Syllabus

The objective of this course is to develop and deepen your writing of poetry through a two stage process: first, to encourage the habit of focusing mindfully on each of the five senses and, through that connection to body, to access the flow of energy that feeds and vivifies language; and second, to shape that language into sharable form by the practice of formal disciplines—the use of traditional meters, the sensitization to careless use of language, to cliché, to self-indulgent diction and to the loss of impact that results when emotion felt is confused with emotion communicated.

The creative writing assignments posted will amount to: (1) five poems-in-progress, one for each of the five senses; and (2) rewrites of at least two of those poems.

The critical reading assignments will be of two kinds: You will be expected to (1) post a signed response to two different colleagues’ work each week, for a total of ten responses; and (2) you will be expected to post a reaction/response to five of the readings from either the text on metrics or the poetry anthology.

A most important point: Everything we discuss is to be created for this class and is to be considered “work-in-progress” rather than finished product. This will make it easier for us to respond to a poem and offer suggestions than is possible when someone presents a piece he or she considers perfected. Even so, it is important to keep in mind that we are all sensitive about our art and that criticism can hurt. One of the things that most helps us as writers is simply to know whether our intentions are being perceived. For this reason, the most useful response that can be offered a poet often goes: “The way I understand what this poem is aiming for is such-and-such, and therefore I wonder what would happen if. . .” That more work is to be done should not dishearten us. A poem almost never pops out perfectly formed; sometimes it needs to be cajoled, tweaked into place; sometimes stronger measures are called for; often, of course, you have to be patient and let time explain what the poem needs.

The grade you receive in this class will be based on the percentage of the assigned work that you actually submit. Ninety percent (90%) or more will be an A, 80 to 89% will be a B, and so forth.

Required Texts


Recommended Texts
