

Dr. Tina Barr, Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200  
*Class meets Tuesdays & Thursdays 2 to 3:15, in Barret Library, 020, Office, 308 B  
 Palmer Hall, 843-3979. Office Hours Wednesdays 2 to 4 and by appointment.*

**Course Description:** This class will introduce students to principles of good poetry, including prosody, through readings in *The News from Poems: A Poetry Handbook*, by your professor, (a project I'm working on) and *The Wadsworth Anthology of Poetry*, (2 texts). Students are expected to *analyze and prepare to discuss the reading, so that they will make significant contributions to class discussion.* **Please don't hesitate to share your own interests with the class, by bringing in work by writers whose poems you admire.** The more each member contributes in different ways to the workshop the more interesting it will be.

A word here---students sometimes think that this course will be an "easy" one, but instead find it can be one of their most difficult classes. Most of us have written poetry to express our feelings, but **poetry is an art, and it requires perhaps more discipline and hard work to achieve a decent poem** often, than to write a good essay. You will have to relinquish the idea that you can express your feelings on paper, and that will be enough. It won't. You'll need to edit extensively, to re-think and re-write sections of your poem in order to make it a piece of thoughtful work, rather than purely and solely an expression of self. In addition, because you *are* expressing your feelings, you'll have to be willing to *examine* them and share them, and that takes courage.

### Course Requirements:

- 1.** Students must attend carefully to the **reading requirements** and **contribute significantly to class discussion.** (30%) You must also **memorize a poem** for the last day of class.
- 2.** Students must turn in a **portfolio** (50%) of poems at midterm and at end of term; these should consist of a folder that contains only the **final revisions** of **all** the *poems you have worked on from the beginning of term through midterm and then from the beginning of term through the end of the semester.* Portfolios should consist of a minimum of 8 and up to 14, **BUT NO MORE THAN 14**, of your best poems. Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades *can* go up considerably, but *may also remain the same* for a final grade if you have been unable to improve your work.
- 3.** Students will prepare an oral presentation (20%) on a poem of their choice from our anthology.

Grading: Grades are based on talent as demonstrated in the poems, but achievement in poetry is usually the result of the *work of editing and revising.* *Writers must employ clear grammatical construction, complete sentences, and careful punctuation. They must make use of concrete imagery and careful diction. Poetry is a discipline. The use of abstract terms and generalized imagery will not result in good poetry.* Careful reading of fellow students' work, careful reading of assigned texts, class participation, effort and attitude also count. The professor has been known to reduce a final grade based on attitude alone. (This falls under contributions to class discussion 30%.)

## Procedures:

**NEVER email poems to me.** If you are absent, bring in your 16 copies when you next come to class. You may only turn in **typed copies**. *I will not look at handwritten copies in class or conference.* Students will be responsible for turning in 16 **copies** of each poem they want discussed in class. Please note: You should **prepare the weekend before**, for the coming week. Sometimes we will discuss the assigned readings on Tuesdays, and the student work on Thursdays; at other times we may begin discussion with student poems on Mondays. **Thus: “Assignment for next week” is due Tuesday of the following week.**

**Weekly Requirements for Poems:** *Students generally will turn in a poem every week for class discussion;* however they are required to complete revisions as they progress. Students should be continually revising their work.

**Conference:** Conference time is built into the syllabus as part of the opportunity offered by this course. Once a student has signed up for her or his conference he or she must attend. **Conferences that are missed cannot be rescheduled.** Students should use this time to consult if they have difficulty with their writing, would like to share poems they'd rather the class did not see, or have questions about editing procedures. Bring your poetry folder to conference.

**Attendance:** Students **should miss** no more than 2 classes a semester, based on a medical absence or family emergency. If you need to miss a class based on an absence of this sort, please call or email the professor. **More than 4 absences will likely result in a reduction in the final grade for the course.** Do not “use up” your absences. Save them for when you are truly sick, I guarantee you will be at some point during the semester.

**Course Structure:** I will be teaching you to focus on and isolate *techniques in craft, also known as prosody*. It will be your responsibility to learn about these techniques. They are based on the idea that poets use **patterns**, visual patterns and sound patterns. Poets make **rhyme or off-rhyme** sounds and their techniques for sound include **alliteration, assonance, consonance**. Poets make **images, metaphors, similes; these are pictures** based on the sensory experience of **seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling**. They create **structures** in their poems, based on patterns of **repetition, based on line lengths, stanzas, shaping**, a structure based on a **received form** like a sonnet, or a **conceived form** like Whitman's, based on biblical line length and the sound of the King James's version of the Bible in translation, or a hanging line, like William Carlos Williams's in his early work. You will learn to analyze a poem based on its **form as well as its content**. These highlighted words are terms you need to learn to use. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the semester, you will have learned to write a **narrative, concrete poem**, so I'll ask you to focus on **editing and development**.

**Student Reports:** **Find a poem we have not discussed in class, from your anthology.** You should focus on **several technical aspects** of the poem you've selected to present. You should begin by giving the page number and reading the poem aloud to the class.

You should then focus the discussion by asking 3 to 4 questions of your fellow class participants in order to generate discussion on this technique or techniques, depending on the particular poem you choose and the way you choose to **find techniques as a point of entry into its analysis**. **Your job is NOT to lecture or summarize** or tell the students what the poem is about. I want you to practice teaching the poem. You should take **NO MORE than 15 minutes of class time**. **You will have the opportunity for an oral report once during the semester.**

**Responsibilities:** My job as your professor is to instruct you in techniques of poetic analysis and model for you the terms and approaches to that analysis. That means you need to attend all classes and pay close attention. Your job is to assimilate those terms through careful attention to reading and discussion, so that you can learn how to explicate or analyze a poem, how to find its meanings. A good poem always presents more than one meaning. A poem has meanings in the plural. It presents an array of ideas. My job is also to assist you in learning to improve your writing of poems. It is not to write the poem for you. Your job is to assimilate my suggestions and revise your work accordingly. You will not progress by assuming that you know better. You don't. You have to trust me. I've been teaching students to write since the early 1980s and my students have gone on the graduate school, publication in national journals and sometimes chapbooks and books of their own. The most difficult challenge in writing poetry is to separate your emotional defenses from making a piece of art, a finished thing, a scrutinized thing. You have to know that technique is crucial in all fields, whether it's playing basketball, taking a car engine apart, dancing, playing an instrument, driving a car, baking a cake, or writing a poem. You have to practice. You have to work. You have to measure carefully the distance between the ball and the hoop or the amount in a teaspoon, or the verb you want to use that really does some *work*.

Editing Advice---You should use this for every poem.

1. go over the poem by reading it aloud.
2. edit all extraneous words---do this by going over your poem word by word.
3. underline all the verbs---is each verb as effective, active and dynamic as it could be?
4. underline all adjectives----are they absolutely necessary?
5. edit all adverbs, unless they are really significant to the meaning of the sentence.
6. distance yourself from your poem and consider whether the reader will be able to fully understand the poem?
7. is the relationship between the characters clear? Will the reader know---if this is important to the poem, what the relationship is?
8. In general, shift out of the second person (You) to the first person or third person. Narrate the poem through an "I" or by using an omnipotent "He" or "She."
9. The best way to LEARN to edit is through practice, practice, practice.

**Is your poem composed in complete sentences? If not, your grade will be a C+ or less. If you are confused about punctuation, it is up to you to correct it, by making an appt. with a tutor at the writing center to go over questions on**

**punctuation, or find a composition book or go online to learn the rules of punctuation. You will need to set this up for yourself.**

### **Week 1 1/15**

In-class interviews, distribute syllabus prior to class contract, to be signed on Tuesday.  
in-class writing, page 4 in handbook --- (aromatherapy)

*Assignment for next week:* type up in-class writing assignment and submit 16 copies of poem on Tuesday, read **entire** syllabus over word by word prior to signing class contract on Tuesday. **Read it**, so you will also understand how the course is structured and where I am taking you. Read Advice for Beginning Writers in *Handbook* and follow reading assignment. (Google references you don't know.)

### **Week 2 1/20 & 1/22**

**Always bring your 2 poetry texts to class.** Distribute student poems. Field questions on syllabus, class contract, quiz. Go over drafts Barr handouts. Discuss reading assignments. In class---self-portrait

*Assignment for next week:* Complete first exercise in Narrative, in the Handbook. Bring copies for everyone on Monday. All assignments are **required**. **Always bring your 2 poetry texts to class.**

### **Week 3 1/27 & 1/29**

Turn in your 16 copies of the poem(s) you wrote. **NEVER email poems to me.** If you are absent, bring in your 16 copies when you next come to class. You may only turn in **typed copies**. **I will not look at handwritten copies in class or conference.** **Always bring your 2 poetry texts to class.** In class we will go over Guidelines for Student Discussion in *Handbook*, with class discussion of student narratives in *handbook*. Begin discussion of what makes a good poem. Verb & adjective exercises in class.

***Assignment for Conference Week:*** work on Pet Poem exercise –page 21---in handbook. Bring a copy to your conference—it is imperative that you allow enough time to work through several drafts of this exercise BEFORE you bring it to conference. I will not read any handwritten poems. Missed Conferences cannot be rescheduled. *Assignment for following week :* Read The Poem's Agenda, in the *Poetry Handbook*, page 14, and do reading assignment in the *Wadsworth Anthology*. Read page 22, What Makes a Good Poem. See Professor Barr in Conference during your scheduled time. These conferences will take place during scheduled class periods to allow for individual meetings. Since conferences will be taking place, we will meet in my office, Palmer 308 B, instead of class. During the time you would normally meet in class, work on your revision of the pet poem and any other poems you have written while I meet with other workshop participants.

**Week 4** 2/3 & 2/5 Classes cancelled---each student will meet me in my office, Palmer 308 B for their individual **conference at some time during 2/3, 2/5 or 2/10** Bring Pet Poem to conference. Work on revisions of your poems during the class periods.

*Assignment for 2/12* : Read II. The Poem's Agenda, in the *Poetry Handbook*, page 14, and page 22, What Makes a Good Poem, and do reading assignment in the *Wadsworth Anthology*. Apply the principles you read about in The Poem's Agenda to your revisions. Bring your revisions to class.

**Week 5** 2/10 (remaining conferences) & 2/12 meet in class

On 2/12 we will begin to discuss student poems, the reading in the anthology, the principles from the handbook (pages 14 & 21) (& the Frost, Hughes & Bishop).

*Assignment for next week*: work on your revisions. **Bring in 16 copies of each poem to class next week, including ALL poems you've been working on this semester.**

**Portfolios Due on 2/26** Students must turn in a **portfolio** of poems at midterm (2/26); staple together or put into a folder only the **final revisions** of **all** the *poems you have worked on from the beginning of term through midterm*. Portfolios **at midterm** should consist of 4 to 6 of your best poems. Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades *can* go up considerably, but *may also remain the same or even go down* for a final grade if you have been unable to improve your work.

**Week 6** 2/17 & 2/19

**Bring your Poetry Handbook and your Wadsworth Anthology to Every Class.**

Complete discussion of Frost, Hughes & Bishop, Small Group Discussion of all poetry revisions. Discuss pages 23 through 29 in Poetry Handbook, Grading Student Poems. Pick arbitrary poems in *Anthology* and discuss oral report techniques. (Chocolate exercise)

*Assignment for next week*: Revise poems on which you are working and bring copies for discussion in workshop. **Four Students to prepare Oral Reports. During the Oral Reports, you want your fellow students to relax and enjoy the discussion. Feel free to bring handouts on the poet whose poem you are discussing-- or cookies, a film clip of the poet reading, whatever. You want your oral report to be focused, but lively and engaging.**

**Week 7** 2/24 & 2/26 **Portfolios Due on 2/26**

**Four Students to give oral reports on 2/26; workshop discussion on 2/24 before Midterm Portfolios due**

*Assignment for next week:* No assignment for entire class, **Four Students to prep Oral Reports.**

**Week 8 3/3 & 3/5**

**Four Students to offer Oral Reports. Portfolios returned. Go over villanelle exercise.**

*Assignment for 3/10 & 3/12---Write a villanelle. The villanelle information is contained in the last few pages, with examples, of the Poetry Handbook.*

**Week 9 3/10 & 3/12 --- No classes**

**(students to see Barr in conference during class time this week---Dr. Barr will request you to come to conference if she needs to see you.)**

*Assignment over Spring Break: Pick any poem and memorize it, recite it on 3/26. It is best if you find a poem easier to memorize: one that rhymes for example, or has a set meter, and one that is not too long! In the days of technology I am trying to take you back to your oral roots—as well as enforce all that you will learn and take notice of, when you commit a poem to memory.*

**Week 10 3/24 & 3/26**

**Bring Poetry Handbook and The Wadsworth Anthology to class.**

During class on Tuesday, we will read pages 30 and on, IV. Transition Versus Juxtaposition, including Tichborne's "Elegy," and poems from your anthology. Recite poem on 3/26. Discuss villanelles—bring in 16 copies--- written before the spring break.

*Assignment for next week:* Read V. Expansion and Contraction, Developing the Poem, in your *Poetry Handbook*, as well as the assigned reading in your anthology. Complete Color Exercise on page 32 of handbook and bring in 16 copies on Monday.

**Week 11 3/31 & 4/2**

Discuss assigned reading and discuss student poems, as well as color poems by Lawrence, Hongo, Stinson & Irwin.

**Week 12 4/7 & 4/9 (out of class writing assignments, see below)**

Writing Assignment to do in lieu of class. You cannot do this on-campus. This needs to be a real-world experience. **This is an exercise in observation of details, appropriation of dialogue, and in development. IF you skip any of these steps, it will show in your work.** Go during the class period(s) to Café Eclectic, CK's, Starbucks, or a similar venue, and sit and write a narrative poem, about some exchange/event you witness. OR: use yourself as a character in the poem who is in the coffee shop. Write in the first person (I) or the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (He/She). Do NOT use the 2<sup>nd</sup> person: You. Observe 1. details, 2. note dialogue and 3. develop the poem in a direction of your choice. This works best if you go to the same venue twice in order to develop the poem.

*Assignment for next week:* Read pages 35/36 and on in *Poetry Handbook*, VI, Prose and Poetry, How to Tell the Difference, with reference to the poems in your anthology. You will need to tread between my entry and my references to the poems in the anthology. Read the poems described and **be prepared to discuss them in class**, as well **as turn in the exercise on the Komunyakaa poem**. **This is fairly intense so you will need to study this assignment quite carefully.** **There will be a quiz on the reading.** Prepare Café Exercise poem for workshop discussion & bring in copies for all. Complete revisions of the poems you have written during the semester for in-class discussion. Complete the exercise on Process, page 40 of the *Handbook*. Prepare final versions to turn in on 4/14. **Portfolios due on 4/23.**

**Week 13 4/14 & 4/16 Final discussion week---this week will be devoted to “work-shopping” of all poems due for portfolio. Please bring in any poems you need feedback on. Do not bring in “revisions” where you have only changed a word or two--- a sentence or two. These can go right into the final portfolio without workshop discussion. Bring in only seriously revised poems, or new poems.**

Discuss Café exercise poems, your process poem on Tuesday and other revisions. Turn in Komunyakaa exercise. Discuss poems read for *Handbook* assignment, etc.

*Assignment for next week:* Complete Food Exercise on page 38 & 39 of *Poetry Handbook*. **Four students to Prepare Oral Reports for 4/23.**

**Week 14 4/21 & 4/23 portfolios due on 4/23**

Discuss Food Exercise poems in workshop on 4/21. Focus on development. **Oral Reports on 4/23—same day as final portfolios.**

*Assignment for next week:* **Pick a poem you want to memorize, from the anthology to recite on the last day of class. It can be a poem we have discussed. Begin to memorize it.** *It is best if you find a poem easier to memorize: one that rhymes for example, or has a set meter, and one that is not too long! In the days of technology I am trying to take you back to your oral roots—as well as enforce all that you will learn and take notice of, when you commit a poem to memory.*

**Week 15 4/28 & 4/30**

**Four student reports on 4/28, return portfolios.**

**Last class on 4/30 ---party and recite memorized poems**

**Please bring in contributions, food & drink, for final class and party**

Recite memorized poem!!!