CA/T Community Classes (CCC)

Creative Writing | Columbia University



Langston Hughes, American poet and Columbia alumnus

COURSEBOOK
Spring 2020

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 six weeks.

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HOW TO REGISTER:

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

To choose your classes, please visit: [Spring 2020 Registration Form](#).

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

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

COURSE LIST

FICTION

LOVE, LUST, AND OBSESSION: WRITING DESIRE | Amanda Breen
Wed. 12:10pm-2:00pm

GROW UP, ALREADY: COMING-OF-AGE IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION | Amy Kalbun
Thurs. 9:00am-10:50am

TEEN SPIRIT: WRITING ADOLESCENCE | Nell Volkmann
Fri. 12:10pm-2:00pm

POETRY

NONSENSE AND MEANING MAKING IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY | Matthew Dix
Wed. 12:00pm-2:00pm

INTRODUCTION TO QUEER POETRY | Lauren Kranzlin
Sat. 1:00pm-3:00pm

NONFICTION

WRITING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE | Galina Nemirovsky
Wed. 7:00pm-9:00pm

REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED | Anthony Cohen
Thurs. 7:00pm-9:00pm

THE FLANEUR IN NEW YORK | Laura S. Head
Sat. 10:00am-12:00pm

BUILDING THE BETTER MEMOIR | Arielle Kaden
Sun. 11:30am-1:30pm

CROSS-GENRE

HAPPY, MAD, SAD, GLAD | Rachel Keranen

Tues. 6:00pm-8:00pm

CHOOSE WISELY: WRITING INTERACTIVE STORIES | Pia Struzzi

Wed. 4:30pm-6:30pm

ROAD NARRATIVES: WRITING THE JOURNEY | Liza Stewart

Wed. 7:30pm-9:30pm

THE BOUND AND UNBOUND BOOK | Allison Carter-Beaulé

Thurs. 12:10pm-1:50pm

**THE MOST SINCERE FORM OF FLATTERY: EXPLORING VOICE
THROUGH RIPPING OFF OTHERS | Darby Minow Smith**

Thurs. 6:30-8:30pm

SCAM LIKELY | Zak Stone

Fri. 12:10pm-2:00pm

FICTION

LOVE, LUST, AND OBSESSION: WRITING DESIRE

Amanda Breen

Wed. 12:10pm – 2:00pm

Dates: March 24 – April 28

Dodge 403

From first loves to unrequited obsessions, romantic and sexual desires are at the heart of some of recent literature's most compelling characters and storylines.

In this six-session course, we will explore how writers mine this rich subset of desire alongside subjects like adolescence, gender, power, and violence. We will think about how these topical lenses shape our experiences of reading and writing desire. Through in-class discussions and writing exercises, we will examine how writers effectively approach representations of desire and we will experiment with similar techniques in our own writing.

While we will primarily focus on fiction works, we will also engage with non-fiction selections; students are welcome to write within any genre of their choosing. At the end of the course, students will have the option to submit a written piece and receive feedback.

In-class readings may include excerpts from the work of Susan Choi, Mary Gaitskill, Carmen Maria Machado, Sophie Mackintosh, Alissa Nutting, Sally Rooney, Kristen Roupenian, Scott Spencer, and Teddy Wayne, among others.

**GROW UP, ALREADY:
COMING-OF-AGE IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION**
Amy Kalbun

Thurs. 9:00am-10:50pm
Dates: March 26 – April 30
Dodge 409

“Growing up is losing some illusions, in order to acquire others.” – Virginia Woolf

Most of us are familiar with the stock phrases associated with coming-of-age: “growing up,” “finding yourself,” “coming into your own.” For authors of contemporary fiction, coming-of-age is complex and amorphous. What does it mean to “come of age”? Is it a linear progression between life stages, or more tangled and uneven? What (if any) formal commonalities exist among contemporary coming-of-age stories? How does coming-of-age intersect with other aspects of a person’s identity and their social, political, and cultural context?

In this six-session course, we will focus on contemporary fiction that explores coming of age in the late-twentieth and early-twenty first centuries. Part of each session will be dedicated to in-class reading and discussion. We will analyze what makes a work successful, and consider how to apply this to our own writing. For the remainder of each session, students will respond to a writing prompt inspired by the readings. In the fifth week, students will have the opportunity to submit a draft of a story, scene, or excerpt for feedback.

All reading materials will be provided, and may include excerpts from among the following: Alice Munro, Jhumpa Lahiri, Susan Choi, Bryan Washington, and NoViolet Bulawayo.

TEEN SPIRIT: WRITING ADOLESCENCE

Nell Volkmann

Fri. 12:10 – 2:00pm

Dates: March 27 – May 8

Dodge 411

Sometimes fetishized, sometimes disparaged, teenagers nevertheless occupy an enormous space in the popular and cultural imagination. But how can adult writers avoid or complicate the stereotypes surrounding adolescence? How can we best understand and convey the intensity of this experience? And how do we write with honesty and originality about an experience that is at once so personal and so universal? We'll keep these central questions in mind each week as we discuss major themes in writing about adolescence, including love and sex, friendship and family, responsibility and power, childhood vs adulthood, and adolescent stereotypes (the runaway, the junkie, the seductor/seductress).

While we'll be reading mostly fiction, students are welcome to utilize the fictional techniques we discuss to write nonfiction about experiences from their own adolescence, with the option to turn in a draft in either genre at the end of the course for feedback. We'll divide our class time between discussing excerpts from works of fiction and writing and workshopping our own short pieces. No outside work will be required, though additional readings and writing exercises will be available to anyone interested.

Readings may include excerpts from Mary Gaitskill, Robert Coover, Joyce Carol Oates, Jhumpa Lahiri, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Carmen Maria Machado, and Eileen Myles, among others.

POETRY

NONSENSE AND MEANING MAKING IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Matthew Dix

Wed. 12:10pm – 2:00pm

Dates: March 25 – May 6 (No class April 8 for Passover)

Dodge 411

—Hooooooooo

Wore that morning's liv

-ery slippery

Made a loop of the loupe,

A jeweler. *Happy happiest toddler*

On the block! And when he leuked closer

The red cell

de-bucketed, spilt guts

Like a hasp spent or hen bent

Over the eggs in the nest of

complexity.

So writes Joyelle McSweeney in her 2012 poetry collection *Percussion Grenade*. Sounds nice. But what does the poem mean? Why did she do it? And does it even matter?

In this six-session, workshop-based seminar, students will ask the hard-hitting questions like Hoo wore that morning's liv-ery slippery? and How to leuk closer at the systems of logic and illogic that dictate contemporary nonsense poetry?

In each class, students will work together to pinpoint the mechanisms at play in a single work of poetry. In-class readings may include work from the poets Peter Gizzi, Mary Ruefle, Matthea Harvey, Haryette Mullen, James Tate, Lyn Hejinian, Susan Howe, and/or others. Students will have the option to workshop pieces developed from in-class exercises or out-of-class writing.

INTRODUCTION TO QUEER POETRY

Lauren Kranzlin

Sat. 1:00pm-3:00pm

Dates: April 4 – May 9

Dodge 411

What makes poetry different from fiction and nonfiction? What is enjambment? Why does a poet choose a specific word?

In the first half of each class, we will read a selection from a survey of the queer canon and break down what is going on in each poem. Students will spend the second half of class writing their own poems from prompts provided by the instructor. One out of the six classes will be a workshop for students to receive feedback from their peers and instructor. This is an entry level poetry class but is open to anyone who wishes to immerse themselves in poetry and generate new work.

We will be reading excerpts from poets such as Sara Teasdale, Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, Gertrude Stein, Richard Blanco, June Jordan, Ocean Vuong, and more. All readings will be provided via handouts in class.

NONFICTION

WRITING THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Galina Nemirovsky

Wed. 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Dates: March 25 – May 6 (No class April 8 for Passover)

Dodge 403

As a nation of immigrants, the United States is a country shaped by the colorful cultural backgrounds that paint our history and our individual stories daily. However, immigrants in this country often live in a cultural purgatory, stuck between assimilation and the perpetuation of their own cultures. The challenge of American freedom in 2020 is asserting a cultural self in the wake of misguided patriotic nationalism.

In this six-session course, we will read and discuss immigrant writers from a variety of cultures and use them as inspiration to unearth our own memories and craft our own stories. We'll read excerpts from such authors as Jhumpa Lahiri, Amy Tan, Gish Jen, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Frank McCourt, and Edwidge Danticat. Through these texts we will explore ways the immigrant identity influences the lives of those who make the journey and their descendants.

Each week we'll divide our time between classroom reading and discussion as well as writing and workshopping short pieces. No outside work is required.

REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED

Anthony Cohen

Thurs. 7:00pm-9:00pm

Dates: March 26 – April 30

Dodge 411

How does the writer remember what happened? How do we turn our lived experience into words on a page? Our memories, so often fallible and faulty, can be tricky places to navigate. In this course, we will work together to excavate material from our own lives and think about how our writing can give shape to that material.

We'll read excerpts from some of the greats, including James Baldwin, Joe Brainard, Anne Carson, Joan Didion, Spalding Gray, Leslie Jamison, William Maxwell, Maggie Nelson, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Tim Kreider, Patti Smith, Tobias Wolff, and maybe even a little Proust. We'll do in-class exercises focused on remembering people, places, and things whose particularities may have become soft and blurry in our mind's eye. We'll go on a field trip to a bustling New York locale of our choice and write about it the following week. We'll do this with attention to how we remember what we've encountered. What does the city look, sound, smell, feel, and taste like? How does the process of short-term memory differ from that of summoning experiences from long ago? How is it similar?

Through our work, we'll explore these questions, and see if we can sharpen our processes of recall, bringing our memories back into focus so that they can be used to tell our most compelling, meaningful stories.

THE FLANEUR IN NEW YORK

Laura S. Head

Sat. 10:00am-12:00pm

Dates: March 28 – May 2

Dodge 409

A “flaneur” is someone who wanders a city alone, closely observing the place and the lives of its inhabitants. The flaneur became a popular literary type in 19th-century France and created a picture of contemporary Paris. Soon writers in places like Britain and the U.S. adopted the form. In this course, you will follow in their steps, becoming flaneurs (or flaneuses) in New York City and writing about your experiences.

Each week, you will observe specific people or places outside of class--riders on the subway, an interesting building, a park, etc.--and write a piece describing what you discovered. The objective is to practice close observation, capture vivid sensory details that make us feel as if we were there, and then perhaps move to the “So what?” of the piece, making some comment about its larger meaning. We will workshop as many as possible during the second hour of each class.

During the first hour, we’ll be reading short examples from flaneurs like E.B. White, Tom Wolfe, Bernard Malamud, Zora Neale Hurston, Vivian Gornick, Phillip Lopate, and John Cheever, among others, to inform and inspire us.

BUILDING THE BETTER MEMOIR

Arielle Kaden

Sun. 11:30am-1:30pm

Dates: March 29 – May 10 (No class April 12 for Easter Sunday)

Dodge 411

“What would you write if you weren’t afraid?” – Mary Karr, *The Art of Memoir*

Have you ever considered what it would be like to write a memoir? Have you ever asked yourself: is my story special or worth sharing? Most likely, if you’ve asked yourself this question your story *is* worth putting down on paper. This course will serve to introduce students to the process of building a memoir. We will discuss coming up with a vision for the story, developing the narrator’s voice, constructing scenes and characters, building a chapter plan and/or story structure, and lastly sitting down to write and revise the piece. Memoir writing is a journey, and if it’s approached with passion, grit, and heart, it’s one that is definitely worth taking.

Over our six weeks together, students will be asked to complete in-class reading assignments that expand our understanding of memoirs and how to write them. We’ll read and discuss excerpts of memoirs by James Baldwin, Cheryl Strayed, J.D. Vance, Isaac Bashevis Singer, D. Watkins, John Connell, Anthony Bourdain, George Orwell, Primo Levi, Mary McCarthy, and Vivian Gornick. We’ll also read excerpts of books on the *art* of memoir writing by Phillip Lopate, Mary Karr, and William Zinsser.

This course will also serve as a lab for students to speak about the stories they’re considering writing. As a team, we’ll develop answers to some of the biggest questions that come with memoir writing: is it safe for me to write about this? How do I know what I am doing? What tools can I use to build this memoir? Will anyone want to read what I am saying?

On the last day, each student will hand in an original piece of their own writing. This piece can be the opening to their own memoir or an excerpt from the middle of it. All students will receive feedback from the instructor and are encouraged to meet for a one-on-one session to discuss the future of their projects.

CROSS-GENRE

HAPPY, MAD, SAD, GLAD

Rachel Keranen

Tues. 6:00pm – 8:00pm

Dates: March 24 – April 28

Dodge 411

Writing emotions can often lead authors down one of two paths: Either the work is overwrought and sentimental, or the emotion falls flat and the author misses the mark. How can writers strike just the right note to convey the intended emotion to the reader, nothing more, nothing less? How does an author's individual style affect writing emotion? Who are writers we can look to for instructive examples?

Throughout the course, we will ask why so much of literature focuses on darker emotions, and why writing happiness poses such particular challenges.

This six-session course will interrogate the art of writing emotion through reading excerpts of works by authors such as Virginia Woolf, Lan Samantha Chang, Philip Roth, Elizabeth Strout, and Jenny Erpenbeck. All readings will be handed out in class. Throughout the course, students will practice writing different types of emotion in class, including happiness, sadness, anger, and anxiety. Students will also have the option to write and refine a single short story, essay, or novel chapter and receive feedback.

CHOOSE WISELY: WRITING INTERACTIVE STORIES

Pia Struzzi

Wed. 4:30pm – 6:30pm

Dates: March 25 – May 6 (No class April 8 for Passover)

Dodge 403

How do you write a story that changes based on the reader's choices? What about a story with a different ending if it's raining outside? How do you write a story on a deck of cards, and what happens to the story when the deck is shuffled?

In this six-session class, we will explore what happens when writers introduce elements of interactivity to narrative. We'll talk about the kinds of input a reader can have on a story, from choose-your-own-adventure narratives to randomization. We'll explore the pitfalls of writing a twisty story and some of the solutions presented by game theory. We'll read stories, play games, and learn to tell fortunes with a deck of Tarot cards.

Each week, we will end class with a brief tutorial to provide students with the technical skills necessary to write their own work of interactive fiction. We'll learn to use Twine, an open-source software used to write the Black Mirror episode "Bandersnatch." We'll learn to write a Twitter bot and how to code and host a simple HTML website. The last class will be a workshop, where students will present their projects for feedback.

ROAD NARRATIVES: WRITING THE JOURNEY

Liza Stewart

Wed. 7:30pm – 9:30pm

Dates: March 25 – May 6 (No class April 8 for Passover)

Dodge 409

Road narratives forge a path into spaces where collective and individual memory shape, shift, and distill points of view. Authors translate the feeling and texture of place through observations, encounters, locations imbued with meaning, and illuminating conversations. In this course we will examine road narratives through multiple lenses and genres. What are the unique challenges presented by fluid setting? How might that fluidity facilitate greater depth for characters, heighten tension, or generate conflict?

Through in-class readings, discussion, and writing exercises, we will uncover how authors use the concept of a journey to craft narratives about what transforms us when we travel and what most eludes us when we return home.

WEEK 1: *Origins: establishing place*

WEEK 2: *Encounters: generating conflict*

Excerpt from Signs Preceding the End of the World - Yuri Herrera

WEEK 3: *Crossroads: emotional landscapes*

[Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg - Richard Hugo](#)

WEEK 4: *Defamiliarization*

[Total Eclipse - Annie Dillard](#)

On Defamiliarization - Charles Baxter

WEEK 5: *Transformation: showing character change*

Antilamentation - [Dorianne Laux](#)

WEEK 6: *Going Home: reflections*

THE BOUND AND UNBOUND BOOK

Allison Carter-Beaulé

Thurs. 12:10 – 1:50pm
Dates: April 2 – May 7
Dodge 512

“It’s a book.”

“A book? Is it like a book that’s also a safe?”

“No, it’s a book that’s just a book.”
—Season 4, Episode 6, *Friends*

What is *just a book*? While this class is not necessarily focussed on taking to task 90’s sitcoms, it is about challenging common conventions that surround writing, books, and artist publication. What implicit structures exist because of how we define the book, and how does that affect our writing? If we agree that most books are not safes and yet some books can also be safes and retain their semblance of book-ness, how clear is our definition of this omnipresent literary format?



Book artists including Johanna Drucker, Ulises Carrión, Dieter Roth, Stéphane Mallarmé, George Brecht, ^{Joey Tribbiani}, and so many others, have asked a version of question in essays, actions, and the publication of artist books that sent Venn diagrams such as the above rolling off the page, proverbially.

Proverbially, only insofar as one of our implicit assumptions might be that the book is a three-dimensional object composed of planes on which language is two dimensional. Not, therefore, prone to rolling. What would happen if we wrote on a round object, then? The underside of a mattress, or on paper that isn’t blank? How would you arrange a book that cannot be experienced chronologically, and what sort of writing would demand such a form?

In this six-session class, we will examine small press books, handmade artist editions, and unconventional approaches to publication. We will venture to identify and question not only what the book can be, but also in what ways seizing the means of production, so to speak, can broaden, strengthen, and inspire our own writing. The writing we do in class will be unconventional, and will test the strength of the 1” margins our literary brain has been taught to write within. By our last class, students will have learned the necessary skills for a small edition of their own handbound book. In keeping with the long tradition of decentralized artist bookmaking, during the final class we will exchange our books for the books of our peers—some of which may also be safes.

**THE MOST SINCERE FORM OF FLATTERY:
EXPLORING VOICE THROUGH RIPPING OFF OTHERS**
Darby Minow Smith

Thurs. 6:30pm-8:30pm
Dates: March 26 – April 30
Dodge 407

What makes a George Saunders story so obviously Saunders? A Maggie Nelson excerpt clearly her own? How has Jia Tolentino become shorthand for thoughtful essays about modern life?

In this six-session class, we'll read and discuss famously voice-y writers. Then, we'll rip them off. We'll write into Saunders and go full Nelson. By closely reading different authors, we'll learn what makes their styles recognizable. And by parodying, mimicking, and reimagining their stories, we'll free up our own creativity. All readings and writing exercises will occur during class time. By the end of the course, students will better understand the elusive concept of voice and how to cultivate it.

In-class readings may include excerpts from the work of Miranda July, Gary Lutz, Lydia Davis, Denis Johnson, Sigrid Nunez, Justin Torres, and Ernest Hemingway (c'mon -- it's a class on voice).

SCAM LIKELY

Zak Stone

Fri. 12:10 – 2:00pm

Dates: March 27 – May 8 (No class May 1)

Dodge 413

The figures of the scammer, the grifter, the con man, and the fraud both captivate and repulse us as readers and writers. From Bernie Madoff to Theranos's Elizabeth Holmes, from Lee Israel to JT LeRoy, from Herman Melville's "confidence man" to Patricia Highsmith's Mr. Ripley, some of the most fascinating stories from journalism and literature revolve around these complicated figures, and prove increasingly relevant in a time of unprecedented inequality and economic unfairness.

In this six-session course we will examine excerpts mainly from non-fiction and fiction (and possibly poetry and plays), as well as found and ephemeral texts (including spam emails, robocall transcripts, marketing materials, and social media) to analyze, catalogue, and deconstruct the narratives of the scam. Then, as creative writers and journalists, we will construct our own. We will think about and discuss the writer as truth-teller, the writer as scammer, the scammer as writer, and the reader as mark. We will generate new work through in-class writing exercises. And we will read excerpts from some of the following:

Frank Abagnale: *Catch Me If You Can*

John Carreyrou: *Bad Blood*

Chaucer: "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale"

Arthur Conan Doyle: "A Scandal in Bohemia"

Cornelius Eady: *Brutal Imagination*

Neil Gaiman: *American Gods*

Nikolai Gogol: *The Dead Souls or Government Inspector*

Patricia Highsmith: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Lee Israel: *Can You Ever Forgive Me*

Jia Jolentino: *Trick Mirror*

Maria Konnikova: *The Confidence Game*

JT LeRoy: *Sarah*

David Maurer: *The Big Con*

Herman Melville: *The Confidence-Man*

Zhang Yingyu: *The Book of Swindles*