WAYS OF TELLING THE STORY (3020)

Kerry Reilly  
Office: TB1, room 8  
Phone: 2-3515  
E-mail: kerry.reilly@colorado.edu

YOU’LL NEED  
-A writer’s notebook (hard cover, preferably unlined)  
-The Collected Works of Billy the Kid by Michael Ondaatje  
-The Next American Essay, edited by John D’Agata

WRITING  
-You will be creating several different types of pieces in this class.  
-Approximately every third week, I will give you a writing assignment that you will hand in.  
-Unless I specify otherwise, everything you hand in should be typed, double-spaced, approximately five pages.  
-If you are having trouble making five pages, spin off into another related topic in an accompanying piece.  
-You will revise these pieces and perhaps add some of them to your final portfolio.

WORKSHOPS  
Because I think it is important for everyone to give and have plenty of feedback, we will have several in-class workshops. I will divide you into groups and you will exchange pieces with your group members. The next class, you will come with written comments on the essays of all your group members and you will discuss the pieces one at a time. We’ll talk about different ways to give feedback.

READING DISCUSSIONS  
Each of you, along with a partner, will be responsible for leading a class discussion on a chapter from The Collected Works of Billy the Kid or an essay from The Next American Essay. More on this later.

READING RESPONSES  
In your journal and sometimes to be handed in, you will write a reaction/imitation/homage to every assigned reading. Imitate the style of the author, write about a similar topic, or do whatever the piece inspires you to do. Also, if it’s not obvious, you must explain how your work relates to the assigned reading. Many times over the course of the semester, you will all read these aloud.
MULTI GENRE PROJECT
Over the course of the semester, you will study a writer of your choice. I will give you more detailed instructions about this in a few weeks. The first step, though, is choosing a writer. In a few days, I will pass out a list of pre-approved writers. If you want to study someone that is not on the list, please let me know. And if you are having trouble choosing a writer, let me know and I can help you. Your writer may be a nonfiction writer, a poet, or a fiction writer. Although this is a nonfiction writing course, you may study other genres because you may use some of the same techniques in nonfiction writing.

Choose someone you admire. Choose someone whose words inspire you. Choose someone who is writing today. (Not Edgar Allen Poe. Not Hemingway. Not Shakespeare.) Choose someone you have not studied in depth before. I would also like you to stay away from ‘popular’ writers like John Grisham and Danielle Steele.

Because this is a course about “ways of telling the story,” you will use your author and what he or she writes about as a springboard to create your own mix of responses in a variety of genres and forms. Sometimes, I will give you specific assignments. Other times, you are free to explore in any genre you choose. You might want to write an editorial, a book review, create a painting, a drawing, a sculpture. You may choose to take photographs or make collages, write a poem about your topic, a series of journal entries, letters, or bumper sticker slogans you invent based on your research and thoughts. Write a scene. Make a list. Create a soundtrack. Write a few paragraphs that explain why you are drawn to your author. Write haiku, found poems, anything you can dream up.

At the end of the semester, you will write a piece in which you reflect on what you have been doing all semester. Look critically at each piece you have done. What have you learned by looking at your topic from different angles? What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing in certain genres? What is gained by each and what is lost? What have you “figured out?” What gives you trouble?

The last week of class, each of you will present your project to the class.

WRITER’S NOTEBOOK
Your notebook will become a record of your thoughts, a place to record close readings of the world, and a sourcebook for essays. I encourage you to carry your notebook with you as much as possible. I will frequently ask you to do writing exercises in your writer’s notebook and to read sections of your choice aloud from it. I won’t collect your notebooks, though. I would not want anyone to read mine, so I feel strongly about not reading yours.

CLASS PARTICIPATION
It is very important for everyone to speak in class. If you are shy or just quiet, I urge you to push yourself. Usually, the more you speak up, the more comfortable you become
doing so. Be careful not to monopolize the discussion, though. A balanced approach is best. Also, I encourage you to speak to each other rather than directing everything to the “teacher.”

CONFERENCES
At least once during the semester, I will meet with each of you to discuss your work.

ATTENDANCE AND PREPAREDNESS
- It is important to be in class during every session. If you are absent more than twice, your grade will drop a letter with each additional absence.
- If you are not in class, it is your responsibility to get the phone number or e-mail address of one of your classmates so you may contact him or her about missed work.
- I generally do not accept late or incomplete work.
- You will be penalized for chronic lateness; try to be here on time.
- I will not accept multiple page assignments that are not stapled or fastened with a paper clip. Buy a box of paper clips or carry a stapler in your backpack.

FINAL PORTFOLIO
(20-30 pages of your best work from the semester)

Must include:
- at least two essays
- at least two reading responses
- letter which guides me through your portfolio

(Some of the following prompts might help you get started:
Introduce and critique each piece. Why did you include the ones you did? Is the order of your portfolio significant? I would like you look at your writing through the eyes of a writer. Do you notice common themes in your work? Comment on your writing style. How has your writing developed? Perhaps talk about your mentor. What has effected you as a writer? Your classmates’ work and comments? Readings from the packet? Writing and reading you have done outside of class? Include anything else you might want to say/add.)

May include:
- additional essays
- additional reading responses
- in-class exercises and journal entries
- any text you have created as part of the Multigenre Project

PLAGIARISM
Plagiarism is defined as the use of another’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement. If you hand in a piece of work that contains plagiarism, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment and perhaps even the course. Also, I will not accept papers that you have written for other courses.