

Creative Writing
Semester(s), Spring SP17
Credits: 3
Major Disciplines: Creative Writing
Program: European Humanities
Faculty Member: Liz Jensen
Location: F24-402
Meeting Time: Thursdays, 11:40 – 14:35

Course description

Develop your storytelling and writing skills in a series of inspiring brainstorming sessions, exercises and workshops. With emphasis on the playful generation of dynamic new ideas and material, this class will explore the technical challenges of different literary forms and genres, and address the practical issues of drafting and fine-tuning fiction.

In weekly double sessions, we will focus on the nuts and bolts of committing imaginative ideas to the page. The class will learn some of the essentials of the writer's toolkit and experiment with different forms of writing. Themed sessions will include genre, setting and world-building, story structure, characterization, dialogue, and editing.

Learning objectives of the course

In this hands-on, practical class, you will learn how to craft your observations and ideas into compelling, informative stories and narratives structured to appeal to many types of readers. Through reading the work of acclaimed writers you will expand your knowledge of the different fiction genres, learn to analyze and discuss what challenges and inspires you, and begin to apply what you learn to your own creative output.

The workshop format involves class discussions and writing exercises, as well as analysis of published work from a range of American and international authors with a strong focus on the contemporary. There will be an emphasis on learning and applying the editorial process in a dynamic and collaborative group.

Course Instructor

Liz Jensen has a BA and MA in English Language and Literature from Somerville College Oxford (1982) and is a Fellow of Britain's Royal Society of Literature. She is the author of eight novels, including *Ark Baby*, *The Rapture* and *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*.
www.lizjensen.com

Contacts

Matt Kelley

Program Assistant, European Humanities Department

Goals

- To develop a toolkit of basic craft techniques with a view to improving your creative writing skills.
- To discover new writers and learn techniques from them.
- To enhance your imaginative drive and learn the “habit of art”.
- To learn the conventions of good writing, and how and when to break with those conventions.
- To develop a portfolio of work that draws on both your imaginative journeys and real-life experiences, deploying observation, description, and reflection.
- To learn to critique your own work and that of others effectively and constructively, and to master fundamental editing techniques.

Expectations

I expect you to read widely and to come to class prepared with questions, ideas, and energy. In class, you must be ready to tackle short, on-the-spot writing assignments and to actively engage in stimulating discussion. Regardless of whether the work under consideration is by an established writer or a fellow student, I expect you to read it closely and to share your thoughts intelligently. I expect you to attend all classes and turn in assignments on time, to learn the lessons of the constructive feedback you receive and to incorporate your technical discoveries into future work.

Policies

Attendance – You must attend all DIS classes when scheduled. Absences will affect your grade and your standing at DIS. Allowances will be made in cases of illness, but in the case of multiple absences you will need to provide a doctor’s note.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and Violating the Rules of an Assignment DIS expects that students abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic work. DIS assumes that all students do their own work and credit all work or thought taken from others. Academic dishonesty will result in a final course grade of “F” and can result in dismissal. The students’ home universities will be notified. DIS reserves the right to request that written student assignments be turned in electronic form for submission to plagiarism detection software. See the *Academic Handbook* for more information, or ask your instructor if you have questions.

Disability and Resource Statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should immediately contact Office of Academic Support (acadsupp@dis.dk) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations.

Opportunities

Our class will hold a public reading at the end of the semester to showcase some of its best work. All students will submit a piece of fiction: this will count towards your final participation grade.

Readings

Please read *The Elements of Style* by William Styron and *Nothing* by the Danish writer Janne Teller. The weekly readings are listed under Files in Canvas: these may change from those indicated on the syllabus, but you will be pre-warned. You will also be asked to choose texts– either from the list or your own reading – to share and present in class.

Evaluation

You will write three complete pieces of fiction over the course of the semester, all of which will be work-shopped, revised, and turned in for a final grade. You are encouraged to bring in additional new work, generated across the semester, to read aloud for class feedback and appreciation. **You may submit up to three of these to contribute to your participation grade. One of these may also be submitted to the end-of-semester showcase.**

Please submit your three works in a clearly-marked Word document on the date required. **The file title must include your name, the nature of the assignment (ie draft or final version), and a title.** Send to *direct* Liz.Jensen@rocketmail.com

The grade breakdown is as follows:

<i>Assignment 1</i>	15 %
2 pages of fiction or a long poem	
<i>Assignment 2</i>	20%
A 4-page story or scene	
<i>Assignment 3</i>	35%
A 7 page piece of fiction	
<i>Participation</i>	30%

Field trip 1: (Wednesday 22 February, 8:30 – 12:30) Observational visit plus writing assignment. Bring notebooks and cameras.

Field trip 2: (Wednesday 19 April, 13:00 – 17:00) Visit to the Danish publishing house Gyldendal, with a talk from a literary editor and two Danish writers. Preparation: from the library or online, find and read a Danish story/novel/poem translated into English and prepare relevant questions.

COURSE PLAN

Thursday January 19th

Session 1, SAYING HELLO

Introduction to the course framework, and a discussion of media sources and literary genres. Exercises in punctuation and observation.

Preparation: Stephen King, *On Writing* and Rebecca Solnit, *10 Tips for Writers*

Thursday January 26th

Session 2, Character Part One: Creating an imaginary person

First-person characterization. Observation continued: the telling detail.

Preparation: Vu Tran, *Dragonfish*, and Janne Teller, *Nothing*

Thursday February 2nd

Session 3, Character Part Two: Point of View

Discussion of the first versus third person and dialogue exercises.

Introduction to the editing process and workshopping Work One.

Preparation: *The Creative Writing Coursebook*: Julia Bell (p164-167); *A A Manual for Cleaning Woman*, Lucia Berlin

Sunday 5 February deliver work One, Draft One.

Thursday 16th February

Session 4, WHEN AND WHERE

How to build worlds by evoking time and place in fiction.

Preparation: Kim Leine, *The Prophets of Eternal Fjord*, Hong Ying, *Daughter of the River*/Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Due date for final version of Work One.

Wednesday February 22, am: FIELD TRIP focusing on OBSERVATION. Bring notebooks and cameras.

Thursday February 23rd

Session 5, Character Part Three: Motivation

What does my character want?

The second person: discussion and exercises. Planning Work Two.

Preparation: Carsten Jensen, *We, The Drowned*; Lionel Shriver: *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

Thursday March 9th

Session 6, Show, Don't Tell

Bring smart-phones/recording devices for dialogue exercises.

Workshopping work two

Preparation: *The Shawshank Redemption*,

Thursday March 16th

Session 7: structuring a story and building scenes

Scene-building and the narrative arc: group brainstorming.

Workshopping work 2

Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* and Robert McKee, *Story*,

Frank Darabont, *The Shawshank Redemption*

Friday March 17th Deliver Work Two draft One

Thursday March 30th

Session 8: Workshopping

Friday March 31st Deliver Final Draft Work Two

Thursday April 6th

Session 9

Guest visit (T.B.A)

Preparation: Go to the library and discover a Scandinavian writer in translation. Bring an excerpt to share in class.

Planning Work Three

Wednesday April 19 (pm) Field trip to a Danish publisher

Thursday April 20th

Session 10: What if?

Speculative fiction: how far can you go?

Preparation: Jennifer Egan, *Black Box* and Amitav Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*

Thursday April 27th

Session 11: The Editing Process: Killing your Darlings

Discussion and exercises

Workshopping and Editing Work Three and other peoples' work

Preparation:

Raymond Carver edited by Gordon Lish

31 April deliver final version of Work Three

Thursday May 4th – Saying Goodbye

Session 12: Endings, conclusions and taking your work to the next stage

Preparation: bring a favorite piece of work to read aloud, or a favorite from the selection on Canvas or your own library. Class party.