

Grossmont College Spring 2012
English 140-143 / 7274-7277 / 3 units
Class Meets: Thursdays 7-9:50 in Room 51-584

POETRY WRITING

A Repeatable Writers' Workshop

Instructor: Sydney Brown sydney.brown@gcccd.edu

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Office: Building 52 Room 564-B

Office Hours: Mondays 3:30-5:00 Tuesdays: 4:30-5:30

Wednesdays: 3:30-5:00 Thursdays: 6-7

& by appointment



*This class is a
no phone zone.
Thank you.*



Course Description

We all have our longings and reasons for being drawn to language, and some of them are easier to explain than others. Part of poetry writing is a mystical process that can't be taught or explained—it's about using language to access, enter, penetrate our questions, which are sometimes mysteries. At the same time, poetry is also about craft: scrutinizing language; forming clear, evocative images; working with qualities of sound and rhythm; considering line breaks; and many other "things." Kim Addonizio asserts in *Ordinary Genius: A Guide for the Poet Within*, "Poetry is often a misunderstood art. People think it's easy to write. They don't realize that it is as difficult to make a great poem as it is to make a great painting or blast out a virtuoso electric guitar solo. To understand poetry is an art is to understand that it is the same as every art, every discipline. It is work" (15). The type of work Addonizio is addressing is tied closely to craft, as craft is necessary to give shape to the often messy, formless sensations we drudge up from inside.

While this class will address the mystical aspects of poetry, it will primarily be about craft, and it will be about work.

We will produce lots of new work and learn how to craft our poems through revision: learning how to "see" other visions, or possibilities, for our poems. Most serious poets go through dozens of revisions to finish one poem. This means tightening or altering word choice, cutting lines or sections of a poem, sharpening images, reconsidering sound and rhythm, or even rethinking the entire concept of the poem. Revising is really about "revealing" the poems we are trying to write (or maybe even didn't know we were writing...) and becoming better writers in the process.

Poets are not made overnight or even in a semester, so students who want to write poetry must be committed to a long and difficult process—a lifetime, really. The process begins with reading widely and deeply—not only poems we immediately understand, but also poems that challenge our understanding of the genre, the world, and of ourselves. We will be in constant dialog with poems that require close, careful rereading.

Finally, the best instruction in this class will come from the comments and insights that we provide for each other. This means that we must read each other's poems with care and sensitivity, not valuing one form of poetry over another, helping each other, and in the process, helping ourselves to become better writers.

Prerequisite

- A “CR” or “C” grade or higher in ENGL 110 or equivalent or assessment for 120.

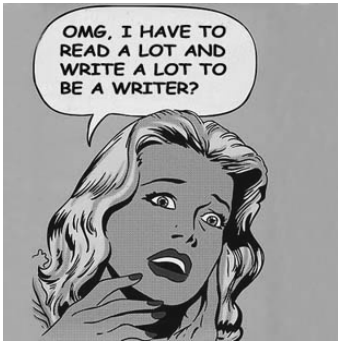
Recommended Preparation

- English 126: Creative Writing.
- A basic understanding of poetic terms and techniques.

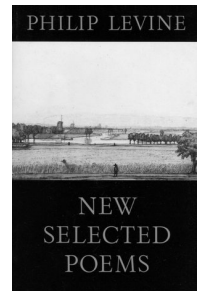
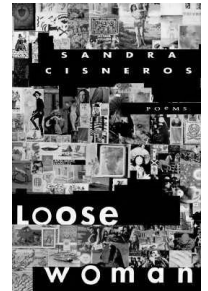
Transferability

- Course transfers to UC and CSU systems (credit limited).

REQUIRED Texts & Materials



- Cisneros, Sandra. *Loose Woman*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Levine, Philip. *New Selected Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.
- Copies of individual poems for small group workshops.
- Access to a computer (available on campus). All poems must be typed.



Recommended Texts: Reading, Craft & Publishing

- Dobyns, Stephen. *Next Word, Better Word: The Craft of Writing Poetry*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2011.
- Addonizio, Kim and Dorianne Laux. *The Poet's Companion*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1977.
- Kowitz, Steve. *The Poet's Portable Workshop*. New York: Tilbury House Publishers, 1995.
- Pinsky, Robert. *The Sound of Poetry: A Brief Guide*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.
- Snodgrass, W.D. *De/Compositions: 101 Good Poems Gone Wrong*. Saint Paul, 2001.
- *Poets & Writers*: <http://www.pw.org>
- AWP: The Association of Writers & Writing Programs: <http://www.awpwriter.org/>
- For more links, and an extensive list of online journals, check out my website: sydbrown.net

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Upon completing this course, students will:

1. Employ elements of poetry (i.e., voice, diction, imagery, sound, rhythm) and use specific details from memory, imagination, knowledge, and research to invent, draft, revise, and reflect upon poems in free verse and traditional forms, as well forms considered experimental or innovative.
2. Interpret and assess the poetry of established and/or emerging poets.
3. Use the writers' workshop to evaluate their own manuscript as well as the manuscripts of others (both orally and in writing) and to advance growth as writer and critic.

“There’s a poem in my head / like too many cups of coffee. / A pea under twenty eiderdowns. / A sadness in my heart like stone. / A telephone. / And always my / night madness that outs like bats / across the Texas sky.”

—Sandra Cisneros, “Night Madness Poem”

Format for Poems

Poems should be typed and single-spaced in standard font (i.e., Times New Roman, Ariel) unless you're moved to experiment with the page and font (be prepared to justify your decisions) and/or prefer double spacing. Do not ask your peers or me to read handwritten poems. Please put your name and date of submission in the upper left-hand corner of each poem. Computers are available free to students at several places on campus, including the library and the English Writing Center.

Lectures, Exercises, Assignments & Readings

I will sometimes present short craft lectures and guided craft exercises during class. These lectures are always integrated into the discussion of a model poem or poems. This time is meant to stimulate ideas and generate content (and formal curiosity) for your poetry. Roughly the first few weeks of class (depending on class size), you will be responding directly to assignments (prompts) I hand out in class. Everyone in class will write a poem in response to the same prompt and then bring copies for small group workshop. The prompts should help generate new poems as well as help you grow as a writer. After a few rounds of poem assignments and small group workshops, we will move on to whole class workshops where the poems workshopped will be of your choice. In addition to these lectures, exercises, and assignments, we will be submersing ourselves in an assortment of contemporary poetry.

Final Project: Chapbook and Reading

The final project is an account of the poems you have completed during the semester. Essentially it is a representation of “you” and the “process” you have experienced during this time. **Whether you create a chapbook or art book or zine, the contents should include clean, final copies of at least EIGHT POEMS. Also, please include a title page; table of contents; and an introduction written by you, one of your classmates, or a friend.** I have examples of chapbooks, art books and zines in my office, which you are welcome to view during my office hours, and I will bring samples to class when we get close to the due date—usually two weeks before the final. Chapbooks are not accepted the night of the Final Exam.

Final Exam

For the final, prepare a reading/performance of 2-3 (depending on class size) of your poems. Location and time TBA.

The Acorn Review

I'd like each of you to pick up a copy of this literary journal run by Grossmont students and featuring the work of Grossmont students, and see what you think. I'd also like each of you to submit several poems—it's a great opportunity to be part of our creative writing community, and *The Acorn* does not retain rights to your work. For more, check this out: www.grossmont.edu/english/creativewriting/acorn_review/



Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to notify the instructor and contact Disabled Student Services & Programs (DSP&S) **early in the semester** so that reasonable accommodations may be implemented as soon as possible. Students may contact DSP&S in person in room 110 or by phone at (619) 644-7112 (voice) or (619) 644-7119 (TTY for deaf).

New Policy on Course Repeatability

On June 11, 2011 the Board of Governors, the governing body for the California Community Colleges, adopted new regulations that limit the number of times a community college district could receive state funding for a student who has enrolled in the same credit course. The maximum number of times a student may enroll in the same credit course is **three times**.

1. A student, through a combination of substandard grades (D or F) and withdrawals on their student record, may only take a class three times.
2. If a student, through a combination of substandard grades (D or F) and withdrawals, wishes to take a class for the fourth time, they must submit a petition to the Admissions and Records Office. Petitions will only be approved based on extenuating circumstances.
3. Military Withdrawals do not count in terms of repetition restrictions, nor do withdrawals that occur due to fire, flood (Title 5 Sections 55024 and 58509)
4. This rule does not contain a grandfather clause. If a student has already reached the maximum allotted number of course repetitions, the district will not be able to claim apportionment for that course.

These changes are effective Summer 2012. Please keep these changes in mind as you plan your Spring 2012 courses. If you plan on taking a course for the fourth time in the Spring 2012 semester, this will be the last opportunity you have to successfully complete the course while attending classes in the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District.

Office Hours

Please take advantage of my office hours; I can't encourage you enough to bring poems in so that we may discuss your revision and bounce ideas of each other. This is often where some of the most dynamic teaching and learning takes place for both of us. Repeat offenders should discuss goals (as writers) independently with me. Furthermore, some of you are more than ready to submit work for publication and I can work on a "plan of attack" with you. I rarely use class time to discuss publishing, so if you are interested, or I have suggested that you "send a poem out," then please speak to me outside of class.

If it is your first semester with us and you have questions about the course, the writers' workshop, or the genre, please discuss them with me. Drop by my office and discuss your poems or what you think about an assigned (or unassigned) reading or a "heated" class discussion. Good music, food, books, movies—all worthy of a visit. I know there is much to learn from you outside, as well as inside, the classroom. Believe me when I say that I want to get to know you and help you as a writer, and this one-on-one interaction is one of the best ways to do so; it's also a joy.

Please know that there is never a good reason for feeling out of the loop. Because this course may be repeated four times, new students are often taken back by how everyone knows each other and gets along—don't be. We're glad you're here, as fresh eyes and voices are essential to a dynamic workshop.

Terminally Un-cool: A Prose Poem

Chronic tardiness. Occasional attendance. Snoozing. Showing up unprepared. Missing class to pick someone up at the airport. Leaving early or skipping out on the break (just tell me if you have somewhere you need to be, so I am not wondering what we might have done to offend you...). Beeping, ringing, singing cell phones—no matter how fine your taste in music. In fact, **PLEASE TURN PHONES OFF WHILE IN CLASS AND DO NOT LEAVE THEM ON YOUR DESK**. Leaving the class to make or take calls. (If you must leave your cell phone on, for emergency reasons, please inform me before class begins, or consider taking the night off). **TEXTING** (even when in the form of haiku, **TEXTING IN CLASS IS BEYOND LAME**), cross-talking, pre-launching, e-mailing or placing work in my mailbox—I have too many students to accept work via email, and in

the past when I have allowed it, it has always turned into a nightmare for me. Please do not e-mail me your poems. (Small print: in order not to be deemed a hypocrite at a later date, I will add that I sometimes make exceptions to the e-mail thing. If you do not have your assignment the day it is due, make arrangements to get it to me before the next class, or turn it in the following week. Groups may e-mail work to each other, but I must always receive hard copies.) Final urgh: pedantic or elitist attitudes towards poetry, poor listeners, combativeness, negative rather than constructive criticism, and of course, mean people...

Evaluation

At the end of the semester, students will receive grades based on two factors: their commitment to the class and their commitment to their own growth as writers. Students' commitment to the class will be measured through such objective factors as attendance and participation, while students' commitment to their own growth as writers will be assessed through their production of poems and revisions. (Note: I DO NOT use the plus/minus grading option.) I will be using a contract grading system * as follows:

Requirements for an "A":

1. Complete the final project—a chapbook or zine—with at least 8 new poems; demonstrate frequent revisions (as needed) throughout the semester.
2. Give a reading from final project.
3. Complete all reading and writing assignments and actively participate in class discussions.
4. Provide conscientious and constructive criticism of peers' work—**orally and in writing**—in small group and class workshops.
5. Miss no more than one-two classes and attend class on time.

Requirements for a "B":

1. Complete the final project—a chapbook or zine—with at least 8 new poems; demonstrate moderate revisions.
2. Give a reading from final project.
3. Complete all reading and writing assignments and participate in class discussions.
4. Provide constructive criticism of peers' work—**orally and in writing**—in small group and class workshops.
5. Miss no more than three classes and come to class on time.

Requirements for a "C" or "Credit":

1. Complete the final project—a chapbook or zine—with at least 8 new poems.
2. Give a reading from final project.
3. Complete all reading and writing assignments.
4. Show growth as a critic by working to provide constructive criticism of peers' work—**orally and in writing**—in small group and class workshops.
5. Miss no more than three classes and come to class on time.

"D" and "F" and "No Credit" students are those who fail to complete the minimum writing requirements (see item 1) and who accumulate excessive absences (more than three). **Students who do not turn in the final project will not pass the class.**

Please note: the contract grading system is subject to the teacher's discretion. The final grade is determined according to the student's overall performance in the class and the teacher's earnest attempt to be fair and impartial.

If you have any questions, just ask!