Storytelling: Writing Techniques for Fiction and Nonfiction

Description: Whether you are writing fiction or nonfiction, story is a key part of prose. Story here is just another name for sequence and structure. Learning the right order for your sentences, paragraphs and pages is as important as putting one foot in front of the other when learning how to walk. We will explore how fiction devices work in nonfiction, and how nonfiction approaches feed fiction.


Specifics: This is a writing class and the emphasis will be on two original papers, one work of fiction and one of nonfiction, approximately ten pages or more. Since learning to write means learning to rewrite, you will do two drafts of each paper which will be workshopped in class. You will also write two short exercises as a way of exploring voice. All papers must be turned in on time, with a double-spaced copy given to the teacher and copies distributed to your fellow students to read.

Grading: The weight of the grade will depend on the four papers. However, class participation is important and will be 20 percent of your grade. More than three absences will reduce your grade.

Academic integrity: Any plagiarism in a paper will result in that paper being given an F. (Plagiarism is the unattributed use of sentences and paragraphs from other sources.) For further details, check the Gallatin Bulletin or website: (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)

Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1 (September 3)

Week 2 (September 10)
Writing assignment: A nonfiction anecdote, 1000 words. These will be read aloud and discussed in class.
Reading assignment: "Shooting an Elephant" and "Why I Write" by George Orwell.

Week 3 (September 17)
Reading assignment: First half of The Great Gatsby by Scott Fitzgerald.

Week 4 (September 24)
Writing assignment: a short fictional episode, 1000 words. These will be read aloud and discussed in class.
Reading assignment: the second half of Gatsby.

Week 5 (October 1)
Writing assignment: You will make a brief pitch for the long fiction piece you want to write for feedback and discussion.
Reading assignment: Aquamarine by Carol Anshaw.

Week 6 (October 8)
Writing assignment: First draft of long fiction piece. (The finished draft will be 3000 to 6000 words, but this can be much shorter.)
Reading assignment: The Unbearable Lightness of Being.

Week 7 (October 15)
Reading assignment: More Unbearable.

Week 8 (October 22)
Writing assignment: Second draft of fiction piece.
Reading assignment: For Rouenna.

Week 9 (October 29)
Reading assignment: "Reflections on Gandhi" and "Looking Back on the Spanish War" by George Orwell.
Writing assignment: You will present your ideas for your long nonfiction piece to the class for feedback and discussion.

Week 10 (November 5)
Writing assignment: First draft of long nonfiction. (As with the fiction piece, the final draft will be from 3000 to 6000 words, but the first draft can be much shorter.)
Reading assignment: Begin In the Freud Archives by Janet Malcolm
Week 11 (November 12)
Reading assignment: In the Freud Archives.

Week 12 (November 19)
Writing assignment: Second draft of nonfiction
Reading assignment: Begin Survival at Auschwitz by Primo Levi.

Thanksgiving holiday, November 26

Week 13 (December 3)
Writing assignment: We will finish reading and discussing the second drafts of your nonfiction essay.
Reading assignment: Survival in Auschwitz.

Week 14 (December 10)
Reading assignment: In Cold Blood by Truman Capote.