Creative Writing Workshop

Course Description:
       This class offers you and your peers an opportunity to experiment with a variety of creative genres and hone your writing skills in the hopes of helping you produce work of publishable quality. As with many English classes, we'll do a lot of reading, examining the work of successful artists to identify what skills and techniques have made them successful writers. Ultimately, though, the heart of this class is student work and workshopping, a system by which an author receives informed, constructive feedback from a group of readers.

INSTRUCTOR:

- Name: Tracy Townsend

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Meeting Days, Time and Room(s)
Mod 5/6, 12:30-2:10 B; 12:20-1:15 D (A113)
Mod 7/8, 3:20-4:15 A; 3:20-4:00 C (A117)

Text(s) / Materials:

- selections from *Room to Write* by Bonni Goldberg
- selections from *In Brief*: *Short Takes on the Personal* ed. by Mary Paumier Jones and Judith Kitchen
- *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo
- *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott
- "A Workshopper's Guide to the Creative Writing Workshop," by Tracy Townsend
- various reading packets, etc., as assigned

Essential Content:

Workshop-oriented classes require a great deal of maturity, focus, and of course participation from all members, so be prepared to talk every day, as your ability to comment on your peers' work is your most important daily contribution to this class.

Without written work, however, there would be no workshop. Each student will produce around a dozen written works, small and larger, in the course of the semester and choose four of them to revise as part of a final portfolio grade. As this class is somewhat larger than the ideal workshop size, the whole group will review student drafts on a rotating basis. In the meantime, each of your pieces will get personal attention through our course's Moodle site. Each student will be part of a three- or four-person "mini workshop" discussion group, who will send each other drafts of work electronically and receive feedback from their discussion partners and me via the Moodle message board. Your participation in the face-to-face and electronic workshops will figure into your grade for this course.

There will be substantial readings assigned regularly, as in any other English course. You are expected to complete these readings and come to class ready to discuss them.

Finally, focus on providing specific, helpful feedback to your peers during workshops. The more precise your comments, the more respectful and productive a member of the class you will be.

SSLs and Outcomes:

In Creative Writing Workshop (CWW), students will engage in the following learning experiences, which conform to the following Standards of Significant Learning:

- Learn to write creatively in a variety of genres and modes (IA, IIIB., IIIC., IVB., IVD)
- Learn to critique clearly, intelligently, and supportively the work of their peers, both orally and in written discourse (face to face and online) (IB., IC., ID., IIA., IIB., IIIA., IIIB., IVA., IVC, IVD, VA., VB.).
- Learn to read creative texts as part of a transactional arrangement between artist and audience (IA., IC., IIA., IIB., IIIB., IVC, IVD.)
- Learn to revise and reshape their creative products, and their creative process (IIA., IVA., IVC., IVD).

Instructional Design and Approach:

Creative Writing Workshop (CWW) addresses IMSA's Core Competencies by emphasizing students' ability to improve their <u>competence</u> as creators of and respondents to texts. It further privileges students' individual questions and curiosities (<u>inquiry</u>) by placing their creative choices at the center of their work and the work of the class as a whole, and continually presents students with the <u>problem</u> of balancing artistic desire with audience expectation and need.

Student Expectations:

Students will be expected to conduct themselves with the level of decorum and reflection articulated in the "Workshopper's Guide" document, which was composed specifically for this class. Late graded work will be accepted at the rate of a half-letter grade penalty per day of lateness. Work that is not presented for workshop at the scheduled time will receive no credit. Response postings to peers' texts online must be done by the stated deadline; responses that are made after this deadline (all or in part) or are incomplete will receive only half credit. Missing responses receive no credit.

o   With respect to collaboration, and with credit to Dr. Rettberg for an excellent policy phrasing, please be aware of the following:

"I encourage you to seek and implement feedback on your drafts from a variety of readers— teachers, classmates, tutors, parents, and peers. You must be the one to actually write your sentences, responses, and essays, though, so those readers should not implement changes directly in your documents. That is, it's great to have a parent or peer comment on errors in a Google Doc—but it's not OK to have them simply correct errors in a Google Doc. It's great to have a parent or tutor offer suggestions for how to improve your topic sentences—but it's not OK to have them write your topic sentences for you. Seek feedback and guidance from readers, but take ownership of your own writing."

Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes:

Assigning grades in creative writing can be a bit like grading a cat on how much it behaves like a dog. Yet, in a world of transcripts and credits, it must be done, so here's how we'll try to make the reality of our actions in the workshop reflect the reality of our talents and intentions. . .

Quarter Grades =
Workshop participation (online, small group): 15%
Workshop participation (oral, whole group weekly; includes timely submission of whole-group workshop pieces): 20%
Workshop Feedback (written weekly): 15%
Graded draft grades: 50%

Semester Grade=
Q3 + Q4 = 80%
Final Portfolio = 20%

Please Note: *It is the policy of this instructor, and the policy of the English department at IMSA, not to round quarter or term grades. Do not ask to have your grade rounded, as the instructor cannot ethically comply with that request.*

Sequence of Topics and Activities

Weeks 1-2: The Creative Writer
    - read selections from Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird /* Townsend's "Workshopper's
Guide"
    - begin short writing exercises and online feedback process
    - "55 Fiction" assigned

Weeks 3-5: The Short Story (part one)
    - Spontaneous Writing Minstrelsy activity
    - - adapted dialogue story assigned and collected
    - "Yahtzee" story assigned and collected

Weeks 6-8: The Poem (part one – form and prompt)
    - read selections from Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*
    - Major Assignment: Poems 1 & 2 assigned (form poetry prompts)
    - Poetry workshops; begin revising.

Weeks 9-11: One-Acts and Monologues
    - read selected one-acts and monologues
    - Major Assignments: One-Act and Monologue
    - Workshop one-acts and monologues; begin revising

Weeks 12-13: The Return of the Poem (free verse and prose poems)
    - read selections of contemporary poetry from *Poetry 180, Contemporary
American Poetry,* other sources
    - learning how NOT to write "at a high degree of personal association"
    - more readings from Hugo's *Triggering Town*
    - Major Assignment: Poems 3 & 4 assigned (1 prose poem; 1 freeform/found)
    - Poetry workshops; begin revising.

Weeks 14-16: The Personal Essay
    -What is the personal essay? What is creative nonfiction? (read selections from
The Art of the Personal Essay) The concept of "earning your exposition."
    - Major Assignment: Personal Essay
    - Workshop personal essays; begin revising

Weeks 17-18: "Choose Your Own Adventure"
    - Students choose a genre to continue working in – fiction, non-fiction, poetry,
        drama.

Finals Week: turn in your final portfolio, containing no fewer than 4 revised works from
this semester's workshop. At least one of these must be a prose piece (fiction, nonfiction,
or theatrical) and at least one must be a poem – the rest can be whatever mix you like.