

PROPOSAL FOR CREATIVE WRITING COURSE: SHAMELESS VOICES

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Course Description

Shameless Voices is a semester-long creative writing elective that follows the Shameless Voices pedagogy. It is designed to encourage first and second year students to discover the theory and craft of expressing themselves -- despite ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation -- without fear of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness or disgrace. The course consists of alternating classroom study and workshop writing production. Students meet two days a week: The first day is a one hour classroom study designed to reinforce basic writing skills, to introduce student writers to writing theory, the idea of dominant discourses, how to write effectively outside these discourses, and to consider how language is used to privilege some to speak while silencing others; The second day is a two hour workshop in which students become writers, readers and listeners. Theory and writing skills learned in the classroom are applied in the workshop according to the needs of the writer in order to build multiple portfolios of work, which will include their own free and guided writing, responses to other student writing, and disruptive collaborative continuations of other student works. The course has been structured in such a way as to work well for both real-time and online formats.

Goals of the Course

Throughout high school and the early years of college, students adopt learning patterns that have brought them success by understanding what the was teacher asking for and then reciting that material back in the teacher's format, and in many cases, the teacher's words. While such patterns work for many types of learning, the student's voice is often muted -- or mutated -- in order to demonstrate satisfactory accomplishment of the lesson. The goal of such learning is often less about what the

student thinks or how they could best express their learning than that they can regurgitate the required information back to the teacher in the appropriate format.

Shameless Voices seeks to disrupt this learning pattern by enabling the student to consider the current paradigms of language, what is expected of writers, those that are privileged and not privileged to speak. It further seeks to allow the student to adopt the role of a writer, to take command of language, to use it to make something they value instead of simply to try to say what they are required to say.

Students of Shameless Voices learn the art of listening by reading the works of other students, adopting these new voices and harmonizing them with their own.

Required Texts

Unlike traditional writing courses that provide samples of literary texts for students to analyze and emulate, Shameless Voices relies on texts designed to enable students to examine the perspectives from which they write, allowing them to determine how much their voices have been influenced by dominant discourses not their own, and to use this information to find their own unique voices as they see fit.

Classroom

- Colors of a Different Horse, Edited by Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom
- What Our Speech Disrupts, by Katharine Haake

- Queering Pedagogy in the English Classroom: Engaging with the Places Where Thinking Stops, by Amy E. Winans

These texts expose the student to theories of writing that exist outside their dominant discourses, compelling them to consider how language has influenced their points of view, and to write with voices that challenge or disrupt these points of view.

Workshop

There are no required texts for the workshop. This is purposeful, as Shameless Voices intends to enable students to consider language itself without superimposing ideas of what “good” writing should look like. Students will be strongly encouraged to find and speak in their own voices and with their own language without mimicking the voices of earlier literary writers.

Course Requirements

The following course work will be submitted by students for grading purposes, except where noted.

1. Writer's voice portfolio:
 - a) Minimum 30 pages of poetry, flash fiction (very short stories, 2000 words or less), short fiction;
 - b) A minimum of two revised texts, based on the responses of other students, that significantly

alters the reader's experience of the text.

- c) Minimum one paragraph of process writing for each writing assignment: What the student's thought process was, what they struggled with, what worked well.

2. Reader's voice portfolio:

- a) Essays in Modern Language Association (MLA) format in response to classroom discussions (ten essays, minimum two pages each).
- b) Responses to other student-writer work that describes reader's experience of the text. For reference, students will keep copies of responses to their work in their portfolios;
- c) Minimum 20 pages of continuations of other student work. Students will also receive copies of other students' continuations of their stories, to be kept in their portfolios for contrast.

3. Final Reading. Students will read two texts created in the course.

- a) An original revised work (minimum three pages) of the student's choosing;
- b) A revised collaborative piece, following the student who reads the original.

These assignments are designed to bring out a broad swath of writing in each student, spread throughout each portfolio:

- Essays are formatted in a structured way following standard rules and using themes that to new college students should be familiar territory. Meanwhile, student responses to text provide the opportunity to approach text as a reader. Responses are a proving ground for proper critique of other text, opening up fresh possibilities to students. Essays and responses allow the student to focus on the “why” of their writing.

- The guided and free writing exercises, on the other hand, provide much more freedom to the student. Such writing opens the student to expressing their ideas in ways they must become more comfortable without the constrictions of formatting or structure. This allows students to focus on the “what” of their writing.

- Finally, the continuation texts introduce new, perhaps uncomfortable, perspectives, to disrupt the student's normal discourse, with fresh themes, structures, rhythms and dialogue. Continuation focuses the student on the “who” of their writing.

Course Structure

The course begins with a lecture from the teacher on roles and responsibilities in the course, both the teacher's role and the students'. This first lecture must also include exactly what is expected of students and how they can expect to be evaluated. Tolerance, even empathy, of other points of view is required. The teacher must strive to maintain a community of open discussion and collaboration among the students without using this authority to influence student creative direction except to disrupt the students' dominant discourses. It is imperative for the teacher to establish early an environment of safety and trust in which students trust the teacher and each other as writers and readers. When dissenting points of view inevitably appear, they should be welcomed except at the expense of silencing others. Emotional discussions should never be moderated in terms of “right” and “wrong”, but of how language is used to influence an accepted discourse over a taboo one. Further, students should be encouraged to consider the voices in their stories and poetry from points of view where their accepted discourses are taboo and their taboo discourses are the norm.

Classroom

Class is one hour and begins with a discussion of essays from the textbooks. Students are expected to participate in discussions, generally 15 to 30 minutes long, of how their own writing is impacted by theories presented in the texts. Students then spend the remainder of the class writing short essays that summarize the discussion, highlighting their own thoughts on the subject. These short two to four page essays will be in MLA format and will require references from the required texts to reinforce student positions. These essays will act as a dialogue between teacher and student to consider the act of creative writing. Students are not required to share these essays with their peers.

Workshop

The bulk of writing, and reading, is done in the workshop. Students – now writers – are provided many opportunities for writing with the teacher using simple devices and exercises to stimulate writing.

For free writing, exercises include using music in foreign languages (that none of the students are able to speak) to listen to different voices without the structure of language to influence them. Students will also experiment with a modified “burrowing” exercises, an alternate form of automatic writing, from Katharine Haake's book. In this modified form, students are instructed to start with a sentence or phrase that moves them and burrow deeper into it. When writing stops, students should begin again immediately with a new phrase using a

new voice. Students will then read each other's work. This reading will result in three things:

1. A brief round table verbal discussion of the readers' experience with the text. The words, “like”, “hate”, “good” and “bad” are not permitted to describe the work. The writer is also permitted to speak, providing their intended perspective or other information as they see fit. The teacher should make it clear to readers that their objective is not to try to “fix” the text.
2. Written responses from each reader to the writer that describe their experience in more detail. These descriptions should allow the reader to tell the writer what impacted them, where the text took them, what was unclear, etc. Again, this response is not used to judge the quality of the text, but to interpret what the text meant to the reader. Copies of these responses will be shared with the original writer.
3. A continuation of the story or poem from each reader. Turning the tables, each reader now becomes a writer and continues the story from whatever point of view they see fit. The continuation can pick up from where the original left off, it can begin at the start from another character's (even a new character's) point of view, it can take place many hours, days, or years later or earlier. The only requirement is that the writer attempt to understand the story from the writer's point of view and use their own voice to continue it. Students will share a copy of continuations with the original writer.

Students will revise a minimum of two texts that they would like to spend time more on.

Using student responses as a beginning, writers will revise their texts with new perspectives,

points of view, and language, in an attempt to alter the reader's original experience. This alteration should be more than simply turning a happy ending into a sad one. Writers must use language to change how readers read the text.

Finally, students shall choose a revised original work and a revised continuation to read in the workshop.

Evaluation/Grading

Evaluation of Shameless Voices is based on standard letter grading. Students may not request pass/fail for this course. Grading will rely heavily, although not entirely, on a modified portfolio method. Successful students will end the course with a body of work that represents several voices, altered discourses, and enhanced perceptions of how their language shapes them and how they shape their language. There are three components to the student's final grade.

1. Writer' voice portfolio (45% of grade). Grade is based on:
 - Meeting the assignment requirements in a thoughtful way, including the minimum number of pages for each assignment; and
 - Radical revision in order to alter the reader's experience of at least two texts.
 - Providing the minimum one paragraph of process writing for each assignment.

2. Reader's voice portfolio (45% of grade). Grade is based on thoughtful:
 - Response of experience as reader to other student writer work that provides the writer with enough information to meaningfully alter their text;

- Essays discussing required reading and class discussion, using correct format, meeting minimum page count.
- Continuation of other student work that meets minimum page requirements.

3. Student participation (10% of grade)

- The Shameless Voices course cannot succeed without the involved participation of its writers and readers. Students are required to read a revised original work and a revised continuation of another student's work.

Opening Minds By Allowing Students to Speak with Shameless Voices

The Shameless Voices course serves its students by offering them the chance to examine the perspective from which they write and to decide for themselves whether they have been speaking with their own voices. It offers them the opportunity to use their voices – despite disparate ethnicities, genders, and even sexual orientations, to finally speak without fear of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness or disgrace.

Even for students who do not plan to go into the field of English studies or writing, Shameless Voices provides a fresh way of communicating that influences all types of writing, whether it is academic, research oriented, or conversational.

Every person should be entitled to know and speak with their Shameless Voices.