ENGLISH 92: READING AND WRITING POETRY
Spring 2018, Tu/Th 1:30-3:20PM

Instructor: Solmaz Sharif
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Office Hours: Tu 12:15PM-1:15PM/ Th 11-1PM
Margaret Jacks Rm 210

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

-William Carlos Williams

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the reading and writing of poetry with an emphasis on contemporary poetic forms. We will move from the basics of poetic craft—the line, the stanza, fixed and open form—into contemporary poetry collections. The aim is to find and sharpen the craft techniques necessary for each of us to write our most urgent poems. This is not a survey course, so it is not exhaustive in its scope of literary history. It focuses instead on a kind of reading: reading as a writer. We will spend most Tuesdays discussing poems by others and reading our own emulations of those poems. Most Thursdays will be devoted to workshopping your own poems. You will bring 3-4 poems in for workshop, depending on the class size. The quarter will culminate in the distribution of chapbooks. Questions that will be asked are: what makes a poem a poem? What is the poet’s role? What is the poet’s responsibility?

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Books— Lunch Poems by Frank O’Hara
Please by Jericho Brown
Canibal by Safiya Sinclair
The Autobiography of Red by Anne Carson
Whereas by Layli Long Soldier

Journal/notebook

Folder

Copies—You will have to bring in 10-15 copies of your poems for workshop—please budget accordingly.

GRADING

Participation 30%
Writing and poems 25%
Lead a discussion 20%
Chapbook and revision processing letter  20%
Attend readings  5%

**Participation (30%)**—Perhaps more than any other course, the success of this course relies on your participation. You are expected, out of respect to your peers’ work as writers and your own work as writers, to attend each workshop fully prepared. Full preparation means having completed all the reading to date, being ready to pose and answer questions on these readings, having prepared comments on your peers’ poems, making a good faith effort to prepare your own poem for workshop, and being willing to share your insights with the class. I will be happy to discuss your participation grade as it stands at week 5, if you wish, in office hours.

**Writing exercises and poems (25%)**—This class is devoted to the creation of new work. At a minimum you will be writing an emulation of each of the poets we read, and four or so new poems for workshop. All of this work must be written *this quarter*. This will mean writing two poems a week at times. There will also be time in each class devoted to writing based on in-class prompts, as well as prompts based on class discussion as they arise. Please see late work policy below.

**Lead a discussion (15%)**—In groups of two or three, each of you will lead one discussion based on our readings according to the schedule set in class. Leading the discussion does not mean presenting a lecture. It does require, however, the following: 1) informing the class the session *before* you present what poems you will be focusing on; 2) 1-2 minutes introducing the poet(s) you will be discussing with relevant biographical details; 3) 1-2 minute a fly-over view of the poems discussed, including why you picked them and what concern they share; 4) questions related to craft to get class discussion going; 5) at least in one supplementary quote from one of the poets (e.g. from interviews, essays). You must present these as a team with a coherent arc between each group member.

**Chapbooks and processing letter (20%)**— At the end of the quarter, you will make copies of a bound chapbook consisting of your revised poems for your classmates. More simply: you will put your work in the world. The chapbook must include revisions of all poems brought in to class. You will also hand in a processing letter to me discussing your revisions. The letter must have 1) a separate brief (100-200 word) description of how you revised *each* poem, including specific comments from your peers and myself that you took into consideration; 2) a brief (100-200 word) synopsis of how this revision process and discussion in workshop (including at least 3 poems/poets discussed) has impacted your approach as a poet.

**Attending readings (10%)**—The department requires attending at least three department readings. You can find the schedule here: [http://creativewriting.stanford.edu](http://creativewriting.stanford.edu) and [http://events.stanford.edu](http://events.stanford.edu). At the end of the quarter, you will submit a brief write-up of the events you attended.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

You are allowed two AND ONLY TWO absences. This includes absences due to unforeseen circumstances. To best accommodate long-term illnesses or medical situations, I will be happy to work with you in coordination with a medical professional. Any additional absence will result in your final grade dropping a whole letter grade (A- will become B-, etc.). Leaving early or arriving more than 10 minutes late will count as an absence. It is your responsibility to contact a colleague to follow-up on missed work.
LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments will not receive a grade higher than a C. This includes assignments that were completed but not printed or copied when required. I will not accept any late assignments by email. They must be printed out and placed in my box.

FORMATTING

All poems must include your name, date, assignment (e.g. Jericho Brown Emulation; Workshop Poem #3, etc), course number, and my name. All poems must be titled. In this class, we will not be playing with typeface—12 point font and black ink, please.

CANVAS

Once the roster is finalized, I will be inviting you to register for Canvas. I will post assignments, announcements, etc. there. More on this as class develops.

OFFICE HOURS/CONFERENCES

Office hours is a chance to get in-depth feedback on your work and your revisions, to ask about the readings, to ask about other possible readings, to discuss any trepidations or reservations you might have, and on and on. I strongly suggest coming in to office hours sometime in the first four weeks. I would be thrilled to see you.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you have any questions, please see me in office hours before you email me. I check and respond to email only once a day. I suggest, if you are comfortable, exchanging email addresses with a couple of people in this class. Many lasting poetic friendships have begun in workshops—you might even send each other work for years to come.

TRUST

All of these requirements—participating in conversation, working together to lead a discussion, not disrupting the class by being late, etc.—are designed to foster an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. It’s not easy to write poems. It’s even harder to share them out loud. Harder, still, to share them for criticism. Know that you are all sharing this risk. So, the final thing: please do not share poems classmates have written for workshop with people outside this classroom.

HONOR CODE

The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive
unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code;
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code;
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL:http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oa e).