



Winter 2016
T/R 3:00-4:50
120-314

ENGLISH 9CE

Story Worlds

Instructor:

Shannon Pufahl
Margaret Jacks Hall
rm 330
srpufahl@stanford.edu

Office hours:

Tuesdays 1:45-2:45 pm
Thursdays 5:30-6:30 pm
and by appointment

English 9CE is a writing class that explores daily creative practice through readings, prompted exercises, improv, games, collaboration, workshop, and revision. This is an introductory course and recommended for students who have never taken a Creative Writing class before. Our primary aims in this class will be to take risks, succeed, reflect, revise, fail, and recover from failure.

A secondary, but no less important, aim is to become more alert to the various worlds of human experience through language. As we engage with the long tradition of literary art, we'll think broadly and bravely, and explore the expressive opportunities inherent in writing.

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.

– Muriel Rukeyser

Course Requirements

Class Participation (25%) This includes attendance, punctuality and involvement in class discussions (including on the course blog), as well as a presentation on an essay of your choice.

Absences: Attendance is required and essential to your experience of the course. Individual workshops & class collaborations are especially affected by absences and are impossible to recreate. If you have a legitimate reason to be absent, please arrange this in advance; otherwise unexcused absence will reduce your overall grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. Chronic absences will affect your grade significantly.

Course site: We'll be posting some of the work for class on our class blog, including annotations on the published essays we read and responses to classmates' work. I'll ask that you post a short comment on our class blog about some of our readings. We'll also produce and respond to some short writing assignments. The blog content will be entirely private to our class. We'll use Canvas a simple and functional site for academic coursework.

Assignments (25%) This includes all writing exercises you've completed in class and for homework, and a longer essay, set of poems, or story submitted for the traditional workshop. We'll conduct mini workshops and/or cold reads (reading the assignment aloud to the class and then inviting response) for many of these assignments, as well as sharing assignments on the course site.

Stanford Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

When you read a short story, you come out a little more aware and a little more in love with the world around you. What I want is to have the reader come out just 6 percent more awake to the world.

– George Saunders

Written critiques (10%) One of the most valuable elements of a writing class is the opportunity to have your work seriously critiqued both by your instructor and your peers. It will be as beneficial to your writing to think critically and generously about your classmates' work as it will be to have your own writing discussed. It isn't necessary to write pages and pages of comments to your classmates, but make sure your letter is carefully thought-out and both critical and kind. It's important to remember that we won't be discussing polished essays but early drafts.

Attendance at Readings (15%) Attendance at three readings in the Creative Writing program is required. A list of readings this quarter can be found at <http://creativewriting.stanford.edu> and <http://events.stanford.edu/>.

Collaborative project (10%) End-of-term collaborative project, to be presented to the class. More on this to follow.

Final portfolio (15%): One of goals in this course is to produce a lot of writing, in the service of exploration. Not everything we write or dream up will be worth pursuing, or will allow us to do our best work. (As Louise Glück once wrote, "The only real exercise of will is negative; we have towards what we write the power of veto.") We'll present some of the work we produce to our classmates, either in workshop or on the course blog. As the quarter progresses, we'll choose some things to pursue and some things to discard. A final portfolio of the work we pursue will be due at the end of the quarter; our goal will be 15-20 pages of revised writing. This portfolio may be composed of a single long essay, a chapter of a memoir, or a series of short essays and investigations. The main criteria will be sustained engagement and thoughtful revision. The portfolio may not constitute a "completion" of the work you pursue, but it should be a significant step toward polish and achievement.

Required materials:

Course reader (available at the Stanford Bookstore)

In-class handouts

Journal for daily use

Budget for workshop copies

Grading

Participation 25%

Assignments 25%

Written critiques 10%

Readings attendance 15%

Final portfolio 15%

Collaborative project 10%

Provisional schedule (subject to change & expansion):

Tuesday, January 5:

Introductions
Course overview

The physical world.

Thursday, January 7:

Seeing & looking
READING: Materials in class
WRITING: Ex. #1: A week of gestures

Tuesday, January 12:

Still lives: useful objects
READINGS: Mark Doty selections (handout)
Annie Dillard's baseball mitt
Poems (handout)
WRITING: Ex. #2: Still life

Thursday, January 14:

Moving lives: embodiment & character
READING: Ernest Hemingway "Indian Camp"
Lorrie Moore "Dance in America"
WRITING: Ex. #3: Embodied characters

Tuesday, January 19:

Everything happens somewhere: on setting
READING: James Agee "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" (handout)
Annie Proulx "Brokeback Mountain"
Poem packet (handout)
WRITING: Ex. #4: World-building

The emotional world.

Thursday, January 21:

Portraiture: where the physical meets the emotional
READING: Portrait viewings in class
"Poem of Faces" Walt Whitman
Poem packet (handout)
WRITING: Ex. #5: Portrait of a face

Accommodation

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodation.

Tuesday, January 26:

Wild energy: revealing emotion through action
READING: Raymond Carver
"Cathedral" (handout)
Poem packet (handout)
WRITING: In-class: Improv exercises

The human world.

Thursday, January 28:

Revealing character through dialogue
READING: Richard Ford "Optimists"
Second story TBD
WRITING: In-class: Collaborative scene in dialogue

Tuesday, February 2:

Who looks? Who sees?: on point of view
READING: Yiyun Li "Gold Boy, Emerald Girl"
WRITING: Ex. #6: Three perspectives

Thursday, February 4:

Song of occupations: meaningful human detail
READING: Nicole Krauss "The Young Painters"
Walt Whitman "Song of Occupations"
WRITING: Ex. #6b: Fan fiction!!

The world of the self.

Tuesday, February 9:

Autobiography

READING: Elizabeth Tallent “Little X”
Zadie Smith “Joy”

WRITING: Ex. #7: Autobiography

Thursday, February 11:

Failure & fear

READING: Poem packet (handout)
Amy Bloom “Silver Water”

WRITING: Ex. #8: Doing what is difficult

Abstraction & myth.

Tuesday, February 16:

Patterns, misdirections, dreams

READING: Borges “The Garden of Forking Paths”
Poem packet (handout)

WRITING: Ex. #9: Class collaboration “In C”

Thursday, February 18:

Ekphrasia: writing about art

MEET @ Cantor Arts Center

WRITING: Ex. #10: Ekphrastic pieces

The world of language.

Tuesday, February 23:

Imagery: the marrow of the literary

READING: “Total Eclipse” Annie Dillard
Poem packet (handout)

WRITING: Ex. #11: New descriptions

Thursday, February 25:

Language as object:

feeling, seeing, tasting, hearing words

READING: In-class

WRITING: In-class

[I write] to change my own mind. I try to create a new vocabulary or terrain for myself, so that I open out—I always think of the Dutch claiming land from the sea—or open up something that would have been closed to me before. That’s the point and the pleasure of it.

– Marilynne Robinson

Workshops.

Tuesday, March 1:

Full draft workshops

Thursday, March 3:

Full draft workshops

Tuesday, March 8:

Full draft workshops

Thursday, March 10:

Course wrap-up; final workshops as needed

Friday, March 18:

Final Portfolios due by 5 p.m.

Collaborative project presentations will be scheduled during weeks 7 & 8, Tuesday February 16 - Thursday February 25, and into week 9 if necessary.