

ENGLISH 314/001

Professor Mark Brazaitis

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Office Hours: Tuesday (2:30-4), Thursday (2:30-4) and by appointment

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Class Hours: TTh 1:00-2:15

Class Location: 215 Hodges

Objective: In this class, you will learn how to become a better writer of creative nonfiction. To become a better writer of creative nonfiction, you must dedicate yourself to both writing and reading creative nonfiction, and this class will require you to do both.

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will read two memoirs and one work of investigative journalism. In addition, you will be required to complete six short writing exercises and two long writing assignments. Finally, you will read and comment on the work of your classmates.

Quizzes: Whenever reading is assigned, you will be quizzed on it. This brief, objective quiz is designed to give credit to students who do the reading and to encourage everyone to participate in class discussion about the works we read. Although there will be no make-up quizzes, your worst quiz score, including a quiz you might have missed, will be eliminated. If you know in advance that you will miss a quiz, you may submit (as an email attachment) a one-page summary of the day's reading *before* the class in which it will be discussed.

Take-Home Exercises: Take-home exercises are given below. They should be between 3/4 of a page and three pages. You should type all take-home exercises because you will be handing them in. For full credit, please hand in the take-home exercises on time. Late assignments will be accepted (with a 10-point penalty) only during the week after they are due. After this, they will receive a zero. If you are going to miss class, have a classmate deliver your take-home exercise to me or send it to me as an email attachment before class. Two or more of your take-home assignments will be discussed in a workshop setting.

Long Writing Assignments: Your two long writing assignments should be between four and 15 pages (double spaced). You may re-write your first long writing assignment for a maximum of four extra points.

Texts: *The Glass Castle* (Jeannette Walls), *Black Boy* (Richard Wright), and *Field Notes from a Catastrophe* (Elizabeth Kolbert).

Grades: Grades in this class will be based on the following: attendance/class participation (20 percent), quizzes (20 percent), written feedback given to fellow students on their long assignments (10 percent); take-home exercises (30 percent), longer writing assignments (20 percent). Grading Key: 100=A+; 94-99=A; 90-93=A-; 85-89=B+; 83-84=B; 80-82=B-; 75-79=C+; 73-74=C; 70-72=C-; 65-69=D+; 63-64=D; 60-62=D-; 59 and below=F.

Attendance: Attendance will be graded as follows: 0-2 absences (A); 3-4 absences (B); 5-7 absences (C); 8 or more absences (F). If you miss 8 or more classes, you will fail the course.

Extra credit: You may attend and write a one-page review of any two of the “special events” listed below. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. (Please type your review.) Each of the extra credit assignments counts for four extra points on a take-home assignment. You are encouraged to attend all the events.

Workshop method: Do not address the writer by name. Refer to the writer as “the writer” or “the author.” When called on, be prepared to offer one positive comment (what you thought was effective about the work) and one suggestion (what could be improved in the work and how). Do your best not to repeat the comments of your classmates.

Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, August 19 Get acquainted

Thursday, August 21 Read: pages 1-41 of *The Glass Castle*.

Tuesday, August 26 Read: pages 42-80 of *The Glass Castle*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Childhood. Write something compelling, moving, entertaining, and/or engaging about an experience you had in childhood.

Thursday, August 28 Read: pages 81-125 of *The Glass Castle*. Workshop.

Tuesday, September 2 Read: pages 129-170 of *The Glass Castle*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: School. Write something compelling, moving, entertaining, and/or engaging about an experience you had in elementary school, junior high, or high school. Workshop

Thursday, September 4 Read: pages 171-213 of *The Glass Castle*. Workshop.

Special Event: Saturday, September 6th at 1 p.m. at the Barnes and Noble in Granville, a reading of poetry and prose with Steve Oberlechner, Mary Ann Samyn, and Emily Mitchell.

Tuesday, September 9 Read: pages 214-259 of *The Glass Castle*. **Due**: Take-home exercise. Lucky and Unlucky. Write something compelling, moving, entertaining, and/or engaging about luck (or unluckiness) you've experienced or witnessed. Workshop

Thursday, September 11: Read: pages 260-the end of *The Glass Castle*. Workshop

Special Event: Monday, September 15th at 7:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, a poetry reading by James Harms.

Tuesday, September 16 Read: chapters 1, 2, and 3 of *Black Boy*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Punishment. Write something compelling, moving, entertaining, and/or engaging about an experience you've had with punishment, justice, and/or crime. Workshop

Thursday, September 18 Read: chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of *Black Boy*. Workshop

Special Event: Monday, September 22nd at 7:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, a reading by novelist Chuck Kinder.

Tuesday, September 23 Read: chapters 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 of *Black Boy*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Alone. Write something compelling, moving, entertaining, and/or engaging about an experience in which you were (or felt) alone. Workshop

Thursday, September 25 Read: chapters 15, 16, and 17 of *Black Boy*. Workshop

Tuesday, September 30 Read: chapter 18 to the end of *Black Boy*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Love. Write something compelling, moving, entertaining, and/or engaging about your first—or most memorable—experience with love. Workshop

Thursday, October 2 Writing Day – No class —enjoy

Tuesday, October 7 Workshop

Thursday, October 9 Workshop.

Tuesday, October 14 Workshop

Special Event: Tuesday, October 14th at 7:30 p.m. at the Blue Moose Café, a Reading to Rock and Rhyme the Vote, with WVU writers Jim Harms, Ethel Morgan Smith, Sandy Baldwin, and Mark Brazaitis.

Thursday, October 16 Workshop

Special Event: Monday, October 20th at 7:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, a reading by poet Bill Olsen.

Tuesday, October 21 Workshop

Thursday, October 23 Workshop

Tuesday, October 28 Read: Chapters 1 and 2 of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*.

Thursday, October 30 Read: Chapters 3, 6 and 7 of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*.

Tuesday, November 4 Election Day – no class – Vote!

Thursday, November 6 Workshop

Tuesday, November 11 Workshop

Thursday, November 13 Workshop

Special Event: Monday, November 17 at 7:30 p.m. in the Gold Ballroom of the Mountainlair, a reading by novelist Elizabeth Graver.

Tuesday, November 18 Workshop

Thursday, November 20 Workshop

Thanksgiving Week – Enjoy!

Tuesday, December 2 Workshop

Thursday, December 4 Workshop

Core Values/Social Justice at West Virginia University

The following core values establish the foundation for Social Justice at West Virginia University.

Every person has intrinsic worth and dignity;

Respect for the law is fundamental;

Freedom from fear is universal;

A climate of opportunity, mutual respect, and understanding engenders a feeling that the future should be shared by all community members;

There is an absence of discrimination and harassment based on age, color, disability, ethnic origin, marital status, pregnancy, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status; and

The rich diversity of people, their cultures, and the bonds that tie people together are appreciated and celebrated.