

English 214

Ethel Morgan Smith, ENGL 214, Fall 2003, Creative Writing: Nonfiction

Fall 2003

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

Department of English

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Creative Writing-Nonfiction-English 214

Good writers probe themselves and their worlds; good writers laugh and cry; good writers observe; good writers don't just talk about writing, they write. Good writing demands your whole self—writing freely, without limits from your unique connections to your world.

Jewel Parker Rhodes, Free Within Ourselves

The goals of this course are for students to become more sensitive and discriminating readers, therefore, better writers. You will also sharpen skills required to communicate your ideas by learning to clearly state your points, developing them in an organized and creative manner. You will also acquire the basic terminology for writing and reading. As a writer you have the opportunity to explore what it means to be human, to conjure through words, those passions, those spirits, which are important to you. And finally, you will learn to use writing (your own and that of others) as a tool for experiencing the world.

This course will explore the art and craft of nonfiction by studying the basic forms— **Personal Experience, The Biographical Sketch, Personal Opinion, Reflection, A Sense of Place, A Slice of History**. This will aid you in understanding nonfiction techniques, which will improve both your writing and reading. Creative writing can offer you an opportunity different from other aspects of your curriculum. But that does not mean it is to be taken casually or lightly. Writing well is very difficult. It demands your full attention. Writing is a commitment. Writing is serious work! I don't believe in the **muse, writer's block**, or other such myths.

REQUIREMENTS

Literary Nonfiction (fourth genre) by Stephen Minot

The professor will also provide handouts from time to time. COURSE PRODECURES

1. Reading. There are no good writers who aren't good readers. You'll learn to read as writers this semester, which means you'll be looking at stories for how they are written, not just what just the story and its meaning. And you will read a great deal in this class! I'll assign stories each week, but you'll also be reading on your own and keeping a log of stories read, as well as a collection of story analyses.

2. Exercising. To write well you have to get in writing shape. Reading is probably the best way of doing that. Writing exercises can also go a long way toward increasing your writing effectiveness. We'll begin this semester with several weeks of in-class exercises.

3. Take-Home Exercises. These exercises will be assigned during class. If you miss a class at which a take-home exercise is assigned, you should call or email a classmate for the assignment. **Please do not call me about an assignment you've missed. I am not your secretary!** All assignments should be typed and handed in on time. No late assignments will be collected. **Writing is rewriting!**

4. Quizzes. Whenever a story is assigned, you will be quizzed on it. Quizzes are designed to give credit to students who do the reading and to encourage everyone to participate in class discussions. There will be no make-up quizzes. **Please do not ask.**

5. Grades.

Attendance/Class Participation 20%

Take-Home Exercises 30%

Quizzes 30%

Short Essays 20%

6. Visiting Writers/Literary Events: Note: This syllabus, like writing, is fluid. If a writer is in town and if he/she can come to our class, we'll gladly take advantage of that opportunity. Another example would be if a noted writer dies or wins a major prize. We'll spend some time with that author's work.

The Literary Events are not only, inspiring and entertaining, but they offer students an opportunity to see writers work with their work. I strongly encourage students to attend all readings, particularly the visiting

writers' series, and student readings sponsored by the English Club. I hope some of you will read from your own work. Please submit your work to Calliope for publication consideration.. And of course all events are free with refreshments. This is what we have so far for literary events:

Sept 18th- Thur Reading by Mike Tidwell

Sept 19th- Fri Deadline for Students to submit entry for Sturm Workshop

Oct 13th-Wed Reading by Nancy Zafris-Sturm Writer in Residence

Nov 5th-Wed Reading by Sara Pritchard

I will also be making announcements as during the semester about these and other events. If you know of such events, please announce to the class as well.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of

Aug 19th Introduction. Review Syllabus. Discussion

Aug 25th Lecture-Personal Experience-"Snakebit" by Connie Wieneke (assigned)

Sept 1st **Labor Day**

Sept 2nd "The Hip Plumber" by James D. Houston and "The Day After That" by Tzivia Gover (assigned)

Sept 9th Lecture-The Biological Sketch. In-class Exercises

Sept 16th Lecture-Personal Opinion-"The Coldness of E-Mail" by Destiny Ward and

"Strong Stories" by Joseph Bruchac

Sept 26th **Rosh Hashanah (Day of Special Concern)**

Oct 3rd Midterm Examination Week

Oct 6th **Yom Kippur (Day of Special Concern)**

Oct 7th Lecture- Reflections, A Sense of Place, and A Glimpse of History- (handouts from the professor)

Oct 14th Workshop

Oct 21st Workshop

Oct 28th Workshop

Nov 4th Workshop

Nov 5th **Election Day**

Nov 11th Workshop

Nov 23rd **Thanksgiving Recess**

Dec 5th Last Day to Withdraw

Dec 6th Last Day of Class

Dec 9th Final Examination Week-Portfolios Due

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY IS COMMITTED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE. THE INSTRUCTOR OF THIS COURSE, WITH WVU'S COMMITMENT, EXPECTS TO MAINTAIN A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT BASED UPON OPEN COMMUNICATION AND MUTUAL RESPECT. ANY SUGGESTIONS AS HOW TO FURTHER SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT WILL BE APPRECIATED.