ENGL 5/4210
Advanced Writing Workshop: Creative Nonfiction
Instructor’s name: Emily Hipchen
Office Location: TLC 2246
Office hours: T 9-1 and by appointment
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Please friend me on Facebook to facilitate communication!
NOTE: Materials for this class contain adult language and discuss adult situations.

Required Texts (buy):
Aldrich, Marcia. *Companion to an Untold Story*. 978-0820343372
Biss, Eula. *Notes from No Man’s Land*. 978-1555975180
Bragg, Rick. *The Prince of Frogtown*. 978-1400032686
Didion, Joan. *Blue Nights*. 978-0307387387
Laymon, Kiese. *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America*. 978-1932841770
Sedaris, David. *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*. 978-0316010795

I will be posting other readings to your Texts folder in Dropbox. These will include:

Allison, Dorothy. From *Trash* and *One or Two Things I Know*
Capote, Truman. From *In Cold Blood* and “Mr. Jones”
Didion, Joan. “On Going Home”
Dillard, Annie. From *An American Childhood*
Fisher, Marc. “The Master”
Gates, Henry Louis. From *Colored People: A Memoir*
Haley, Alex. From *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*
hooks, bell. From *Bone Black*
Gordaneer, Alisa. “After Birth”
Lepore, Jill. From *The Story of America*
Rodriguez, Richard. From *Hunger of Memory*
Rock, Chris. “Making Distinctions”
Sacks, Oliver. From *The Mind’s Eye* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*
Slater, Lauren. From *Opening Skinner’s Box* and *Lying*
Skloot, Rebecca. From *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*
Stuart, Andrea. From *Sugar in the Blood*
Thompson, Hunter. From *Fear and Loathing*
Turkel, Studs. From *Working*
Wallace, David Foster. “David Foster Wallace at the Fair”

On reading: If you’re all Kanye West about reading, this isn’t the class for you. Just saying.
Course Description: I’ve designed this course to help you write and place short creative nonfiction. To that end, you will read and analyze a wide range of published essays, keep a journal, workshop your writing, revise your writing, and construct a portfolio. You will create writing support networks that will ideally help you write better and place your work after you’re done in the classroom. You will familiarize yourself with creative writing journals that take CNF, and analyze which of these is most likely to publish your work: in fact, to make an A in this course you must submit a piece to a journal of your choice. This course will provide you with both seed materials for future essays and with one final work for submission now.

Course Goals as Set by the Department:

- Students will achieve enhanced fluency in writing within a particular genre and become conversant with issues of technique in that discipline
- Students will understand the defining characteristics of the specific genre studied.
- Students will learn how to submit their writing to literary journals and magazines.
- Students will learn to offer and receive constructive criticism in a public forum.
- Students will demonstrate in both oral and written work a discipline-specific critical facility through convincing and well-supported analysis of related material.

Course Policies and Structure

Absences: “Attendance” is defined as physically and mentally present, aware, and prepared. If you come to class obviously not prepared to attend, I may ask you leave and will mark you absent. Attendance is part of your daily grade. In this class, an absence is an absence, regardless of your reasons for being gone. I don’t mark absences excused or unexcused.

- On your third absence for any reason, and again on all subsequent absences, you will lose five points from your final grade for this course in addition to the points you lose from your daily grade simply by missing class.
- On your sixth absence for any reason, you will automatically fail the course. It’s best if you begin missing too many classes to go to the registrar and withdraw, and take the course again when you can make it to class.
- Missing a workshop for whatever reason constitutes two absences.
- Missing a writing group meeting for whatever reason constitutes an absence for this class.
- Each tardy (more than five minutes but fewer than 40 minutes after the scheduled start of class) equals ½ absence; coming to class after 40 minutes has passed constitutes an absence. Two tardies are one absence. I’ll periodically post my current count of tardies and absences on CourseDen, but you can always email and ask.

Texting and other Disturbances: Texting, Facebooking, surfing, IMing, using the cell phone, or any other class disturbances constitute a violation of the definition of attendance above. Each time you distract yourself in class, expect to be called out and thereafter marked absent; you can accrue more than one absence per day this way. All electronic devices should be turned off for the duration of class. Don’t bring your computer to class; it’s not necessary or useful.

Make-up work and late work: No assignment of any sort may be made up.
Class format: Discussion, workshop, writing group/presentations. In the next week, we’ll try our first group configurations. You’ll have a chance to switch if it’s not working.

Documentation and Plagiarism: The Department of English and Philosophy statement on plagiarism is as follows: “The Department of English and Philosophy defines plagiarism as taking personal credit for the words and ideas of others as they are presented in electronic, print, and verbal sources. The Department expects that students will accurately credit sources in all assignments. An equally dishonest practice is fabricating sources or facts; it is another form of misrepresenting the truth. Plagiarism is grounds for failing the course.” For this course in particular, all out of class writing which references other material must have MLA style in-text citations and a complete, correct Works Cited page formatted to current MLA style conventions. I reserve the right to ask you to present the materials from which you cite, and to refuse to read and grade essays for which you cannot produce these materials. Should any student violate the provision of the University of West Georgia’s policy on academic integrity as the Student Handbook describes it (you can get this information at http://www.westga.edu/handbook/ or http://www.westga.edu/~engdept/Plagiarism/index.html as well), I will fail the plagiarized work and may give that student whatever grade for the course I deem appropriate, including an “F,” without consideration for the student’s other work in the course. Any academic dishonesty will be treated in accordance with the policy laid out in the Student Handbook: it is your responsibility to understand and avoid violating these policies.

Assignments and Grades

Class participation: based on attendance and tardiness, preparation, willingness to talk, general attitude about the class and the work.

The Shoebox journal: This is a collection of materials you’ve found and kept that will help you construct your essays for this course. Might include receipts, torn out pages of magazines, old band-aids, notes from interviews, reports from DNA labs, newspaper clippings, bundles of hair, pictures of feet, everything and anything. It’s yours. You’ll show it to me at midterm and at the end of the semester and I’ll evaluate it, based on mass and complexity. It never will leave your possession. These things will serve as starting points for your writing—as ways of prodding memory into story.

Writing journal: You will be required every two weeks to turn in a draft creative nonfiction. No draft is formal or has any required length. It’s a draft. I want them regularly only to get you in the habit of writing regularly. I may also periodically ask you to write on specific prompts in class or for homework. These drafts are graded either with a check plus (150 points), a check (100 points), or a check minus (50 points). I save check plusses for journals that blow me away, so they’re very rare; checks are common and give you the full points for the assignment. Check minuses mean that I think you might have tried harder and done better.

Journal search (spreadsheet): You will be reading journals during the semester to discover which are the best fits for your work. These should be primarily paper journals. I’ll be giving you an assignment sheet on this in the third week of the course.

Response Work: Almost immediately, we will be workshopping your own writing by responding as individuals to at most three pieces presented by each writing group, which
will be responsible for focusing the discussion on the most salient points of assistance. See attached handout for the required structure of your responses. Responses are graded either with a check plus (150 points), a check (100 points), or a check minus (50 points). I save check plusses for those letters that blow me away, so they’re very rare; checks are common and give you the full points for the assignment. Check minuses mean that I think you might have tried harder and done better.

**Writing Groups:** The best way to help yourself write well and to continue writing outside the classroom is to have a writing group that meets in person to talk about writing.

Your writing group has **two tasks** outside of providing moral and intellectual support for each member:

1. **Your writing group will be assigned one or two of the required texts for this class (depending on how many groups we have). You will read around in them, then choose, as a group, what parts of the text you would like for us to discuss in class.** You must assign at least three essays or chapters—a minimum of 100 pages—of each text for us to read. See the schedule below for when your selections are due. 

   **NOTE:** You are not responsible for the discussion of the text, only for the reading assignment.

2. **Your writing group will preview the group’s pieces for workshop, and decide on two or at most three focus points for each piece for the workshop.** “Focus points” are those places the group feels are most in need of general discussion, feedback, ideas, or assistance of any kind. As with response letters, focus points should not concentrate on editing problems, but on larger concerns (material, structural, thematic, syntactic, etc.). These will guide, but not limit, the general discussion in the workshop for that piece.

Writing groups MAY meet outside class, but WILL meet during class time at least four times this semester. Those days are noted in your schedule. **Missing a writing group date constitutes an absence in class,** so make sure the regular time fits your schedule.

You may move groups at three pre-arranged points in the semester in order to get a better fit (sometimes placements work out great, sometimes not).

**Midterm Portfolio: Consists of**

- Two heavily revised journals
- With an early draft for each;
- Your Shoebox Journal;
- Essays from six print journals or magazines in which you’ve found essays that interest you;
- 300 words each (total, 900 words) analysis of three of these essays, describing what they teach you (to avoid or to copy) about writing CNF;
- At least 1500 words addressing the following questions (at least) about your writing/life: Which writing skills are getting better for you (provide examples from your writing)? Which need more work (provide examples from your writing)? What was the most helpful moment in your writing group—tell the story? If nothing helpful has happened, describe what needs to change. What has been the most challenging aspect of writing CNF for you? What are some of the obstacles in your life to pursuing a writing
Final Portfolio: Consists of

- ESSAYS:
  - one completed, polished essay for submission to a journal of your choice;
  - one essay (can be the same one) to be submitted to the Eclectic;
  - and at least three essays in draft;
    Though you might have begun your completed essay in another semester, it must have been workshopped in this class, and have been revised heavily this semester. It must be formatted for submission to the journal of your choice. Your drafts must have been begun during this semester. They may or may not have been workshopped by the class. At least one of the pieces in your portfolio must have been workshopped in class.
  - at least one early version of each draft (total of four or five drafts) and your submission that shows you made significant revisions;
  - at least one set of response letters about one piece you workshopped in class with a 500 word summary of the advice in these letters; and
  - a statement of analysis, of at least ten pages or roughly 3,000 words. It will describe your aesthetics (what you believe constitutes good writing in the genre of creative nonfiction); will discuss your position on the ethical quandaries your writing presented for you; will analyze how well you’ve been able to meet your own standards of good writing (what did you do well, what do you need to work on); will discuss how you navigated your ethical quandaries. Lastly, your statement will project into your writing future: will you, how will you, find a way to continue writing in this genre? What sort of strategies do you intend to use if you do want to continue to write CNF; if not, why not? What discourages/d you? Try to make your statement describe as well as demonstrate your ideals: it should be CNF, too, and not just a list of answers to my questions.

Exam: Your portfolio will be due at your final exam, and a ten-twelve minute, public reading from your portfolio will constitute your final. **Your final is scheduled Apr. 21, 11-1:30.**

Grades:

Work used for other courses will not count in this one. Generally speaking I offer no extra credit.

Graduate students will meet with me in the first week of courses to design assignments that assist their programs.

I use a standard, 10-point grading scale. I do not curve grades or drop low scores.

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Group and Response Work</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submission Sent</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</table>
Journal search and Shoebox journal  5%
Writing journal  10%
Midterm Portfolio  25%
Final Portfolio  30%

**Schedule of Events**

I have found that a real day-to-day schedule usually gets violated on the second day somehow; below, therefore, is only the rough order of things, which will probably change with notice. Frankly I’m much more interested in letting us have the flexibility of spending more—or less—time where we need to than being rigid and not giving you what you need in terms of discussion and instruction. Coming to class will ensure that you know when each assignment is due. **You are responsible for having the appropriate material read on the day it is due, regardless of whether or not you attended class on the day it was assigned.** You should have all the texts for each day prepared for discussion though we may or may not discuss all of them on that particular day.

NOTE: All of this is **highly** subject to change at my discretion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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| 1/6  | Literary Journalism and Memoir: Briefly Discussed  
| 1/8  | Discuss conduct and duties of writing groups. Assignment to writing group and book assignments given. Discuss workshops. If we have time, we’ll finish talking about yesterday’s assignment. |
| 1/13 | Writing groups meet.  
*Journal 1 due. NOTE: all journals are to be printed and brought to class.* |
| 1/20 | NO CLASS (MLK Day) |
| 1/22 | Writing groups meet.  
*Journal 2 due* |
| 1/27 | Workshop 1  
Assignment for Bragg due. |
| 1/29 | Have read: Bragg assignment.  
Also: Allison, from *Trash* and *One*; Turkel, From *Working*  
*Sign up for Shoebox Journal Appointments (for the Midterm Portfolio)* |
| 2/3  | Workshop 2  
Assignment for Sedaris due. |
| 2/5  | Have Sedaris assignment read.  
Also: Rock, “Making”; and Thompson, From *Fear*.  
*Journal 3 due* |
| 2/10 | Workshop 3  
Assignment for Laymon due. |
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>2/12</td>
<td>Have Laymon assignment read.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Midterm Portfolio Due</strong></td>
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<td>2/17</td>
<td>Workshop 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assignment for Biss due.</td>
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<td>2/19</td>
<td>Writing groups meet.</td>
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<td><strong>Journal 4 due</strong></td>
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<td>2/24</td>
<td>Workshop 5</td>
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<td>2/26</td>
<td>Have Biss assignment read.</td>
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<td>Also: Rodriguez, <em>From Hunger</em>; Wallace, “Fair”; and Didion, “Home”</td>
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<td>3/3</td>
<td>Workshop 6</td>
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<td>Assignment from Didion due.</td>
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<td>3/5</td>
<td>Have read assignment from Didion.</td>
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<td>Also: Capote, “Mr. Jones”; Fisher, “Master”; and Tisdale, “Uncommon”</td>
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<td>3/10</td>
<td>Workshop 7</td>
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<td>Assignment from Aldrich due.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>Have read assignment from Aldrich.</td>
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<td>Also: Slater, <em>From Lying</em>; Dillard, <em>From Childhood</em>; Gates, <em>From Colored</em>; Sacks, <em>From The Mind’s Eye</em></td>
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<td>3/15-3/22</td>
<td>NO CLASS (Spring Break)</td>
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<td>3/24</td>
<td>Writing groups meet.</td>
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<td><strong>Journal 6 due</strong></td>
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<td>3/26</td>
<td>NO CLASS (Out of Town)</td>
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<td>3/31</td>
<td>NO CLASS (Honors Convocation)</td>
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<td>4/2</td>
<td>Have read: Stuart, <em>From Sugar</em>; Skloot, <em>From Immortal</em>; Slater, <em>Opening</em>; Sacks, <em>From Hat</em></td>
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<td>4/7</td>
<td>Workshop 8</td>
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<td>4/9</td>
<td>Writing groups meet.</td>
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<td><strong>Journal 7 due</strong></td>
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<td>4/14</td>
<td>Workshop 9</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Sign up for Shoebox Journal Appointment (for Portfolio)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Day of Class</td>
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Exam Monday, Apr. 21, 11-1:30: Portfolio, including *eclectic* submission and professional journal submission, and journal search (spreadsheet) due.