

CA/T Community Classes (CCC)

Creative Writing | Columbia University



Zora Neale Hurston, Barnard & Columbia Writing Classes Alumna

COURSEBOOK

Spring 2023

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 six weeks, beginning on Monday, March 20th, through Friday, April 28th. Classes are six weeks unless otherwise specified. This semester will offer both **IN-PERSON** and **ONLINE** courses (noted below).

Online courses will take place over Zoom. In-Person courses will take place on campus in Dodge Hall.

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, March 17th. Classes are capped at 12 students. Those that fill up will be specified as **waitlist only**.

To choose your classes, please fill out [the Spring 2023 Registration Form](#). The CCC coordinator, Delia Cruz Kelly, will contact you by Sunday, March 19th, 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, Delia Cruz Kelly, at soa-writing-ccc@columbia.edu. If your question pertains to a specific course, please reach out to the instructor.

COURSE LIST

FICTION

METAMORPHOSIS: COMING-OF-AGE STORYTELLING | Caroline Johnson

Tues. 12:00pm-2:00pm Dodge 411 (IN-PERSON)

DREAMS AND SEAMS AND DUENDE | Deya Luna

Tues. 6:30pm-8:30pm Dodge 403 (IN-PERSON)

POETRY

POETICS OF DESIRE | Loisa Fenichell

Mon. 4:00pm-6:00pm (ONLINE)

TRACING PORTALS: READING WALLACE STEVENS | Addison Schoeman

Wed 12:00pm-2:00pm Dodge 409 (IN-PERSON)

A FRESH LOOK AT POETIC FORM | Calleja Welsh

Thurs. 6:30pm-8:30pm Dodge 409 (IN-PERSON)

NONFICTION

WRITING ABOUT HOME | Emma Golden

Fri. 2:00pm-4:00pm Dodge 413 (IN-PERSON)

SERENDIPITY | Sarah Swinwood

Mon. 6:00pm-8:00pm (ONLINE)

CROSS-GENRE

THE LANGUAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH | Caleb Knight

Fri. 12:00pm-2:00pm Dodge 413 (IN-PERSON)

RESTORATIVE TEACHING WORKSHOP | Leah Silverman

Tues. 6:00pm-8:00pm (ONLINE)

CONSTRUCTING CREATIVITY | Caitlin Smith

Wed. 12:00pm-2:00pm Dodge 411 (IN-PERSON)

FICTION

METAMORPHOSIS: COMING-OF-AGE STORYTELLING

Caroline Johnson

Tues. 12:00pm-2:00pm

Dates: March 21st—April 25th

Dodge 411

“I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist. I could not count on precision or calculation; I could only count on intuition.” - Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*

What does it mean to come of age? Is there a way to put language to it through multimedia elements? In this class, we will dive into the transformation of the self over time through the lens of Black women literature. By examining prose, poetry, paintings, photographs, and more, the class will provide students with the tools to better understand coming-of-age storytelling and encourage students to create works of their own. We will read excerpts in class from authors including Jamaica Kincaid, Toni Morrison, Wanda Coleman and Audre Lorde. The class will be divided into segments dedicated to themes such as: friendship, love, familial relationships, autonomy, place, spirituality, gender/sexuality.

Exercises and prompts will encourage students in the second half of each session to write short stories with fictional characters, write and/or record streams of consciousness, create visuals and other media. The goal is to be creative, create a sense of community, have fun and dive into what it means to transform and invent the self. Regardless of your familiarity with creative writing, all are welcome!

DREAMS AND SEAMS AND DUENDE

Deya Luna

Tues. 6:30pm-8:30pm

Dates: March 21st—April 25th

Dodge 403

“Till then — dreaming I am sewing
Fetch the seam I missed —”

- *Emily Dickinson*

“With idea, sound, gesture, the *duende* delights in struggling freely with the creator on the edge of the pit.”

- *Federico García Lorca*

If, for Dickinson, writing is somnambulant sewing—and if, for Lorca, writing is a dangerous struggle—we can imagine how, for others, writing might be a bit of both. In this six-week course, we’ll apprentice ourselves to both the quilt and the chasm, to both the precision of craft and to the vastness of imaginative and emotional extremes.

How can studying prose in distinct, intense modes—the cosmic, the comic, the surreal and sublime, the mad and horrific—help us diversify the fabric we use for our work? How can seams—the more conscious tools of writing like diction, syntax, rhythm, and punctuation—provide integrity and balance, allowing us to approach and harness these intensities? What can writers of prose learn from the spirit of poetry, song, and stand-up or from frameworks in linguistics, translation, and cognitive science?

Together, we’ll approach these questions through a variety of discussions and exercises. Readings provided in class may include excerpts from Italo Calvino, Kōno Taeko, Hilda Hilst, Alain Mabanckou, Robert Walser, Raymond Queneau, Leonora Carrington, Roberto Bolaño, Renata Adler, Joanna Newsom, Garielle Lutz, Hélène Cixous, Fleur Jaeggy, Franz Kafka, and others. Our goal will be to cultivate a greater understanding of both mystery and mechanism— of prose that moves and warms and wounds.

POETRY

POETICS OF DESIRE

Loisa Fenichell

Mon. 4:00pm-6:00pm

Dates: March 20th—April 24th

Online

“What makes the engine go? / Desire, desire, desire” – Stanley Kunitz, “Touch Me”
“All lyric poetry is the poetry of desire.” – a craft talk by Robert Hass

In this hybrid seminar-generative writing class, using psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s definition of desire, that desire stems from lack, we will be discussing the ways in which desire seeps into lyric poetry. In investigating lyric poetry, we will also be thinking about the idea of addressing the other, the “you.” We will be looking at other connected themes, too, like romance and grief.

We will be reading excerpts from a range of poets and thinkers, such as Jacques Lacan, Anne Carson, Sappho, Jenny Xie, Audre Lorde, Karen L. Green, Robert Hass, and Stacie Cassarino.

The first half of each session will be devoted to reading and discussing various texts – primarily poetry, but with some excerpts from selected psychological and philosophical texts – and the second half will be dedicated to writing, with optional prompts. Each class will end with students sharing their work, and receiving some feedback, should they so choose to do so.

TRACING PORTALS: READING WALLACE STEVENS

Addison Schoeman

Wed. 12:00pm-2:00pm

Dates: March 22nd — April 26th

Dodge 409

Beauty is momentary in the mind —

The fitful tracing of a portal;
But in the flesh it is immortal.

— Wallace Stevens, “Peter Quince at the Clavier,” 1923

One of the most idiosyncratic voices in 20th century American poetry, the work of Wallace Stevens contains everything from goofy onomatopoeia to austere philosophizing, and even uses the unexpected exclamation “Hi!” in a poem that includes both. A successful insurance salesman, trained lawyer, and intermittently discontented family man, Stevens’ imagination remains an enigmatic, baroque, and oddly tropical fixture in American poetics.

As a class, we’ll deep-read and discuss one or more poems per week, covering some of his greatest hits, like “The Snow Man,” “Sunday Morning,” and “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” as well as lesser-known treasures like “July Mountain” and “No Possum, No Sop, No Taters.” We might spend multiple weeks on a long poem, like “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” or “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven.” Previous knowledge of Stevens’ work is not required, but students will be expected to read the relevant poem(s) at least once prior to class. We’ll talk about themes, style, and, where there’s one to be explored, the argument. Students will also free-write in response to what we read, with opportunities to share their work aloud. The optional final assignment will be one original poem that Wally himself would love, hate, or find vaguely interesting. Toodle-oo!

A FRESH LOOK AT POETIC FORM

Calleja Welsh

Thurs. 6:30-8:30pm

Dates: March 23rd — April 27th

Dodge 409

Poetic form can be seen as the structural container through which the “heart” of a poem flows. We may not always be able to grasp and describe the heart of a poem, but form is measurable: meter, rhyme, line length, stanza construction, repetition, etc. When this distinction between form and meaning is overemphasized, many students of poetry feel that formal constraints stifle expression. Together, we’ll move beyond

this sense of limitation and discover how form can be essential to the writer's articulation of something new.

To this end, we'll explore how poetic form reveals language as an artistic medium (like paint or clay) and is integral to the poem's meaning. An attention to form begins to unravel language from its assumed and inherited relationships to the world. This gives the writer fresh material with which to work. We'll take a close look at formal poetic devices in historical and contemporary contexts, with an eye for how they disrupt typical language/social assumptions.

This course will be part seminar and part writing studio. In the first half of each class, we'll take a look at poetry that engages with forms such as the sonnet, the haiku, the pantoum, and the ode. The second portion will be dedicated to in-class writing exercises that guide students to experiment with elements of these forms in their own creative writing. Students will have the opportunity to share their work with the class and receive feedback.

NONFICTION

WRITING ABOUT HOME

Emma Golden

Fri. 2:00pm-4:00pm

Dates: March 24th — April 28th

Dodge 413

In this seminar, we'll practice strategies to write about the places that shelter us, as well as non-residential spaces that feel like home or serve the functions of home. We'll treat our homes like characters that hoard secrets, animate conflicts, and tell cultural histories. We'll do writing exercises to brainstorm objects, moments, and feelings, and we'll flesh out scenes that our homes breathe life into. We'll read excerpts from writers like Carmen Maria Machado, Kiese Laymon, Sarah M. Broom, Carina del Valle Schorske, and Meghan O'Gieblyn as models. One session will include a visit to MoMA to pull inspiration from art exhibits curated around ideas of home.

SERENDIPITY

Sarah Swinwood

Mon. 6:00pm-8:00pm

Dates: March 20th — April 24th

Online

Through a series of readings and playful writing prompts, we will examine how coincidence, chance and serendipity enhance every aspect of our creative lives. Our days are often spent planning and working practically towards our goals. A key element often ignored is the role that chance and the happy accident play in moving things forward. By focusing on these things, our thoughts become more joyful and solution oriented. When we loosen our grip on trying to control every aspect of what it is we aim to do, we create space for novel ideas and fresh perspectives. This course is ideal for anyone who would like to both find more ease on the page and become more oriented to facing personal and professional challenges. By the end of this course, we will have kept a daily notebook of synchronicities and uncanny events which can be referred to when encountering blocks.

CROSS-GENRE

THE LANGUAGE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Caleb Knight

Fri. 12:00pm-2:00pm

Dates: March 24th — April 28th

Dodge 413

Why has the image of the suffering artist historically been elevated to a place of near mythology? What happens to art when an artist is given support and a chance to recover and move toward wellness? If language determines our ability to think about ourselves and express our reality, then what impact does it have on our ability to express our experiences of mental health? How can we reclaim writing as a practice of personal well-being, a powerful tool for sense-making, healing, and connection?

In this class we will explore how shifts in societal conceptions of mental health create new language for expression. We will examine works from writers who have lived with mental health conditions and who offer a variety of models for speaking about their experiences, such as Leslie Jamison, Kendrick Lamar, Audre Lorde, NK Jemisin, Stephen King, Kaveh Akbar, and Ocean Vuong. We will analyze how mechanical features of writing like sentence structure or line breaks can impact the emotional composition of a piece. Students will also have the option to bring readings which they've found important in their own journeys of mental health, and to participate in an optional writing exchange program with individuals from The Bridge, a non-profit organization in the city which provides community-based outpatient and residential programs for adults seeking assistance managing their behavioral and mental health conditions.

Class time will be divided into two segments, with the first half spent on close reading and discussion, and the second half spent on in-class writing prompts and opportunities for sharing and feedback.

RESTORATIVE TEACHING WORKSHOP

Leah Silverman

Tues. 6:00pm-8:00pm

Dates: April 4th — April 25th *4 WEEKS*

Online

Workshops are meant to be diverse communities where a bevy of experience can inform one's work, and they necessarily require us to interrogate ourselves and our beliefs. So how do we channel all that experiential and personal variety into generative, tolerant, and thoughtful feedback? We can use the tenants of restorative pedagogy to guide us. In a restorative classroom, the goal of education is to foster empathy, reduce harm, and encourage relationship-building — all of which, I believe, are also why we write. In this course, we will each workshop one piece through restorative teaching activities, games, and language that lend themselves to fostering a more supportive and emotionally rigorous classroom.

CONSTRUCTING CREATIVITY

Caitlin Smith

Wed. 12:00pm-2:00pm

Dates: March 22nd — April 26th

Dodge 411

How do you write? When and where? Do you sprint to your keyboard as deadlines near or perfect a line a day? Does your mind empty anytime you confront a blank page or do you find yourself swirling with too many ideas at once? Do any of these descriptions apply to you? All of them? The purpose of this course is to discover your creation sweet spot(s). Do you need music or dead silence? Do you need a prompt to get you going or a running list of ideas ready for when the mood strikes?

“Writing is a manual labor [of the mind]: a job, like laying pipe,” John Gregory Dunne.

Each class will have one of the following themes: preparation, sound, setting, medium, revision, fighting writer’s block. Depending on a student’s current problems or mindset, some classes may be more of a mental hurdle than others. Students will get to know when they need to write with pen and paper to shake off their nerves or when they need to lie outside to feel centered in their thoughts or when they need to go down a rabbit hole of reddit conspiracies to be inspired. In short, this course will help students with the struggle of writing. By the end of the term, students will have a list of practical tools to construct their own creativity, as well as many pages of written work.

“The greater the artist, the greater the doubt. Perfect confidence is granted to the less talented as a consolation prize,” Robert Hughes.