



Introduction to Poetry: Voices, Rhythms, and Visions of Chicago

Second City. City of the Big Shoulders. Pulse of America. Chi-beria. These words have all been used to describe the third most populous city in the United States: Chicago, IL. In this course, we will trace a history of poets from the early 20th century up to the present day who were born in, immigrated to, spent significant periods of time in, or were otherwise strongly influenced by the city of Chicago. Readings will include selections of poems from the following texts: Carl Sandburg's *Chicago Poems* (1916), Gwendolyn Brooks's *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make* (1951), Stuart Dybek's *Brass Knuckles* (1979), Ana Castillo's *Women Are Not Roses* (1984), Sandra Cisneros's *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987), Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai's *Infinity Breaks* (2007), Nate Marshall's *Wild Hundreds* (2015), Chance the Rapper's *Coloring Book* (2016), Daniel Borzutzky's *The Performance of Becoming Human* (2016), Mayda Del Valle's *The University of Hip-Hop* (2017), Eve Ewing's *Electric Arches* (2017), José Olivarez's *Citizen Illegal* (2018), and Fatimah Asghar's *If They Come for Us* (2018). The architecture, streets, music and arts scenes, politics, and people of Chicago have inspired countless writers to creatively represent the complexity of this city's voices and rhythms. In this course, we will ask ourselves some guiding questions to help focus our readings: What does it mean to be a "Chicagoan" and how can we begin to define what "Chicago poetry" is? How have poets used their Chicago roots or connections to create a broader, more universal vision of themselves and their communities? Why is poetry as a literary and artistic form an effective and powerful means of representing all the beauties, problems, conflicts, or harmonies of a city? Substantial attention will be paid to how communities of color—represented by African American, Chicana/o, Chinese-Taiwanese-American, Puerto Rican, and Pakistani-Kashmiri-American poets and sound artists—have experienced Chicago or sought to depict their worldview through the spoken and written word.

Course Objectives

The aim of this course is to help you become a better reader, writer, and critical thinker. To that end, the specific objectives we will focus on throughout include:

1.) Reading actively. You are encouraged to take informal notes as you read the texts on our syllabus. What do you find most interesting, thought-provoking, or confusing about the poems? What questions do you have? Is there any particular passage of the text you would like to look at more carefully in class? Why did that moment stand out to you?

2.) Engaging in lively discussion of the assigned readings. This entails offering your thoughts on the texts during our class sessions *and* listening respectfully to the ideas of your peers.

3.) Developing your writing and argumentation skills. Throughout the course, we will conduct in-class exercises in order to practice the essential skills that go into constructing strong and compelling pieces of writing, including close reading, argumentation, organization, and style. As your final assignment, you will be composing a short essay that asks you to develop an original thesis statement, use appropriate textual evidence from the poem(s) of your choosing to support your argument, and compose clear, well-organized sentences and paragraphs.

Formal Assignments

- 1.) One-paragraph proposal for final paper (due week 3, April 17th)
- 2.) Four- to five-page final paper (due week 5, May 1st)
- 3.) Five-minute oral presentation (due week 6, May 8th)

(more detailed instructions will be provided in advance of each assignment's due date)

Classroom Expectations

- 1.) Have all the readings completed before the class session for which they are assigned.
- 2.) Bring your course handouts with you to every class.
- 3.) Listen attentively when your Instructors and peers are speaking.
- 4.) Be prepared to participate in an engaged and respectful manner with questions, comments, and responses to your peers.
- 5.) Complete all in-class exercises and hand in assignments on their due dates.

Special Note

Giving voice to your own thoughts and having conversations with one another will undoubtedly help you to gain a better understanding of the texts discussed in this course. This is a welcoming space to experiment with your approach to spoken dialogue, analysis, and interpretation. Feel free to share bold or unusual ideas, disagree with a viewpoint that differs from your own, and develop your own personalized readings. There is no such thing as a stupid comment or question!

Northwestern Prison Education Program
Instructors: Anne Boemler & Maria Dikcis
Spring 2019

Northwestern Certificate

To earn a Northwestern certificate for your participation in this class, you must attend all six sessions, complete all in-class exercises, turn in your paper proposal in week 3 and final paper in week 5, and present your final oral presentation in week 6. Students who have one absence from class will be allowed to make up missed work in accordance with the Instructors' directions. If you are not able to complete all assignments and attend five of the six sessions, you will not receive the Northwestern certificate, but you are still very welcome to participate in this course as much as you are able.

Schedule

Week 1, April 3rd--Skill: Principles of Poetry

- Carl Sandburg, *Chicago Poems* (1916): Chicago; Masses; The Harbor; They Will Say; Halsted Street Car; Graceland; The Right to Grief; Working Girls; Dynamiter
- Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945): kitchenette building; southeast corner; a song in the front yard; when you have forgotten Sunday: the love story; at the hairdresser's; QUEEN OF THE BLUES

Week 2, April 10th--Skill: Close Reading

- Nelson Algren, *Chicago: City on the Make* (1951): Preface; The hustlers; Notes
- Stuart Dybek, *Brass Knuckles* (1979): Vivaldi; Brass Knuckles; Orpheus; In the Basement; Dreams
- Ana Castillo, *Women Are Not Roses* (1984): An Idyll; And All Octobers Become One; From "A Letter to Alicia"; The Invitation; 1975; and El Ser Mujer
- Sandra Cisneros, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987): Preface; South Sangamon; My Wicked Wicked Ways; Six Brothers; Letter to Jahn Franco—Venice; Amé, Amo, Amaré

Week 3, April 17th--Skill: Argumentation

- Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai, *Infinity Breaks* (2007): Wai-Puo; Little Red Books; Lili's Hands; Aftershocks; University
- Chance the Rapper, *Coloring Book* (2016): All We Got; Summer Friends; Blessings; Same Drugs; How Great
- Mayda Del Valle, *The University of Hip-Hop* (2017): Chicago, c. 1993; In the Cocina; Why You Talk Like That?; This is How the City Began to Slip

DUE: Final paper proposals (one paragraph)

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Week 4, April 24th--Skill: Organization

- Nate Marshall, *Wild Hundreds* (2015): Harold's Chicken Shack #1; palindrome; Mama Says; Alzheimer's; On being called a n----- in Ann Arbor, MI, on South University Street by a drunk ticket scalper; pallbearers
- Daniel Borzutzky, *The Performance of Becoming Human* (2016): THE PERFORMANCE OF BECOMING HUMAN; THE GROSS AND BORDERLESS BODY; LAKE MICHIGAN MERGES INTO THE BAY OF VALPARAISO, CHILE; LAKE MICHIGAN, SCENE #X1C290.341AB3DY
- Eve Ewing, *Electric Arches* (2017): foreword; A note of introduction; the first time [a re-telling]; Sestina with Matthew Henson's Fur Suit; another time [a re-telling]; why you cannot touch my hair; Chicago is a chorus of barking dogs

Week 5, May 1st--Skill: Style

- José Olivarez, *Citizen Illegal* (2018): Mexican Heaven (both); Ode to Cheese Fries; Hecky Naw; Mexican American Disambiguation; and Interview
- Fatimah Asghar, *If They Come for Us* (2018): Partition; *How We Left*: Film Treatment; Microaggression Bingo; Ghareeb; If They Come For Us

DUE: Final papers (four to five pages)

In-class poetry writing workshop

Week 6, May 8th--Skill: Oral Presentation

DUE: Final Presentations (five minutes)

Poetry readings by guest speakers Nate Marshall and Daniel Borzutzky

Course Evaluations