

Alexandra Sladky  
alexandra.sladky001@umb.edu  
Office: Wheatley 06-044  
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-10:30 AM

**Introduction to Creative Writing**  
**English 210, Section 6**  
**McCormack 02-0207**  
**Tuesday/Thursday 8:00 AM- 9:15 AM**

**Required Texts**

Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*

Materials distributed in class or online, and/or by email

A notebook dedicated specifically to this class for in-class writing and for recording your thoughts outside of class

**Important Websites**

Class Wiki: <http://engl210-sladky.wikispaces.umb.edu/>

**Objectives**

Alice Munro says, “Real things are the starter dough by which the writer makes the bread.” To be a writer means a great deal of things. To be a writer might mean that you are also a scientist or a mathematician or an economist or a musician or a teacher or a dancer or a chemist. What it means ultimately is that you have something to say – something to say about the way that you see the world that is different from the way that others see it – different, but also the same. Writing is a way to address truth.

The purpose of this class is to explore the writing process. We will work to articulate our unique observations of the world and carefully examine what we, as writers, care about. We will also explore what our characters care about and experiment with how to express these understandings in our stories and poems. We will refine and polish our language until it is vivid and fresh.

The class will focus on the fundamentals of writing poetry and fiction, with particular emphasis on the different aspects of craft and the different stages of the writing process – from first draft to revision. While writing, we will also be reading – reading like writers. We will learn a vocabulary with which we will respond critically and supportively to each other’s writing. We will answer questions, such as: What makes you love your favorite poem or story? How does dialogue work and how can you make it effective? What creates a powerful image? How can you create a unique voice or a three-dimensional character?

**Methods**

In order to explore the writing process, discover what works and what doesn't, we will write and read, we will discuss our own work as well as published writing, we will workshop our writing to give and receive constructive feedback, and we will prepare portfolios of our work over the semester to document our growth as writers. This class will have weekly reading and creative writing assignments, both in class and outside of class.

We will read and discuss published works, and at the same time, we will read and discuss our own work, building a vocabulary with which to offer feedback towards revision. We will learn to look at a piece of writing under a microscope to see each and every intricate part to make sure that the words we use are the best possible to articulate our ideas.

In the same way that you practice a musical instrument daily, or go running every day to build muscle, it is important to write a little bit every day. While there will be writing exercises in class to stretch your imagination, you must also keep a daily journal for writing poems, stories, and thoughts. This will be turned in as part of your portfolio at the end of the semester.

An important part of writing is reworking and revising your work. Writing is re-writing; writing is re-vision. Writing is looking at something and then looking at it again. You will be required to take one poem and one story through two radical revisions.

In the words of Mary Lyon, "If you jump in, you may ride very fast." It is my hope that you jump in (!) and that you explore and experiment with language, take risks with your ideas, and then take some time to refine your work. You will not be graded on your talent, but rather on your growth and willingness to experiment with and explore the writing assignments and your capabilities as a writer.

### **Course Requirements and Evaluation**

Please note that you will not be graded on "talent." Rather, your grade will be a reflection of your growth and development as a writer, along with your adherence to the course requirements in this syllabus. To determine your grade, I will weigh your class participation with the timely completion of your written assignments and response papers, your response and attentiveness to your peers' work and the final portfolio.

#### **Grading Breakdown**

35% Class Participation

25% Response papers

25% Portfolio

15% Workshop

#### **Class Participation (35%)**

##### Attendance and Participation

This class is an opportunity to create a writing community – which is an invaluable part of this class and an important experience for you whether you are a beginning writer or an experienced one. Participation includes attendance, quizzes, writing in your journal, and your attendance at the mid-term conferences. Simply put, if you are not in class, you will miss out on the opportunity to participate in discussion with other writers, which is an important part of forming a writing community and building on your own ideas about the writing process. One of our goals is to create a safe place where we can share our sometimes personal writing and where we don't have to worry so much about appearing vulnerable. Writing is a very brave thing to do. I encourage you all to take risks. If you come to class, do the reading, complete the writing assignments, both in and out of class, and engage actively in discussion, you will pass this class.

**More than two absences will affect your grade. If you miss more than *four* classes, you will be at risk of failing this class! If you are 15 minutes late twice, that equals one absence.**

### Late Work

I will not look at late creative writing assignments. For your papers, each day that they are late will result in a subtraction of one-third a letter grade.

A word about weekly writing assignments – these assignments, while they will be started in your journal, should be typed and handed in when indicated. If they are not typed, and if you hand them in late, I will not accept them.

### Journals

The most basic, most important aspect of this class, the thing that separates writers from everyone else, is the physical act of putting pen to paper. You will be asked to keep a journal. This journal is a place for you to write down your ideas, your thoughts, interesting observations and bits of conversation you hear out in the world. It is a place for you to write down beginnings of stories or first lines of a new poem. You should have four journal entries every week – this is including the warm-ups and writing exercises that we will do each day in class. You may keep a journal on your computer if that is easier or more comfortable for you, but you may not use a smart phone.

### Conferences

Conferences are a way for us to meet and discuss your progress in the class on an individual basis. You will be required to attend one conference at the mid way point in the semester. I have office hours weekly, and if you have questions or concerns I strongly encourage you to come talk to me. If the hours don't work for you, let me know, and we'll find a time that does.

### **Response Papers (25%)**

### Craft Papers

You will be required to write two critical papers this semester, 2-3 pages in length. A craft paper should consider how a certain aspect of craft works in a piece of writing. For instance – how does image work in a poem? How does character change in a story? What is the point of no return? How does it work?

### Attendance at a Reading

During the semester you will be required to attend at least one reading. There will be many opportunities to attend readings, whether the Global Voices Reading Series at UMB, the Breakwater Reading Series, or Write on the DOT, organized by the UMB MFA program, or at one of the many, many bookstores in Boston. When you attend a reading, you will be required to write a short 1-2 page response paper. This paper should show that you engaged in the experience. You might consider what the work of this author or the author's presentation of his or her work taught you about your own work.

### **Final Portfolio (25%)**

Your final portfolio is the equivalent of a final exam in this class. You will turn in your final portfolio along with your journal at the end of the semester. Your portfolio should include all drafts of your writing turned in this semester. Please include the copies of your work with my comments on them. It should also include the revisions on a poem and a story of your choice.

### **Workshop (15%)**

While this class is not completely centered around the workshop, we will utilize this form five times during the semester. The workshop is an extremely valuable time for the writer since he or she is sharing his or her writing, seeing how and/or where it might fit in the world. You should come to every workshop in this class prepared, by reading the poem or story ahead of time and having insightful comments to offer in discussion. You will also be required to write a workshop letter to the writer whose work is being discussed. You will turn in two copies of the workshop letter – one to me, and one to the writer. The letter will be graded. The workshop letter, in a nutshell, should touch on the points that worked well and also offer constructive and supportive criticism for revision.

### **Students with Disabilities**

If you have a disability and feel you will need accommodations in order to complete course requirements, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services (Campus Center, UL Room 211) at 617-287-7430. Information can also be found on their website: <http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability/>

### **Plagiarism and Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism is defined as the attempt to use or pass off as one's own the ideas or writings of another. This includes copying from a friend, downloading material from the Internet and pretending it's yours, or using passages either reproduced word-for-word or paraphrased from another's writing without giving the author credit. If you're confused about the right way to quote sources, please see me and I'll be glad to clarify. Because plagiarism involves stealing someone's ideas, it's considered a serious matter in academic life. *Anyone committing plagiarism risks failing the course.*

All students are accountable to the definitions and the regulations concerning Academic Honesty contained in the University of Massachusetts Boston "Code of Standard Conduct." For more details see: [http://www.umb/life\\_on\\_campus/policies/code/](http://www.umb/life_on_campus/policies/code/)

### **Outline of Classes**

Please note: This outline is subject to change.

#### **Week 1: Introduction & Image**

**Tuesday Sept. 4:** Introduction.

**Thursday Sept. 6:** IW: Invitation to the Writer, pg. 1-10

#### **Week 2: Image**

**Tuesday Sept. 11:**

IW: Image, 13-25 Read Selected Readings at the end of the chapter, pg. 30-40.

Online: "The Sea of Information," by Andrea Barrett

**Thursday Sept. 13:**

Online: "Inspiration? Head Down the Back Road, and Stop for Yard Sales," by Annie

Proulx: <http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/051099proulx-writing.html>

"Goofing Off While the Muse Recharges," by Richard Ford:

<http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/110899ford-writing.html>

"Time Can Transform the Fantasies of Youth," by Russell Banks:

<http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/120699banks-writing.html>

#### **Week 3: Voice**

**Tuesday Sept. 18:**

IW: Voice, 47-61. Read selected readings at the end of the chapter: "Cowboy" and "Ode to American English"

**Thursday Sept. 20:**

Online: Raymond Carver: "Where I'm Calling From"

Eudora Welty: "Why I Live at the P.O."

#### **Week 4: Character**

**Tuesday Sept. 25:**

IW: Character, pg. 87-101. At the end of the chapter: "Prue," "I Knew a Woman," "Stonecarver," "To Aunt Rose," "Tattoo."

**Thursday Sept. 27:**

Online: Louise Gluck: "Persephone the Wanderer," "A Myth of Innocence," and "A Myth of Devotion"  
Alice Munro: "Walker Brothers Cowboy"

**Week 5: Setting & Introduction to the Workshop**

**Tuesday Oct. 2:**

IW: Setting, 132-144. Read "The School," "The Werewolf," "Earthmoving Malediction," and "Nobody Dies in Spring"

Online: Benjamin Percy: "Refresh, Refresh"

**Thursday Oct. 4:**

Model Workshops

**Week 6: Poetry Workshops**

**Tuesday Oct. 9**

**Thursday Oct. 11..... (First craft paper due 10/11)**

**Week 7: Conferences**

**Tuesday Oct. 16**

**Thursday Oct. 18**

**Week 8: Story**

**Tuesday Oct. 23:**

IW: Story, pg. 167-176. Read "Incarnations of Burned Children," "A Story About the Body," "Short Story," "Woodchucks," and "The Hammock"

**Thursday Oct. 25:**

Online: Flannery O'Connor: "Good Country People"

Philip Levine: "Story"

**Week 9: Story**

**Tuesday Oct. 30:**

Online: Ernest Hemingway: "Hills Like White Elephants"

Antonya Nelson: "Stitches"

**Thursday Nov. 1**

Online: John Cheever: "Reunion"

Mary Gaitskill: "The Girl on the Plane"

**Week 10: Development and Revision (and Experimental Stories)**

**Tuesday Nov. 6:**

IW: Chapter 7, Development and Revision, pg. 196-229. Read all selections at the end of this chapter!

**Thursday Nov. 8**

Online: John Updike: "Problems"

Aimee Bender: "Quiet, Please," and "The Rememberer"

**Week 11: Fiction Workshops**

**Tuesday Nov. 13**

**Thursday Nov. 15**

**Week 12:**

**Tuesday Nov. 20..... Second Craft Paper Due 11/20**

Read selections from Micro Fiction (online)

Try writing your own piece of micro fiction. Bring to class for an exercise.

**Thursday Nov. 22 (Thanksgiving – NO CLASS)**

**Week 13: Imitation and Influence**

**Tuesday Nov. 27:**

Online: Raymond Carver: “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”

Nathan Englander: “What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank”

Barbara Kingsolver: “Why I Am A Danger to the Public”

**Thursday Nov. 29**

Online: Anton Chekhov: “The Lady with the Dog”

Joyce Carol Oates: “The Lady with the Pet Dog”

**Week 14: Class Reading**

**Tuesday Dec. 4**

**Thursday Dec. 6**

**Week 15: Conclusions**

**Tuesday Dec. 11:**

Online: Readings by Anne Lammott, Annie Dillard, Richard Hugo, and Lorrie Moore

**Last day of classes: Dec. 12**