

ENG 408: Writing Autobiography (The Personal Essay)
Syllabus Summer Session C, 2018
Professor M. Evelina Galang

Course Description: This workshop asks its members to read and write. In addition to workshopping each other's personal essays, every module you will read published essays, watch videos, and conduct interviews through the StoryCorps app. These exercises, combined with online class discussions, creative responses, and class critiques will lead to the drafting of one complete essay, a workshop, and revision of that essay. Workshops will critique short pieces between 7-12 pages. This workshop is about reading, writing and revising so plug in your laptops and let's go!

Required App: StoryCorps

Policies, Procedures:

Attendance: Because this is an online course, students will be expected to read or view materials and upload their responses during the window provided.

Online Creative Journal: Each module you will be asked to post an entry in your online creative journal. These creative responses are based on the essays and videos we are reading and viewing. You should have 12 entries by the end of the semester. 15%

Online Critical Journal: Each module you will be asked to post an entry in your online critical journal. Each reading or viewing assignment will come with specific questions for you to respond to. You should have 12 entries by the end of the semester. 15%

Exercises: Some modules you will be asked to do additional exercises to supplement the readings. 10%

StoryCorps Interviews: Students will be asked to purchase the StoryCorps app and to interview at least three persons during the course of the semester. 10%

Final Essay: You will be asked to choose one of your creative responses and develop it into a full personal essay. After workshopping your piece and meeting with me, you will revise your essay. Include the original drafts I have marked with your revisions and a short reflection/contemplation regarding your work as a writer. 20%

Workshop Critiques: Our mission should be to help the writer achieve his or her goals. It's helpful for the writer to hear what we thought the story was trying to do and how and why (through examples from the text) we came to our conclusions. So, in the critique, you might begin with what you think the heart of the story is. What is the central tension in the story? Try to address three or four questions from the list below to support your critique. If you don't know where to begin, begin with what you think the piece is saying and go from there. Here are questions to consider from Andrew Stanton's Ted Talk "Clues to a Great Story."

1. Does the piece make me care? How?
2. Does it make a promise? What?

3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Stay away from what you like and what you didn't like and what you wanted. Please write a formal critique, not a letter. Critiques should be at least one page, single-spaced, 12-point font. It can be longer. Critiques should be posted by Sunday, August 5th to give writers time to revise. 25%

Mini-Workshops: Each module, students will be asked to read at least two creative responses written by their peers and respond briefly. 5%

Online Creative Journal: 15%
Online Critical Journal: 15%
Exercises: 10%
StoryCorps Interviews: 10%
Workshops: 25%
Final Essay: 20%
Mini-Workshops: 5%
Total: 100%

THE SYLLABUS

Define the Personal Essay

Module One

January 14-20, 2019

View: “The Clues to the Good Story,” Andrew Stanton, TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_stanton_the_clues_to_a_great_story

Read: “My Life in Black and White: Why Memoir is the Ultimate Multicultural Act,” Faith Adiele, YES! Magazine

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/america-the-remix/faith-adielle-my-life-in-black-and-white>

Write a creative response to the Adiele essay (always do the creative responses before the critical responses). Tell your story. Answer these questions 5th graders asked Adiele:

“Where exactly on the world map have you been?” they want to know. “How many islands have you visited? Have you taken a boat trip? What is your favorite place?”

Due January 20th @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Write a critical response to both the Stanton talk and the Adiele essay by answering the following questions:

1. What does Stanton mean when he says, “Storytelling is joke telling. Knowing your punchline, your ending. Knowing everything you’re saying from the first sentence to the last is leading to one singular goal, and ideally confirming some truth that deepens our understandings of who we are as human beings”?

2. How does the Adiele essay meet Stanton's criteria above?
3. What do you think Adiele means by the "intersection between story and reflection" in the following passage. And what does it mean to you to "democratize storytelling."

"I teach memoir, the intersection between story and reflection. What I love about memoir is that it democratizes storytelling. Official history is penned by power brokers, but the real stories are lived on the ground by ordinary folks. Memoir is the ultimate multicultural act.

4. Based on this module's essays, what do you think the personal essay is?

Due January 20th @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Two
January 21-27, 2019

Read: "Music and My Father," Gabrielle Bellot, [Lit Hub](https://lithub.com/music-and-my-father/)

<https://lithub.com/music-and-my-father/>

Write a creative response to the Bellot essay. Whose child were you?

Bellot's father had music. Can you talk about what your parent/elder had, if anything, like Bellot's father's music? Tell us about it.

Write a critical response to the Bellot essay by choosing at least three of Stanton's criteria and addressing those criteria. They are as follows:

1. Does the piece make me care? How?

2. Does it make a promise? What?
3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module One.

1. Does the piece make you care? How?
2. Does the piece make a promise? What?
3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

Due January 27th @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Reinventing the Self

Module Three

January 28-February 3, 2019

View: "If I should Have a Daughter," Sarah Kay, TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/sarah_kay_if_i_should_have_a_daughter

Read: "Prayer for the Dying," Edwidge Danticat

<https://lithub.com/edwidge-danticat-a-prayer-before-dying/>

Write a critical response to the Danticat essay by choosing at least three of Stanton's criteria and addressing those criteria:

- a. Does the piece make me care? How?
- b. Does it make a promise? What?
- c. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
- d. What drives the character (narrator)?
- e. Does the narrator change?
- f. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
- g. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
- h. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
- i. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Due February 3 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Complete the Kay exercise.

1. Write ten things you know to be true. (Do not over think.)
2. Write about being (insert your age here). How is it different than any other age you've ever been?

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Two.

1. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
2. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
3. Can you see this as a full-blown essay? What would you want to know?

Due February 3 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Four

February 4-10, 2019

Read: "I Had a Stroke at 33," Christine Hyung-Oak Lee, Buzz Feed

https://www.buzzfeed.com/xtinehlee/i-had-a-stroke-at-33?utm_term=.jvB4ga3XK#.cgxKqk9Ya

Write a creative response to the Hyung-Oak Lee essay.

Have you ever had a moment when your left brain and your right brain could not communicate? A moment of fog and confusion? Of not knowing where you were or who was around you? Describe that moment or imagine that moment, and use concrete images like the ones Hyung-Oak Lee uses to describe her experience of losing control.

"There was a cascade of input — triangles and sky and gravel sound and music on the radio and wind and the feeling of rough cloth near my hands. I could not make sense of it all; I did not know the small triangles were trees, the larger ones mountains, the sound tires crunching snow and Snow Patrol, the jacket Gore-Tex, and that my wrists were the things attached to things called my hands. They were colors and shapes and sound and touch and sensation and my brain was no longer sorting these things out. But when I saw the red snow blowers in the parking lot turned 90 degrees and doubled, I finally had a complete thought. I comprehended what I was seeing. Red snow blowers. Sideways. Strange.

That was what my stroke felt like: like I was separating from myself."

Due February 10th @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Write a critical response to the Hyung-Oak Lee essay.

Chose at least three (different than last's module's) criteria and addressing those criteria:

1. Does the piece make me care? How?

2. Does it make a promise? What?
3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Three.

1. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
2. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?
3. Is there are full essay here? Give the writer one suggestion to develop it.

Due February 10th @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Talking to your People-Interviews and Addresses

Module Five

February 11-17, 2019

View: "Everyone Around You Has a Story the World Needs to Hear," Dave Isay, TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/dave_isay_everyone_around_you_has_a_story_the_world_needs_to_hear

Read: "Why Your Mother Can't Drive," Cinelle Barnes, Buzz Feed

https://www.buzzfeed.com/cinellebarnes/why-your-mother-cant-drive?utm_term=.cc2nP5EWm&ref=mobile_share#.pgEbGKn3N

Write a creative response to the Barnes essay. Tell a memory to someone you love using second person address (the YOU form). See how Barnes writes her essay speaking to the daughter using the second person address.

Write a critical response to both the Isay TED talk and Barnes essay.

1. What do both of these pieces have to do with listening? With bearing witness? Based on these stories, please talk about the art of listening and also the art of conversation/interview.
2. What do you think about the four things Isay says people want to say to one another: Thank you, I love you, Forgive me, I forgive you?

Due February 17 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Download the StoryCorps app. Follow the prompts. Conduct one StoryCorps Interviews.

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Four.

1. Does the piece make you care? How?
2. Does the piece make a promise? What?
3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

Due February 17 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Six

February 18-24, 2019

Read: "The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma," Junot Diaz,

The New Yorker

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/04/16/the-silence-the-legacy-of-childhood-trauma>

Write a creative response to the Diaz essay. In this essay, Diaz makes himself vulnerable in this confession. Write a confession to a person in your past. Try to be as honest as you can. Take off the mask.

Write a critical response to the Diaz essay. Choose at least three criteria and address those criteria.

1. Does the piece make me care? How?
2. Does it make a promise? What?
3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Five.

1. Does the piece make you care? How?
2. Does the piece make a promise? What?
3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

Due February 24 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Conduct StoryCorps interview #2.

Due February 24 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

More Than One Story In the World

Module Seven

February 25-March 3, 2019

View: "The Danger of a Single Story." Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

Read: "An American Woman Quits Smiling," Lisa Ko, New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/21/opinion/sunday/an-american-woman-quits-smiling.html>

- * Write a creative response to the Ko essay. Talk about the history and practice of your smile. How does your smile define who you are? Do you think the practice of smiling is an American expectation as Ko writes?
- * Write a critical response to the Adiche TED talk. Please answer the following:
 1. What does Adiche mean by "a single story"?
 2. When you were growing up did people "like you" exist in literature? Please describe them and what you thought of them. If not, who did you see in literature? Describe them.
 3. What are the stereotypes about you and your culture? Adiche says stereotypes are not wrong, they're incomplete. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Due March 3 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Write a critical response to the Ko essay. Choose at least three criteria and address those criteria.

1. Does the piece make me care? How?
2. Does it make a promise? What?
3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Six.

1. Does the piece make you care? How?
2. Does the piece make a promise? What?
3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

Due March 3 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Eight

March 4-10, 2019

Read: "Undercover at the Miss Ex-Yugoslavia Pageant," Sofija Stefanovic,
Lit Hub

<https://lithub.com/undercover-at-the-miss-ex-yugoslavia-pageant/>

Write a creative response to the Stefanovic essay. In the essay she says:

“The idea of a beauty pageant freaks me out, and ex-Yugoslavia as a country is itself an oxymoron—but the combination of the two makes the deliciously weird Miss Ex-Yugoslavia competition the ideal subject for my documentary film class. I feel like a double agent. Yes, I’m part of the ex-Yugo community, but also I’m a cynical, story-hungry, Western schooled film student, and so I’ve gone undercover among my own people. I know my community is strange, and I want to get top marks for this exclusive glimpse within. Though I’ve been deriding the competition to my film-student friends, rolling my eyes at the ironies, I have to admit that at this pageant, and its resurrection of my zombie country, is actually poking at something deep.”

Can you think of a moment when you have gone undercover among your own people? Have you ever rolled your eyes at your community even as you are being drawn into the experience? Write about that moment.

Due March 10 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Write a critical response to the Stefanovic essay. Choose at least three criteria and address those criteria.

1. Does the piece make me care? How?
2. Does it make a promise? What?
3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?

9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Seven.

1. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
2. What drives the character (narrator)?
3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

Due March 10 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Conduct StoryCorps Interview #3 with a person outside of your experience (race, gender, religion, nationality for example).

Due March 10 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Heart Stories

Module Nine

March 11-17, 2019

View: "Tales of Passion," Isabel Allende, TEDTalk

https://www.ted.com/talks/isabel_allende_tells_tales_of_passion?referrer=playlist-how_to_tell_a_story&language=en

Read: "When War Destroyed My Grandmother's Grave," Dunya Mikhail, Lit Hub

<https://lithub.com/when-war-destroyed-my-grandmothers-grave/>

Write a creative response to the Mikail essay.

Mikail writes, "There is no book. There are stories we pass down from generation to generation." What are the stories passed down in your family? Who told them to you? In what context? Tell us the stories of the stories in your family and how you received them.

Due March 17 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Write a critical response to both the Allende TED talk and Mikhail essay.

1. Talk about the way passion works in these essays. Talk about the use of feminism to tell these stories.
2. What is your personal definition of passion and being passionate?
3. What is your definition of feminism and how does it work in your own life?

Due March 17 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Eight.

1. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
2. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

Due March 17 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Ten

March 18-24, 2019

Read: "My Family's Slave," Alex Tizon, The Atlantic

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/06/lolas-story/524490/>

Write a creative response to the Tizon essay. In Tizon's essay, he writes:

"We spent our first decade in the country trying to fit in. Having a slave did not fit. Having a slave gave me grave doubts about what kind of people we were, what kind of place we came from."

Is there a family secret in your life, one that appears to be the opposite value or truth that you would like the world to believe? One

that has caused you to doubt “what kind of people we were, what kind of place we came from”? Write about it.

OR

Write a personal response to Alex Tizon. How would you answer him if he were sitting with you, sharing this confession with you?

Due March 24 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Write a critical response to the Tizon essay. Choose at least three criteria and address those criteria.

1. Does the piece make me care? How?
2. Does it make a promise? What?
3. The Unifying 2+2 Theory: Does it make the audience work for their meal?
4. What drives the character (narrator)?
5. Does the narrator change?
6. Has the author constructed anticipation? How?
7. Has the author made the reader want to know how the story ends? How?
8. Is there a strong theme running through the story?
9. What (about the human experience) has the reader learned from the story?

Due March 24 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Respond to at least two peer creative responses from Module Nine.

1. What drives the character (narrator)?
2. Does the narrator change?

3. Can you imagine the writer developing this piece into a full-blown essay? How?

4.

Drafting and Developing Your Essay and Workshop

Module Eleven

March 25-31, 2019

Choose one of your creative responses or one of your Story Corps interviews and develop, draft, and submit a full personal essay. Your essay should be between 7-12 pages in length. Doubled spaced and 12-point font. In developing this essay please consider the criteria we've been working on all session.

Due March 31 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Twelve

April 1-7, 2019

Read at least two peer essays. Please post the titles of the essays you intend to read. This way we can make sure everyone has a reader. If the readings are not balanced, I might step in to reassign essays.

Write marginal notes and using Stanton's criteria write a critical response to two peer essays.

Due April 7 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Address your peer responses to your essay and revise.

Due April 7 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Thirteen

April 8-14, 2019

Choose one of your creative responses or one of your Story Corps interviews and develop, draft, and submit a full personal essay. Your essay should be between 7-12 pages in length. Doubled spaced and 12-point font. In developing this essay please consider the criteria we've been working on all session.

Due April 14 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Fourteen

April 15-21, 2019

Read at least two peer essays. Please post the titles of the essays you intend to read. This way we can make sure everyone has a reader. If the readings are not balanced, I might step in to reassign essays.

Write marginal notes and using Stanton's criteria write a critical response to two peer essays.

Due April 21 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Address your peer responses to your essay and revise.

Due April 21 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

Module Fifteen:

April 22-May 8, 2019

FINAL EXAM: Write a process letter and talk about your development as a writer of personal essays.

Due May 8 @ 11:59 p.m. EST

