Anita Mir

A passionate enquiry begins with something one loves. Writers, like all craftspeople, learn by attending to the best work in their field and by practising their skills. By studying classical Greek and other myths, Joseph Campbell’s ideas on universal story structures, superhero and Bible stories, we will learn how stories are built. We will then analyse great literature and ‘Harry Potter’ (笑脸) to see how other people employ these ideas. Throughout, we will practise how to observe, listen and analyse better as a first step to writing better, all the while using London as our sensory playground.

Each week we will do in-class story exercises- either individually or collectively. This class is not, however, structured as a workshop. I don’t therefore, ask students to comment on each others’ work; though, when we arrive at a state of comfort with one another, I do encourage collaboration and the sharing of work.

Each class begins with a short recap and recall session. The short term purpose of this is to prepare you for the class test towards the end of the term. The long term purpose of this is to strengthen your memory muscles and learn how the telling of a story can make things memorable.

Students’ final submission can be either a fiction piece or a piece of creative non-fiction

What you will learn:

1. How to develop a story muscle
2. How to work in diffuse thinking (intuitive) mode and how and when to switch to rational thinking mode
3. How to switch off/get in the zone for writing
4. How to analyse motivation
5. How to remember better by visualising- using stories- to recall what you learn  
   (Points 2-5 are transferrable skills which you can use in your other studies and in the workplace)
6. Why and how myth is at the heart of storytelling
7. The value of symbols (Both points 6-7 are important not just for literature students but for Business ones as well, as symbols and myth are at the heart of marketing- think of Nike-the goddess of victory and the tick symbol; Apple’s bitten apple- the tree of knowledge, but also temptation)
8. How to analyse texts as a would be writer: looking for dramatic turns, examining motivation, contradictions, and of course, how writers use/play with language
And, of course, how to write better

You may be:

1. Someone who wants to learn/extend their practice of the craft of writing
2. A literature major who wants to enhance his/her analytical skills of literary texts
3. Someone who wants to write more felt/dramatic/structured academic writing assignments (all writers-fictional, factual, academic, bloggers- use the same tool box)
4. A Business major who understands that creating/building a business is also about telling good stories; someone who is interested in better understanding what motivates people or someone who wants to learn maverick mode thinking, what it is and how to do it

Course outline

Week 1:

Introduction

What we are doing and why: Myths, fairy-stories and legitimate stealing. Themes, structure, questions

How a pro does it. Class analysis of an Angela Carter short story

Writing exercise: Watching/writing yourself

Required reading: At least, the first twenty pages of Sam Selvon’s *Lonely Londoners*

Week 2:

Class trip: Cinema trip

Week 3:

Real vs fake voices; One London or many?

Setting the scene. Brief history of London. Place as a setting; place as a character

Analysis of Selvon’s novella and analysis of the film

Introduction to diffuse/creative thinking. First steps.

Required reading: The first chapter, ‘Myth and Dream’ of Joseph Campbell’s in ‘The Hero with a Thousand Faces’.

Submission: First piece of writing by Sunday midnight -5%
Week 4:

The magic of myth

Recap and recall

Introduction to the Pomodoro technique, or writing to the command of a chicken egg timer.

Analysis of Campbell’s chapter and class analysis of a poem in Ted Hughes’ version of ‘Metamorphoses’

Mapping the hero’s journey and thinking of tragedy as the inverse of the hero’s journey

Collective story exercise: Story cubes.

Required reading: ‘King Lear’ or ‘Macbeth’

Week 5

The big bang theory

Why begin with a big bang? Learning tempo from Shakespeare and Alfred Hitchcock

An analysis of either Lear or Macbeth and watching the opening of Vertigo and analysing its mechanics

The overlapping of private and public worlds; words of love, words of insult. Who to believe: the world or yourself?

Collective story exercise: Big openings

Required preparation for a class presentation pitch, subverting a myth: using Greek, superhero or any religious texts.

Week 6

Presentations

Recap and recall

Class presentations -5%

Required reading: Penelope Fitzgerald’s The Blue Flower
Week 7

Softly, softly

How do slow burning narratives work?

Analysis of *The Blue Flower*

Collective story exercise using your ITunes/Spotify playlist

MID-TERM BREAK: March 5-9

Week 8

Class trip to the Wellcome Gallery

Submission: 2nd piece of writing by Sunday midnight -5%

Week 9

Shields and Achilles’ heels

Recap and recall

Analysis of the class trip. In creating a story, a life, where to begin: with a sensory impulse or research? Looking at entries and exits.

Examining heroes’ strengths and weaknesses using Jung’s archetypes

Required reading: John le Caree’s novella, *The honourable schoolboy*

Week 10

Secrets, and why they are the making of a story

Recap and recall.

Analysis of John le Caree’s novella

Collective writing exercise: And then…Using the power of improve to keep things going

Submission: 3rd piece of writing by Sunday midnight-5%
Week 11

**Class trip:** Harry Potter walk

**Required recall:** ‘Harry Potter’. Any chapters you choose.

Week 12

**Orphans and other outsiders**

Recap and recall

Analysis of Harry Potter and themes of children’s/ YA literature

Class writing exercise: Off the page with Tarot cards

**Required reading:** Either several chapters of Neil Gaiman’s *Stardust* or Douglas Adams’ *Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy*

Week 13

**Crazy people, crazy worlds**

Analysis of the Gaiman or Adams

Writing exercise: Making unexpected things happen

Week 14

**Class test**

And one-to-ones with students to discuss their final submissions

Week 15

**To posterity and beyond**

Sharing our work with one another

Recording a podcast of our work

Have a listen to our earlier work:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4xjgw2Tz4M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4xjgw2Tz4M)
and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q21bYdgzDDQ

and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zorJ2joE4MM

Use of non-material texts:
By all means, read books/texts online and bring in your laptops and other devices to class.

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend every class of every course for which they are registered. Each class meeting has its own dynamics and provides a unique opportunity for learning. While acknowledging the critical importance of class attendance, the institution also recognizes that there are times when absence from class is unavoidable. Absences for reasons of religious holidays, serious illness, death in the student’s immediate family, or required participation in a University sponsored event are, with the appropriate documentation permitted and students will be given an opportunity to make up class examinations or other graded assignments. Faculty members are under no obligation to allow makeup work for any other absences. All faculty must include their attendance policy in the course syllabus distributed at the first course meeting. Information is to include whether and how absences will affect the student’s grade for the course. Students are responsible for keeping a record of their own absences. While students may consult the instructor about their record of attendance, the instructor is the final judge of that record.

If a student has been absent for more than two classes during the term, the Office of the Assistant Head of the London Centre for Academics may notify the appropriate class dean of the student’s home school as well as the ISAP Office. In cases where unusual circumstances cause a student to miss a significant amount of class time for reasons beyond the student’s control, the student should confer with the faculty member and the Assistant Head of the London Centre for Academics to ascertain if it is feasible to complete the work of the course. The Office of the Assistant Head of the London Centre for Academics will notify the appropriate class dean of the student’s home school as well as the ISAP Office.

Office hours:

My office hours are the morning prior to our class and Monday mornings. Please e-mail to schedule a time: amir2@fordham.edu

If you’d prefer to talk on the phone my number/WhatsApp number is: 07951464449
Assessment:

Students need not be literature students but they should have a yen for writing or a strong desire to try. I will send you writing prompts after each class based on our readings and discussions. You may choose to use them or not use them. The more you write, the stronger your writing will be.

You are required to submit three pieces and make a class presentation. This is in order to see where strengths and weaknesses lie, and what needs to be improved. From this work I will be able to tell you—by mid-term—where your grades stand at this moment in time.

Grade breakdown

The three class papers and one presentation will make up 20% of your final grade (5% for each exercise)

Weightage: The first three assignments are only weighed as 5% each so that you can practice your craft and learn from comments. These first three submissions need not be long. Some students believe that the longer their final piece, the higher their grades will be. This is not true. Your work will be graded on quality not length.

And because this course begins with the premise that you must know in order to do, there will be a test on the texts we are studying.

- This will be on the thematic issues we have discussed and will be worth 20% of the final grade
- A final essay of 2,500 + words will make up the remaining 60%. This will be in a few days before our last class in order to give me time to edit the stories for publication. Students can submit a final creative writing piece, an academic article or a journalistic piece. The rubric for academic writing is the same as it is for your other academic subjects. The rubric for creative writing pieces is below.

Creative Writing Rubric: Criteria for Grading Creative Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D / F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning/Content</strong>: the extent to which the assignment exhibits sound understanding/interpretation/analysis</td>
<td>Establishes strong plot/setting/character/pt. of view</td>
<td>Establishes plot/setting/character/pt. of view</td>
<td>Some elements of story structure; little blending of dialogue and narration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Story Structure** | Establishes complex characters through dialogue, narration and action | Develops characters through dialogue, narration and action | Some character development | Characters are not developed |

| **Characterization** | Develops ideas clearly and fully; uses a wide range of relevant details | Develops ideas clearly; uses relevant details | Develops ideas briefly; uses some detail | Uses incomplete or undeveloped details |

| **Development**: the extent to which ideas are elaborated, using specific and relevant evidence | | | |

| **Ideas** | | | |
### Organization: the extent to which the assignment exhibits direction, shape, and coherence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designing Organization</th>
<th>Maintains a clear focus; exhibits a logical, coherent structure through appropriate transitions</th>
<th>Maintains a clear focus; exhibits a logical sequence of ideas through appropriate transitions</th>
<th>Establishes but does not always maintain an appropriate focus; some inconsistencies in sequence of ideas</th>
<th>Lacks an appropriate focus, but suggests some organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific Assignment Directions</td>
<td>Exceeds all requirements specified for this assignment</td>
<td>Meets all requirements specified for this assignment</td>
<td>Meets some of the requirements specified for this assignment</td>
<td>Meets few/no requirements specified for this assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Language Use: the extent to which the assignment reveals an awareness of audience and purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Creative, concrete language; uses literary devices and rich sensory detail</th>
<th>Assignment uses concrete language, literary devices, and sensory detail</th>
<th>Some use of concrete language, literary devices, and sensory detail in assignment</th>
<th>Little use of concrete language, literary devices or sensory detail in assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>Uses sophisticated precise vocabulary</td>
<td>Effective word choices</td>
<td>Some effective word choices</td>
<td>Few effective word choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Variety</td>
<td>Well-varied sentence structure throughout</td>
<td>Good sentence structure and variety</td>
<td>Occasional use of sentence variety</td>
<td>Little sentence variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice/Sense of Audience</td>
<td>Unique voice; strong sense of audience</td>
<td>Evident awareness of voice and audience</td>
<td>Some awareness of voice and audience</td>
<td>Mechanical/unsuitable voice; unaware of aud.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conventions: the extent to which the assignment exhibits conventional grammar/spelling/word usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammar/Punctuation</th>
<th>Smooth, fluid error-free punct./grammar</th>
<th>Mostly correct grammar; errors do not interfere with communication</th>
<th>Errors occasionally interfere with communication; verb tense errors</th>
<th>Grammatical errors are awkward and interfere with communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spelling and Word Usage</td>
<td>Correct spelling; error-free word usage</td>
<td>Mostly correct spelling and word usage</td>
<td>Errors in spelling and word usage</td>
<td>Misspelled and misused words throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall assignment presentation</td>
<td>MLA heading; unique title; professional presentation</td>
<td>MLA heading; appropriate title; neat presentation</td>
<td>Incomplete heading; average title/presentation</td>
<td>No heading/title; no attention to presentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>