

The Writers Journal Fall 2013

English Writing 1092

Tu Th 11 to 12:15

Room: G19A CL

Jeff Oaks

Office: 501 E CL Office Hours: Wednesdays 1 to 3 and by appt.

Phone: 412-624-9341

Email: oaks@pitt.edu (This is my preferred method of contact)

Required Books:

A Writer's Diary, Virginia Woolf

A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold

The Cancer Journals, Audre Lorde

Bluets, Maggie Nelson

Narrow Road to the Interior, Kimiko Hanh

a Journal, which I will give you

Recommended/ Further Reading:

What It Is, Lynda Barry

Writing Down the Bones Natalie Goldberg

Leaving a Trace, Alexandra Johnson

Course Description

This class is about the very writerly practices of introspection and articulation. Most of us, and I would guess anybody interested in writing, are introspective to some degree. We ask ourselves questions; we feel our way through difficulties; we talk ourselves into things; and we consult our memory in order to come to new ways of thinking and seeing the world. Generally, we write because something inside us wants to say things, to be heard.

The idea of writing everyday is to become more conscious of that inner voice, which is the voice of your obsessions, interests, silences, dreams, hesitations, weaknesses, strengths, and evasions as a writer (as well as a thinker, a friend, a lover, a spirit, and a citizen). You become more conscious of your own depths, the variety of voices available to you, which is something every writer draws upon in his or her work. If your ability to articulate and organize language is informed by a number of possible ways to compose, frame, and play, that can make a real difference next time you face the blank page. Some of the assignments will push you to work on your language,

some will ask you to tell your stories, some will ask you to try a new process of putting things together. Not all of them may work for you or will work for you right now, but I believe that knowing a number of approaches toward exploration is the best training for a lifetime of writing.

A writer's journal, as opposed to a diary, should involve a more considerable attempt by the writer to interrogate the experience, the language, and especially the writerly self. Central to the work of the class will be your ability to be messy, to trust in your creative process and to allow yourself liberty to say things that might make you feel very vulnerable. The best work I've found over the years, comes from those students who imagine their writing for class is more than just an assignment but is the opportunity for them to think out deeply personal issues and obsessions, and questions. I recommend that way of thinking about the assignments to all of you.

Course Goals:

To develop the habit of writing everyday.

To become conscious of the ways that writing leads to thinking, rather than the other way around.

To begin to articulate and integrate, via writing, your experiences.

To experiment with a number of compositional techniques.

To learn how to develop a larger piece of writing out of smaller ones.

Practical Matters:

Assignments

I expect that all work will be done by the due date. Type and proof-read your work and turn it in on the due date. You will have in-class and take home assignments. Be sure to keep an eye on the syllabus and those due dates, in case I forget to remind you of them in class.

Attendance

Our class meets twice a week. Please be prompt and present in body and mind each time we meet. Expect to be writing something each class. Bring your journal. Expect

to speak up, ask questions, respond to each other's work and ideas, and discuss the assigned readings.

Absence Policy

I don't distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. You are allowed three (3) absences, no questions asked. More than that will begin to affect your grade. Missing six or more classes, for any reason, will result in a failing grade for the course. (This doesn't mean that, if something cataclysmic happens to you, we can't work something out, but please let me know as soon as possible if that is the case.)

Conferences

To provide you with specific commentary on your writing as you move through the course, I will ask you to schedule two conferences with me and to provide me in advance pieces of your work and/or some questions for discussion.

In addition to our scheduled conferences, you are welcome to meet with me at any point in the course to discuss your work, ideas, progress, and any questions or concerns you may have about the course.

Grading

You must finish the journal to receive an A.

You must not miss more than 4 classes, if you'd like to receive an A.

You must write and hand in two assignments (which will be graded) and six one-page descriptions (which will not be graded) during the course of the class.

At the end of class, you must hand in a Final Folder which will consist of your Final Project (see below), and at least 10 more pages, which can come from your one-pagers or the earlier assignments.

Final Project:

In the middle of the term, I will ask you to start thinking about and writing toward a large writing project (12 to 15 pages). This project should be an exploration of some question or technique or interest that you have. The form of it can be as a group of poems, a series of short essays, an essay, or a mixed genre piece. The work we'll read and discuss in class will hopefully give you some ideas to work with.

Course Schedule

Tues, August 27th, Introduction, In-class writing

Thurs, August 29th, In-class writing (One-pager #1 due*)

* One-pagers are typed, single page excerpts from your journals. You will hand in 6 of these to me during the course of the term. They should demonstrate your descriptive ability as a writer.

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Tues, September 3th **BOOK DISCUSSION: A Writer's Diary, Virginia Woolf**

Thurs, September 5th In-class writing (One-pager #2 due)

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Tues, September 10th **BOOK DISCUSSION: Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold**

Thurs, September 12th In-class writing(One-pager # 3 due)

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Tues, September 17th **BOOK DISCUSSION: The Cancer Journals, Audre Lorde**

Thurs, September 19th In-class writing

FIRST ASSIGNMENT DUE SEPTEMBER 19th NO ONE-PAGER DUE

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Tues, September 24th

Thurs, September 26th (One-pager # 4 due) In-class writing

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Tues, October 1st **BOOK DISCUSSION: Narrow Road to the Interior,**

Kimiko Hanh

Thurs, October 3rd (One-pager # 5 due) In-class writing

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Tues, October 8th In-class writing

Thurs, October 10th **BOOK DISCUSSION: Bluets, Maggie Nelson**

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Tues, October 15th(No classes this day because of the fall break disruptions)

Thurs, October 17th In-class writing

SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE OCTOBER 17th

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Tues, October 22nd In-class writing

Thurs, October 24th In-class writing

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Tues, OCTOBER 29th In-class writing

Thurs, October 31st In-class writing

FINAL PROJECT PARAGRAPH DUE TODAY

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Tues, November 5th: Conferences this week. Please make sure you've met with me to talk about your final project.

Thurs, November 7th Conferences this week. Please make sure you've met with me to talk about your final project.

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Tues, November 12th In-class work on your project

Thurs, November 14th In-class work on your project

ROUGH DRFTS OF YOUR FINAL PROJECT DUE Nov. 14th

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Tues, November 19th Small Group Reading Workshop of the first half of your Final Project.

Thurs, November 21st Small Group Reading Workshop of the second half of your Final Project. In-class work on your project

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>NO CLASS November 26th and 28st for Thanksgiving Break

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Tues, December 3rd In-class Writing

Thurs, December 5th Read-around and Journal Check

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Tues, December 10th **DUE: Final Folder** (see note above for details)

University Policies

Academic Integrity:

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Disabilities:

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and the Disability Resources and Services no later than the 2nd week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Office is located in 216 William Pitt Union.

G-Grade Policy

I don't give out G grades except in the most dire circumstances where a student must leave the university for medical reasons but expects to return within six months to complete any missing work.

ASSIGNMENTS

ONE PAGERS:

One-pagers are single page descriptions of a physical object or space that is important to you for some reason. They should demonstrate your descriptive ability as a writer, since a large part of your journal practice should be descriptive writing. I strongly suggest you write the description out in your journal first and then type it up, revising where necessary for clarity. You will hand in 5 of these to me during the course of the term. They will be graded satisfactory (check), unsatisfactory (check minus) or excellent (check plus).

Assignment #1

The Writer's Journal

Due September 19th

For your first assignment, I would like you to write about Silence. I'd like you to write about a moment in which you were silent or silenced, to describe it at some length, then to speculate about what things led up to it or allowed to happen, and perhaps what the long term effects of that silence have been. This does not have to be a violent silencing, remember, although it could be; there are also silencings from awe, from exhaustion, from happiness, from ignorance. Feel free to explore whichever one of those interests you. 3-5 pages.

As a journal assignment that's ongoing, I'd encourage you to freewrite about silences you see going on around you, silences you remember, silences in the culture, and to let yourself really range around in your imagination and memory before you decide which silence you want to write about. Use your journal as a space for potential subjects to be tested out, in other words.

ASSIGNMENT #2

Due October 17th

Following the examples of *Narrow Road to the Interior* and *Bluets*, I'd like you to take on either a time of personal change or an obsession and write about it using an associative structure of some kind—one that slides between the categories of prose and poetry, that moves in associative rather than chronological or logical ways.

Length: 5 to 7 pages, double-spaced.

The Writer's Journal Final Project Paragraph

Due October 31st

Please type up a short paragraph about your final project. Here are the major points to cover:

What is your project going to be about? What is the major question that you're going to write toward, to work on? What is the time frame for this piece—is it about something in the past? The present? Some combination of the two? How, generally, will it be structured?

Final Project: Final Draft Due December 10th

In about the middle of the term, I will ask you to start thinking about and writing toward a large writing project (12 to 15 pages). This project should be an exploration of some question or technique or interest that you have. The form of it can be as a group of poems, a short story, a series of short shorts, an essay, or a mixed genre piece. The work we'll read and discuss in class will hopefully give you some ideas to work with.