

Bryn Mawr College Fall 2026
CRWT B159 – 001 Introduction to Creative Writing
Syllabus

Professor Nicole Dennis-Benn
English House 209
Class Meeting Time: English House III, W 1:10 PM-4:00 PM
Office Hours: By appointment
Email: ndennisben@brynmawr.edu

Required Texts:

- What We Lose by Zinzi Clemons
- Zami – A New Spelling of My Name by Audre Lorde
- Heavy by Kiese Laymon
- Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth by Warsan Shire

Recommended Text:

- The College Handbook of Creative Writing by Robert DeMaria, Jr

***These books are available in the Bryn Mawr College Bookstore and are reserved at the library. **Please note: Students are expected to purchase these texts, in these editions, for this course. If the purchase of these texts presents a problem, please see the instructor.**

Helpful Resources:

- Special Services for Students with Disabilities:
<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/access-services/information-students>
- Writing Center: <https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/writing-center/students>
- Library: <https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/library-information-technology-services>

Course Description:

This course is for students who have a genuine interest in storytelling, poetry, memoir and whatever form the imagination takes with a respect and appreciation for craft despite their major and writing backgrounds. The course will explore the creative inspiration, and how memory, identity, and the human experience can inform the artist's work. Each student will have the opportunity to workshop twice up to (10) pages, drawing inspiration from our readings and class assignments. Following their in-class critiques, students will meet with the instructor for individual conference.

We'll discuss selected readings to aid our discussions on technique/craft in relation to shaping your work. Excerpts of other books and stories will be listed as we go along to better aid your individual creative process. Prompts will be given at the beginning of the workshop, throughout, or at the end to get your creative juices flowing.

Learning Objectives:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

- Draw creative inspiration from the world around them.
- Hone their voice.
- Create compelling narratives.
- Understand the importance of discipline as a part of the creative process.
- Learn to appreciate other art forms/mediums of expressions and consider themselves a part of a larger conversation with other artists and the world.

Course Requirements:

- A journal
- A camera (iPhones and Droids are fine!)
- The ability to attend a play, dance recital, spoken word poetry, readings, and art museums.

Responsibilities:

You will be responsible for preparing works (5 pages max) for MINI-workshops in a timely manner. You will work on these excerpts in class, inspired by prompts. Excerpts should have specific questions you would like your classmates and instructor to address at this stage of the work. Keep in mind that specific questions do not prevent people from commenting on other components of the story they deem necessary, but will give a sense of direction and make your critiquing experience more fulfilling.

You are required to read and write **detailed** critiques for your classmates' work. Make sure to let your classmate know what is working and why, what they can improve, and any helpful suggestions. Critiques should be typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins, and in 12pt. Times New Roman font. Critiques should be at least one (1) page.

In addition, you will be responsible for reading the required texts, essays, films which will aid in our discussions.

Submitting Material:

Each group will exchange emails so that you can share your drafts for discussion. Please submit materials for critiquing 1 week before workshop. This should give your group members time to properly read and critique your work. The polished material should be uploaded to Moodle for my grading.

Attendance and engagement:

This class requires full participation and meaningful engagement. A chunk of your grade is based on your attendance and engagement. You're only allowed 2 absences before

your grade becomes affected. (Lateness for more than 10 minutes is considered an absence).

Lateness:

Unforeseen circumstances happen to everyone; this is understood. However, class begins at 10:10 AM. **Prompts are given at the beginning of class, and each student is expected to participate.** If for any reason you are running extra late or are unable to attend class, please email instructor and the student(s) whose work is scheduled for critique that week. **If this occurs often, your grade may be affected.**

******Your success in this course is based on your written work, your full participation in the class and your efforts.**

Instructions for Turning in Work:

1. Title Your Work
2. Name/Page numbers on all pages
3. Double Space Microsoft Word
4. Print One Side Only.
5. Submit Electronic Copy and make sure your name and the title of your work are in the subject.

Grade Rubric:

- 60% Submissions (*10% Turned in on time; 10% innovation; 10% effort; 10% structure; 20% incorporation of craft discussed in readings & lecture*).
- 20% Critiques of classmates' work

Class Participation (20%): Thoughtful critique of students' work; active participant in discussion, preparation for leading story discussion during your week, attendance).

Fiction Assignment (20%): This will be a piece you will work on for workshop, inspired by in-class prompts or readings. A copy will be uploaded to Moodle for grading.

Memoir/Poetry Assignment (20%): This will be a piece you will work on for workshop, inspired by in-class prompts or readings. A copy will be uploaded to Moodle for grading.

Multimedia Assignment (20%): A large focus of this course will be understanding what writing can be. As various as that answer is, it cannot be anything in a vacuum. For this assignment, you will be asked to work on a project that steps outside the realm of just language. The idea is to take one of your written pieces (you may also write a new one) and braid it into conversation with some element, artform, medium, structure, etc. that lives separate from the world of words on a page. I want you to think about what your piece can be, and what it wants to be it with. This can be a multimedia project, a spoken word project, a historical project, a music project, a public space project, and so on.

Regardless of its form, you will present this assignment to the class as well as supplement it with a brief one-page write-up sharing your intentions and process.

Final Portfolio (20%): Towards the end of this course, you will submit a portfolio consisting of:

- At least 3 pieces that you have written over the length of the semester,
- A reflection of 2 pages on what this class brought up and/or revealed for you as well as your growth as a writer,
- Any material from which you have drawn inspiration,
- A page describing your process and your inspiration.

Prior to turning your portfolio in, you will give a brief presentation on your process and works in progress at the end of the course. This could be a powerpoint on your process or you could assign the class excerpts of materials that have inspired your creative process, discussing them.

Statement of Belongingness:

In this course, we must be respectful of others' identities and perspectives even if they differ from ours. We will strive to create an inclusive learning environment where we value all voices. We will address everyone by their preferred names and pronouns. In this course, we will not make assumptions about what someone knows and does not know. We will make knowledge accessible to everyone. In this class, we will grow as writers and, most importantly, as human beings.

Course Schedule (Note that all required readings are either assigned books or provided electronically via Moodle unless otherwise specified):

Class Meeting Date	Required Readings or Assignments	Recommended Resources
9/2	POETS IN THE KITCHEN by Paule Marshall accessible in Moodle. <i>*Upon completion of the reading, reflect on the "poets" in your life.</i>	<u>On Keeping a Notebook, Joan Didion</u> <u>In Her Own Words: Toni Morrison on Writing, Editing, and Teaching By Kathy Neustadt '73 Interview and Photographs</u>
9/9 <i>What is fiction?</i>	SEX LIVES OF AFRICAN GIRLS by Taiye Selasi POINT OF VIEW by Lucy Berlin (<i>book on reserve in Canady Library</i>)	Film to watch: Toni Morrison: Pieces I am
9/16 <i>Elements of Fiction</i>	Without Inspection, Edwidge Danticat (New Yorker) Found Wanting by Doug Stuart (New Yorker)	Craft reading Assignment: On the Many Different Engines That Power a Short Story- It's Not Just Plot or Character That

		Drives Fiction By Lincoln Michel (on Moodle). Film to watch: Eve's Bayou
9/23 <i>Elements of Fiction</i>	SAFARI by Jennifer Egan, The New Yorker Jumping Monkey Hill by Chimamanda Adichie	Craft reading Assignment: The Sentence is a Lonely Place by Gary Lutz Films to watch: The Watermelon Woman
9/30 <i>Elements of Fiction</i> ***Short story draft due to your fellow group members.	The Englishman, Doug Stuart (New Yorker) A Temporary Matter, Jhumpa Lahiri (New Yorker)	Craft Reading Assignment: Reading Like a Guest by Noah Baldino (on Moodle) Film to watch: The Namesake
10/7 <i>Elements of Fiction</i>	An Honest Exit by Dinaw Mengestu (Available via The New Yorker) Read and critique your classmates' work. Prepare talking points for group discussion.	Films to Watch: Black Swan
Required to attend Dinaw Mengestu Reading: 10/7 at 6:30pm in Goodhart Hall Music Room.		
Fall Break: No Class on 10/14 (Read ZAMI – A NEW SPELLING OF MY NAME by Audre Lorde)		
10/21 <i>What is Poetry</i>	Warsan Shire (Selected poems) Discuss ZAMI (What stood out to you most in Lorde's work? What are thoughts about the way in which she weaves poetry into her prose and the story itself? In what ways is poetry adding to the narrative?)	Film to Watch: Pariah
10/28 <i>Elements of Poetry in Art and Music</i>	Discuss the songs by contemporary artists such as Tupac Shakur, Kendrick Lamar, Lauryn Hill, Common. How is poetry utilized in these works? What does it add?	American Poets on Hip Hop Songs that Most Inspire Them (New York Times Style Magazine) Film to watch: Beyonce's Lemonade Film

	***Journal assignment incorporating POETRY or a Poem itself ***Excerpt of Libertie by Kaitlyn Greenidge	
Required to attend Kaitlyn Greenidge Reading: 10/28 at 6:30pm in Goodhart Hall Music Room.		
11/4 <i>Personal Essays/Memoir</i> ***Start thinking about your final project	Heavy by Kiese Lemon ***Journal Assignment inspired by Heavy, a personal essay/memoir chapter	Film to watch: Prozac Nation
11/11 <i>Personal Essays/Memoir</i>	Finish reading Heavy by Kiese Lemon ***Share Journal assignment with group members for discussion/critique	Film to watch: Aurora
Required to attend Lain Haley Pollock Reading: 11/11 at 6:30pm in Goodhart Hall Music Room.		
11/18 <i>Mix Storytelling</i>	What We Lose by Zinzi Clemmons ***Journal Assignment inspired by What We Lose, a personal essay/memoir chapter and/or one of the films you've watched during the semester.	Film to watch during Thanksgiving: Roma
Thanksgiving Break: No Class on 11/25 Write a journal entry reflecting creatively on family or chosen family dynamics over the holiday.		
12/2 <i>Group A Presentation</i>		
12/9 <i>Group B Presentation</i> Final Portfolio due <i>*Last Day of Class</i>		