

SANDRA BEASLEY – SEMINARS AND LECTURES

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*All seminars include handouts, and can be tailored to specific needs of the group.
Pacing can usually be adapted for 50-minute, 90-minute, or 120-minute presentations.*

“Commanding the Stage”

This seminar offers primer of tips for effective public speaking and reading, including aspects of physical posture and gesture, eye contact, and vocal projection. We will discuss how to interpret text and shape reception by your audience, using examples from American poetry and oratory. Participants will practice delivery via a partnering exercise. *This presentation can be used with those studying outside the disciplines of literature.*

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“Heart, Tongue, Home: Poems of Origin”

A poem is a powerful way to capture a story—the family that anchors you, the places you have been, and where you are going now. Poets use bright images and sound-play to bring those experiences to life on the page. We will read an array of contemporary poems, including George Ella Lyons’ “Where I’m From,” and then work to create poems of our own that give a sense of our heritage, language traditions, and origin stories. *This presentation is welcoming to those who do not regularly read or write poetry.*

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“Someone Else’s Shoes: Playing with Persona”

Drawing from the well of the writer’s life is a wonderful practice—and at times, a tiring one. What about writing what you *don’t* know? Looking at poems with unconventional points of view, from a lonely mirror to an angry yak, we’ll explore inhabiting another perspective for the length of a poem, and get ready to write your own persona poem. *This presentation has versions calibrated for high school, college, and adult audiences.*

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“The Art of the Revision Process”

Once past that first rush of inspiration, it can be hard to get excited about the drudgery of revision. Using three versions of “The Translator,” a poem that appeared in *I Was the Jukebox*, we will examine the decisions that can be re-visited in any poem in terms of perspective, tense, structure, and story, and distill tips for your own revision process.

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“What We Talk About When We Talk About Voice”

Voice is the most elusive element of strong writing. How do we craft language that feels compelling and unique? We will unpack the constituent elements of voice by thinking about recurring aesthetic decisions in terms of point of view, tense, image, sound, structure, and diction. Using an extensive array of read-along texts, we will bold decisions in voice from noted contemporary authors of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

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“Ekphrasis: The Muses in Conversation”

**Requires image projection.*

We say that "a picture is worth a thousand words," but William Carlos Williams captured Breughel the Elder's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" with just 56 words. We will look at great examples of ekphrasis throughout the ages, focusing on ways in which a poem can engage a work of visual art, as well as the narrative elements—the artist and the cultural moment—that shaped the inspiring work. Our time will culminate in a generative exercise, drafting from postcards that feature images of classical and contemporary art.

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"Sestinas: The Gyroscope of Form"

The sestina, with its patterning and repetition, is one of the most acrobatic and challenging of received forms. Ironically, it has found many devotees in the free verse world as well. Where did it come from, what makes it work, why is it surging in popularity today, and what are its latest innovations? We will read sestinas from a range of eras that honor the tradition with poems that are fresh, funny, and impassioned.

This presentation is most effective for students with existing knowledge of poetic craft.

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“Moving Life Material Across Genres”

Sometimes, writers convince themselves that they're "done" with a topic—whether a foundational personal relationship, the place they grew up, or issues of body and mind. But as writers, we have to realize that our life stories are a well that never runs dry. Using a reader of the author's own work, we will look at examples of recounting an experience multiple times, across poetry and nonfiction, while varying approach and tonal impact.

This presentation requires 15 pages of advance reading.

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“How to Get Your Memoir Out into the World”

As writers, we may realize “This tale needs telling.” But recognizing raw memoir material is a long way from bringing 60,000+ words into print. We will focus on different structural styles of contemporary memoir (and picking one that works for you), writing the sample chapter, and crafting a book proposal. We'll also have time for a frank Q&A on the realities of today's industry. Bring 3-4 sentences that capture your idea for a book.

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“Taming the Beast: On Ordering Poetry Manuscripts”

Ordering a poetry manuscript is both an art and a science, and this seminar presents strategies for both temperaments. We will discuss philosophies of ordering, identify “meta-text,” including decisions to be made on the level of title, sections, and epigraphs, and do a close reading of exemplar tables of contents from significant collections. Time permitting, students may exchange and workshop TOCs with a guided prompt.

This presentation is most effective for students with a significant body of drafted work.

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“Bringing the World to the Poem”

Poems plumb human nature—our loves and losses. But the emotional interior can be monotonous. What about writing beyond the self? In this four-session workshop, we'll celebrate poems that map external landscapes: poems that survey the bright particulars of a world shaped by animals, music, travel, and science. Inspired by our collaborative close readings, each workshop will include generative prompts connected to the theme at hand.

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“An Appetite for the Page”

“First we eat, then we do everything else,” wrote M.F.K. Fisher. We'll discuss food writing's pitfalls, opportunities, and responsibilities—such as acknowledging the tandem subjects of race and class—using both canonical and contemporary models. This seminar includes drafting strategies, a generative prompt, and tips for placing your work.

This seminar can be adapted to focus on poetry, or nonfiction, or multi-genre.

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“DisLit, CripLit, Inspiration Porn: Centering Narratives of Chronic Illness and Disability”

**Requires image projection*

Experiences of “the body” are not uniform. Each of us has strengths, vulnerabilities, and quirks. How can these enrich writing, in terms of theme and craft? How does our gaze change when looking at bodies different from our own? Using a substantial handout of advance readings, we’ll consider poems, nonfiction, and fiction that explore or are conceptually influenced by living with disability or chronic illness. We’ll also talk frankly about ableism in publishing and progressing as an inclusive writing community.

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“On Roland Barthes and Teju Cole: The Contract & the Wound”

**Requires image projection*

Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* is an enigmatic, provocative look at photography and grief, which yields the concepts “studium” and “punctum.” We’ll show how those terms apply to literature as well, bridging into an examination of contemporary author Teju Cole’s pairing of image and text in *Blind Spot*.

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“Narrative Strategies and Truth-Telling in Creative Nonfiction”

Contemporary essays and memoir offer a wide spectrum of what it means to be “truthful.” This seminar examines how, through specific decisions, an author can utilize the available information and build (or intentionally destabilize) credibility on the page. We’ll also complicate notions of traditional narrative and lyric impulses by looking at innovative prose forms such as the braided essay, collage, and hermit crab structures. A handout includes exemplar nonfiction excerpts showcasing the strategies discussed.

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