
THIS IS NOT A WORKSHOP

LA 210 | Thursdays 6:00 -8:50 pm | Catherine Lacey
Office: LA 126 | Hours: Thursday 3:30 - 5:30 pm & Friday 11:45 am - 12:45 pm

The assembly of a story is not the same as the assembly of a table. We are not carpenters.

Therefore this is not a workshop.

We're not learning how to use a saw. We don't measure twice and cut once.

This class is officially called a Fiction Workshop because that is what it has always been called, but it is not a workshop in many more ways than it is a workshop. We know this.

There is such thing as craft, if you want to call it that, but it is as personal as your body.

A story is a response to all that you have observed and thought and read and felt. You cannot tell others how to respond to their world and no one can tell you how to respond to yours. This is not to say that no one can help you with your work. They can and will.

Rather than trying to collectively edit a story as a workshop, this class will be a space in which you can figure out what it is that you're doing from the inside out rather than the outside in. You will help your fellow students by listening rather than speaking, by asking rather than telling.

You are the only person in the room that can make the words you're trying to make.

With this in mind, we will be using a method in this workshop called THE ASKING, which is based on the Quaker tradition of conflict resolution. I'm drawing heavily on the writer Jesse Ball's use of The Asking in his writing classes at at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. He in turn adapted John Schmidt's original idea to apply Quaker techniques in a creative writing classroom.

What is The Asking?

THE ASKING

As is the case in traditional workshops, each week a group of students will submit their work to the class. Rather than notate their manuscripts and write end-notes on how we each believe this story can be improved, we will instead consider what this work is doing and how it can succeed on its own terms. We will prescribe nothing. We will not tell them they need to cut the bit about the dog on page three. We will not tell them the present tense “doesn't work” in this story. We will not say “I liked it” or “I didn't like it.” We will not praise or decry the work in any way.

Instead, we will formulate excellent questions for each writer, the sort of questions that will be a launchpad for their thinking. Each student will type up at least three questions for each writer and bring two copies of this list to class.

At our meetings, the writers we've read the prior week will each have a turn being THE ASKED. The Asked will sit at the front of the classroom and allow us to ask them the questions we have come up with. These questions will be about the work or the ideas this work raises. These questions will not contain judgement, whether positive or negative. They will not be leading questions. They will not be statements spoken like a question?

Prior to The Asking, the Asked will have a brief meeting with THE ADVOCATE about any topics they want to avoid. The Advocate will sit beside The Asked and call on students from the room. If a student asks a question that does not fit the above criteria for questions, the Advocate will ask them to re-form their question. If the question is about a topic The Asked would like to avoid, the Advocate will request another question.

Somewhere in the room will be THE RECORDER. They will simply record the questions that are asked and give this to The Asked at the end of their session.

A NOTE ON SILENCE

Silence is an extremely useful and overlooked tool. Do not fear lingering in silent thought if you are The Asked. You may sit in silence for as long as you like and you need not rush to answer any question. When you are The Asked, the development of your thoughts is the focus, and if these thoughts cannot be immediately shared, that is absolutely fine.

A NOTE ON SELF-DEPRECIATION

Resist the urge to belittle your work, your thoughts, your choices. This course has much in common with inviting someone to your house while you're mid-renovation. When you are The Asked, it is your opportunity to consider how your objectives and the reality of a work are interacting. If you do not like or have changed your mind about some aspect of the work you have submitted to us, that is fine. Contradiction is to be expected, encouraged. But self-deprecation is to be avoided just as the deprecation of others is to be avoided.

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

September 8

THE ASKED:	A _____	B _____	C _____
THE ADVOCATE:	_____	_____	_____
THE RECORDER:	_____	_____	_____

September 15

THE ASKED:	D _____	E _____	F _____
THE ADVOCATE:	_____	_____	_____
THE RECORDER:	_____	_____	_____

September 22

THE ASKED:	G _____	A2 _____	B2 _____
THE ADVOCATE:	_____	_____	_____
THE RECORDER:	_____	_____	_____

September 29

THE ASKED:	C2 _____	D2 _____	E2 _____
THE ADVOCATE:	_____	_____	_____
THE RECORDER:	_____	_____	_____

October 6

THE ASKED:	F2 _____	G2 _____	A3 _____
THE ADVOCATE:	_____	_____	_____
THE RECORDER:	_____	_____	_____

October 13 Special Guest Week

October 20

THE ASKED: B3 _____ C3 _____ D3 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____ _____

October 27

THE ASKED: E3 _____ F3 _____ G3 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____ _____

November 3

THE ASKED: A4 _____ B4 _____ C4 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____ _____

November 10

THE ASKED: D4 _____ E4 _____ F4 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____ _____

November 17

THE ASKED: G4 _____ A5 _____ B5 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____ _____

November 24 NO CLASS THANKSGIVING

December 1

THE ASKED: C5 _____ D5 _____ E5 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____ _____

December 8

THE ASKED: F5 _____ G5 _____

THE ADVOCATE: _____ _____

THE RECORDER: _____ _____

Final Portfolios due Date TBA