

Introduction to Poetry Workshop

CRWR 211A: Tuesday & Thursday, 9:30-10:50am in LA 338

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“Much of beauty, both in art and in life, is a balancing of the lines of forward-flowing desire with those of resistance—a gnarled tree, the flow of a statue’s draped cloth. Through such tensions, physical or mental, the world in which we exist becomes itself. Great art, we might say, is thought that has been concentrated in just this way.” ~ Jane Hirshfield

COURSE OVERVIEW

As writers, how do we translate the raw material of experience into language? How do we seduce readers into a deepened engagement: with our texts, the world, themselves? In this introductory writing course we will explore poetry as both a literary form and a craft. We will read as critics; approaching poems as a conversation between the writer and reader, we will develop interpretive techniques and habits of mind that allow us to appreciate poems as complexities of meaning, emotion, beauty, and ambiguity. We will also read as writers, interrogating the craft of other poets in order to inform our own. The class will include weekly workshops, for which student writing will be the central text. As a group, we will read and discuss your poems, offering close analysis and suggestions; we will seek to help each poem realize its fullest potential.

Learning Outcomes

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing, and writing poetry.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to poetry.
- Practice the art of writing and revising poetry.
- Learn to critique the quality of your own work and that of fellow students.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Available at the UM bookstore

1. Jane Hirshfield, *Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry*
2. Jack Gilbert, *The Great Fires*
3. Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris*
4. Alice Oswald, *Memorial*

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

- **Creative Responses**

Each week I will provide a prompt, asking you to write a poem in response to a particular area of inquiry from our reading and discussion. You will submit **twelve poems** over the course of the semester, and at least **nine** of these must clearly engage my prompts; the other **three** may be “wilds,” written in accordance with your own interests and experimentation. Poems should be **printed** and turned in each **Monday, no later than 11:45am**, in the **blue folder in my mailbox, LA 133**. Please label each poem with your name, the date, and the prompt you are responding to. Printing must be single-sided with no staples. ** Please make a note if for any reason you do not wish to have a particular poem included in the class worksheet.*

- **Workshops**

In class on Tuesday I will hand out a worksheet of the poems, which will be the reading for the workshop on Thursday. Read through all of the poems; take note of how others are working within the parameters of the assignment. What techniques and strategies can you use in your own work? Additionally, you will “prepare” the three poems I have selected for the workshop (I will announce these on Tuesday). You should come to class Thursday prepared to talk about these poems in-depth: What are the poem’s aspirations? (What is it about?) Where does it live up to these aspirations? How can the poem be developed to better realize or challenge these aspirations? Many of you will be new to the workshop model; as with all of our discussions, approach the poems with curiosity, ground your comments in close observation, and be willing to take risks.

In addition to full-class workshops, you will receive feedback from your peers in several informal, small group workshops. These workshops will be either topic-oriented (looking collectively at a single aspect of our poetics), or “open,” providing the opportunity to workshop a poem of your choice. Details to be discussed in class.

- **Individual Conferences**

I will meet with each of you individually at least two times during the semester to discuss your work. Beforehand you will need to **submit a folder of all completed poems** along with a **progress report** (one page, double-spaced), reflecting on your engagement with the creative process and our course activities. Where do we see ideas from class readings and discussions at work in your poems? You may address specific strategies you have employed, particular areas of interest, and/ or issues that have presented a challenge. Please include a list of questions you would like to discuss at our meeting.

- **Informal Assignments**

These will include writing exercises and short responses to reading assignments. I will also ask you to bring in poems (outside of our weekly readings) that demonstrate particular aspects of the craft. It is my hope this will encourage you to explore the incredibly diverse range of American poetry, to find poets that you love and will continue to learn from. Additionally, you should expect to do a good deal of writing in class. I will provide prompts geared toward developing attention to craft elements such as rhythm, form, imagery, and perspective. In-class writing will

not be collected, but I will encourage you to share it with the group. The material generated by these exercises may also be developed into finished poems for your portfolio.

Final Portfolio

You will submit **twelve poems** in a Final Portfolio, due at our last class meeting. Although some of these poems will have undergone substantial revision, you need not submit the original version. Your portfolio should include only your best work.

Late Work

If you do not finish a poem in time to submit it for the worksheet, you may hand it in the following week. Poems will not be accepted more than one week late.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. Consequences include failing an assignment, failing the course, or even expulsion.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Because workshops and class discussions are the foundation of this course, regular attendance is critical. More than three absences will compromise your grade. I will take attendance at the beginning of each class; please arrive on time.

Participation: Come to class with questions and insights, having completed all assignments, and be prepared to contribute your perspective to our discussion. In workshop, suggestions should be tactful, thorough, and specific. Verbal participation is only one form, and students may also participate through active listening, commitment to the revision process, and engagement with course concepts in their creative work.

Cell phones: Please do not have your phones out in the classroom, including the moments before class begins. This will allow us to arrive in the space, mentally as well as physically, so that we can bring our focused attention to the work and to each other.

GRADING

Because you will revise your poems over the course of the semester, these will not be graded until the final portfolio. However, I am happy to speak with you about your grade. If at any time you would like to know where you stand, you are welcome to schedule an appointment.

- Participation: 35%
- Final Portfolio: 65%

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodation. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. If you think you might qualify for Disability Services and you have not yet registered, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243.