

***Syllabus for English 258  
Creative Nonfiction Writing  
Fall, 2001***

***MW 3:30-5:20, Lubbers 103***

*"You came here to get what you already have."  
—Buddhist proverb*

***The Course***

Instructor: Dr. Susan Atefat Peckham

Office: Lubbers 310

Office Hours: MW 12:00-1:00 & 5:30-6:00 and by appointment (Lubbers 310); check on me around the department if you drop in and can't find me in my office. I'll probably be in the hallway or running up and down the stairs. If you want to be certain I'll be in my office, give me a call ahead of time to let me know you're coming or make an appointment and I'll be sure to stick around. Phone: 395-7613 (Office) 738-5899 (Home), or send me an email [atefat@hope.edu](mailto:atefat@hope.edu) (be warned that I may not check my email daily: it's better to call me at home if you need me).

***Texts, Supplies, and Costs***

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life*

Additional stories to be provided for your photocopying

\$5 for video tape, cassette tape, or color copy in support of your literature and the arts presentation

\$5 for photocopying your stories for group evaluations

***Structure of the Course***

*"If you read good books, good books will come out of you."  
-- Natalie Goldberg*

Most often the best writers are those who read often. Just as pianists need to listen to music as well as practice their own scales and improvisation, you will most likely need to read autobiographical stories carefully in order to write them well. You need to read good stories, and you need to think about them, talk about them, try to figure out what they're doing, and how they're doing it, and discuss what they mean to you as readers and as writers--what significance they seem to have to your lives. Besides, good stories will give you literary models to emulate--reading them is a way of opening up your imagination and showing yourself the range of options available to you as a nonfiction-writer.

Much of our class time will be spent discussing published works of nonfiction and writing our own nonfiction. We'll discuss how the published stories we read for class might inform your own writing (through aesthetic analyses, ie. these are fancy words for figuring out how a writer achieves a certain effect through the words he/she chooses), and how they stand as great works of art. I assume everyone here likes reading (why else would you want to learn how to write, right?)--but nonetheless, I'll give out this gentle warning: if you don't enjoy reading nonfiction, if you find reading stories a chore rather than a pleasure, this class might not be what

you would fully enjoy. I hope that you will enjoy reading each selection--maybe even think of each one as brilliant in its own way--but I don't expect that that will be the case. We are all individuals. We all have different tastes. If you find that you are reading a selection and don't like it, remember that different works of art have different aesthetics (and this applies to the stories of our colleagues as well). Give the story a second chance, or even a third. If you still don't like it, come to class that day prepared to be constructively critical. Negativism is not constructive. Shark-festing is not constructive. I am interested in

your opinion, especially if it is phrased intelligently and with an eye for improving the work as well as contributing to a better understanding of your own work.

When we're not discussing published works of nonfiction, we'll be talking about techniques of nonfiction—writing and practicing those techniques with much in-class writing and group work. Be prepared to write your arm(s) off in class. You will keep a journal of daily drafting work, “Dailies” and turn them in each week. I will meet with you individually to discuss your own work in depth in at least three formal meetings during the semester, and as many more as you would like to schedule. I would be delighted to see you in my office or at my home during these hours or at any other time in addition to those if you just want to brainstorm or knock a few story ideas off of me.

At the end of our time together you will have written, revised, and polished three complete nonfiction stories (about 6-8 double-spaced pages each, one of which involves “creative research”). In addition, you will have written a publishable review (2-3 double-spaced pages) and learned how to submit it to national literary magazines for publication, twelve aesthetic analyses (1-2 double-spaced pages each), three creative research methods journal entries (1-2 double-spaced pages each--a, observation, b, interviews, and c service learning), and feedback on peer work (from all-class workshop sessions, and class research presentations). Furthermore, you will have read several works by professional writers, presented on at least one of the selections in terms of visual and oral art, as well as been to two professional readings and participated in a service research project valuable to our local community. Wow! Sounds like a lot, and it is, but you can do it, and I will help you do it painlessly.

### ***Writing Requirements***

*Aesthetic Analyses (around 12 of these due)*

*“Let me tell you something: from then until I let that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk. You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge...Months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.”*

*-- Malcolm X and Alex Haley, The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

I'll ask you to write and bring to class an aesthetic analysis 1-2 double-spaced pages every time a reading selection will be discussed in class. It's a good idea to read a selection once through for pleasure and overall understanding; then go back and review, taking notes or making marginal comments to help you clarify things, jotting down questions, and making connections. You must read these texts as writers rather than doing a Siskel & Ebert, thumbs up/thumbs down. You have two options on how you may respond to these. Six of the responses must be done by option A, and six by option B. You can choose which you want to start with, or whether you prefer to mix them. Simply mark A or B at the top, and keep track of how many of each you have done.

Option A: You will respond to the stories in several ways: as examples of writing technique; as pieces of dramatic narrative; as explorations of human emotions; as lessons in how to live (or not to live) a life. Your writing will be rigorous and emotional. I am looking for content here. Grammar, punctuation, transitions--none of those things matter for now. I would like to see evidence that you have captured the essence, the central issue, or the techniques of a story in sharp, concise language; that you have asked interesting questions and offered possible answers to them; and that your approach to the story was personal as well as imaginative, exploring the specific connections between this reading selection and other literature you've encountered in your life. And most important I'll be looking for connections you make between what you've read and how it informs your own writing. Talk here about how the piece you have just read provokes your thinking about possible direction or revision to what you have been writing. You may, if you like, include a page of free write with your reading journals. This free write might be a story idea that you need immediate feedback

on, or a few story ideas that you want to experiment with. I will not grade this part of the journal if you choose to do it. Feel free to experiment with some new ideas here. And I will help you with your ideas as much as I can. Writing these more analytical observations on paper will sharpen the skills necessary for writing your review later.

Option B: Begin with a short paragraph describing a particular way the author achieves a certain effect, and talk a little about what the effect is and how and why it works for that piece. Give examples of how the author uses the technique. Next, spend most of the response trying it out yourself. Your “practice” of what you have observed someone else doing shows me that you are aware of not only how a story works, but also of how to employ the technique on your own. You should aim by the end of this course to be able to teach yourself; teaching yourself is the most valuable element of writing that I can teach you here. When you read, allow yourself to be swallowed and moved by the writing, and always keep in the back of your mind, ‘what is the author doing here that I can use to improve my own work?’

The aesthetic / analysis should be on loose paper, not in a spiral or bound book (it’s too heavy for me to carry a class load of bound books). On the afternoon it is due you will exchange or trade with a class colleague (a different one each time). There will be 15 minutes or so in class when he or she will write a paragraph response to your work, agreeing or disagreeing or simply giving you feedback and giving you even more ideas to add to your original ones. Sharing your work with your colleagues will help you gain confidence in class discussion, as well as get a feel for the level of work that’s out there in the class. You should keep these in a folder or binder; it will be an on-going record of your work in this course. You’ll turn these in to me just before you come in to meet with me for conferences, and I’ll let you know how you’re doing on them then. If you have any concerns or questions about these before then, don’t hesitate to drop by and show me your work or give me a call at home or at the office--I’d be glad to give you some feedback.

*Creative Research Methods Journal (3 of these due in the latter portion of the semester)*

*Explore “the wonderful mimetic power a story can have—its capacity to work its way well into one’s thinking life, yes, but also one’s reveries or idle thoughts, even one’s moods and dreams.”*

*--Robert Coles, The Call of Stories*

The Creative Research Methods Journal will chronicle three research stages while you are writing your third and last nonfiction essay. Observation, Interviews, and Service Research. Each of the three journals (which are due on three consecutive class dates) will focus on each one separately (1-2 double-spaced pages). You should have your research experience completed before the first of these is due, which means you need to get an early start on these (at the least a month ahead of time): write these journals as you encounter the experience, not after it’s all over. For instance, you might want to write a story about your experience being the daughter of a parent who suffers from mental illness. You could do your service research work at a psychiatric hospital, interview doctors and family members of the mentally ill (or even, if you’re lucky, observe some of the patients), in order to write more effectively and informatively from the voice of, in this case, the scientific (to compliment your life’s experience). You are the creator of the structure; don’t rely on this experience for plot. In other words, try to incorporate your research smoothly into your writing rather than relay the idea that you were “once working on service research for this class” you were taking. The research you’ll be doing will happen in three basic stages, and they will overlap. For the first, Observation, you will focus on vision, both physical and mental. For the second, Interviews, you will focus on how and whom you are interviewing. For the third, Service Research, you will focus on the service research project of your choice, and how it relates directly to your writing. I will guide you through each segment with a more detailed written explanation as we go along. Remember, you need to be dealing with this early in the semester. Find a good place where you would

like to work. The idea is that you want to step outside of your own skin and give back to the community at the same time. I will help you; come by and see me in the office.

*Workshop (once during the semester)*

Once during the semester we will hold an all-class workshop about any of the three stories you are writing for this class. You will need to bring as many copies of your story and author's letter as there are members of the class the class period before the workshop date for which you are scheduled. Read our class schedule closely for due dates. Come to class with two copies of one single-spaced typed page response to each story being workshopped. I will collect one copy of your response, and you will give the other to your colleague in workshop. **ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY**. Excusable absences: severe illness or hospitalization, car accident, traveling home for a death in the family or a similar emergency. Inexcusable absences: registration, sleeping in, job interview, make-up work / test for another class, work for this class, extending winter or spring recess, etc.

Your responses need to be thoughtful and thought provoking. Pay attention to the author's letter, responding first to the author's concerns, then drawing attention to other issues you've noticed. Be enthusiastic but not obsequious; be confident but not arrogant; be smart but not all knowing; be critical, and be kind. Always suggest alternatives to problem spots. Share your own experiences. Share your close-readings of particular sections. Read the piece. Read it again. Swallow it and carry it in the pit of your belly before you respond. Remember, the person who wrote the piece cares deeply about your opinion. Words for the wise.

*Nonfiction Essays (3 of these due throughout the semester, revise as much as you like)*

*"What stories can do, I guess, is make things present. I can look at things I never looked at. I can attach faces to grief and love and pity and God. I can be brave. I can make myself feel again."*

*--Tim O'Brien, The Things They Carried*

You will write three "serious" nonfiction stories (remember that "serious" can be funny "serious" too, as in, for instance, Eudora Welty's fictional "Why I Live at the P.O." -- the message is serious; the voice is brilliantly funny). When you come up with a draft of your story we will meet to discuss your work. I will take these conferences very seriously." At this time you may want to ask about possible solutions to any problems that may be presenting themselves to you as you write. You will have written an author's letter with your story, a letter in which you will be constructively critical of your own work--and I will have read this before our meeting (items to be included in this letter include the goal and/or main point of the story, the theme; your intended audience; the strategies you used--narrative, voice, characters, etc.; the choices you made, particularly what you omitted and why; the problems you encountered in writing the paper; your revision plans; any questions of me, and any indications of how I can help you accomplish what you'd like to).

The choice of topic is up to you (it may be your choice of work or vocation, gender issues, family matters, etc). Remember that your stories must in some way reflect upon our lives, on what it means to be alive on this earth. Stories that aren't simply plots, but those that use language in the same way that painters use paint, stories that aim to explore the mystery of the human condition in some way. You ought to explore our human striving, our failures, our

triumphs, our strengths and weaknesses, our places in society, our relations with others, our confusion, and our moments of self-knowledge. Your stories ought to read gracefully, intelligently, and sensibly, with wit, passion and compassion. Everyone, every thing, has a spirit, a history, a narrative. It is our job to find those narratives, and your job to decide how those narratives can be best brought to life through "your" language, To do this, we will focus exclusively on "voice," that aspect of language and vision which is like your fingerprint - recognizably yours and only yours.

Unfortunately. I will have to grade your stories. On a personal level, I don't believe in "grading" art--it seems wrong; however, given that I will have to do it because of departmental requirement, these are my guidelines: I'll grade your stories on the basis of their style as well as their content, at the end of the semester, after we have talked about them at great lengths, and after you have had a chance to get much feedback and time to work on various revisions. Spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, word usage, and general neatness all count, along with the content, at the end of the semester. An "A" story is entertaining, interesting, lively, and dramatic. It is about something (i.e., it has some deeper, implied "truth," some significance). Its plot is imaginative without being farfetched. The characters seem real; they talk and behave in a manner we can believe, and they're a mixture of good and bad, just the way real people are. The small details are fresh and original. An "A" story doesn't have to succeed totally in what it's trying to do; but it needs to be trying to do something ambitious, something beyond the expected limits of introductory nonfiction. The dialogue is crisp and accurately rendered. In all "A" stories, the writing is mechanically sound -- that is, the grammar, punctuation, spelling and usage are all in order (good "mechanics" are like good clothes). Remember that there is really no formula for an "A" story; These are just very general guidelines. And there isn't going to be any one type of story that's an "A" story. If it's well-written and well-developed, I'll give it an "A." I'm interested everything, so don't feel that you need to cater to a specific "type" or "content" to satisfy my ego. I have been described as a tough grader, but also a fair one. My former students know that I have high expectations of them and their work, and that I will do anything to help them achieve their goals. To receive an "A" in the class, you need to do more than simply the minimum quantity of work. You'll need to actively revise and develop your first drafts (Rushdie would tell you that "any story worth its salt can handle a little shaking up"); develop your writing style so that it is vivid, fluent, and expressive; take risks - try something new; have strong and thoughtful author's notes; come prepared to participate actively in class discussion and in your groups, thus helping other class members be lively and real and responsive to others; ask many questions (no matter how small) of yourself and others.

Note: We will read these drafts to each other in small groups, so you should bring as many copies to class as are people in your group. If you have difficulty deciding on a topic, come by to my office and we will brainstorm together. Also, I strongly encourage all of you to use a computer when you write, and especially to save your drafts on disk so that you can more easily revise your writing; revision is a major emphasis in this class. Save every shred of paper you write on! All drafts must be typed and double-spaced. All author's letters must be single-spaced. I will not read a draft without an accompanying author's letter. And finally, always keep a copy of your draft with you at home.

*Publishable Review (1 of these due whenever you like during the semester)*

*...the Americans have handled the short story so wonderfully that one can say that it is a national art form"*

*--Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice*

You will write one review (2-3 double spaced pages) of any contemporary work of nonfiction you choose. In order to be in serious contention for publication, your review must be written concerning a work or works which are about to be released or which have been published within the last year, and the review must not exceed 3 double-spaced pages. (Remember that a "review" is quite different from a literary "analysis," and we will study the differences and similarities.) I will help you write cover letters and choose national magazines and literary journals which might be interested in publishing your work. By the end of the semester you will have submitted your review to the magazine of your choice.

Here's how to begin: Go to Barnes & Noble (or any bookstore) and ask for a list of the New

Releases. Sean through the list or look through the books on the New Release shelf until you find a book you think you will enjoy, one which is “literary” as well as popular. Get yourself a few options and run them by me first before you make a final decision.

*Dailies (about 13 sets of these, 7 entries each)*

*Okay. Take something specific to write about... we should always concentrate, not by blocking out the world, but by allowing it all to exist.”*

*-- Natalie Goldberg*

Pay attention to living. Each day you will spend a half hour simply writing. About anything. And in any fashion. Go Go Go. Don't rest your pen. Be crazy. Be experimental. Use these for story ideas. Or use these as daily reflections on living. Or for shots at revision. Or for those crazy ideas that never really get going anywhere but sound so good for a few lines. You will turn these in to me every Monday. I will check that they are done and return them to you unmarked during the next class period. These are pass/fail. If one is missing, it's a fail. If all are there its full credit. No pressure for excellent writing. I'll know if you're blowing them off (you may use the in-class writing exercises as “dailies” if we do them).

*Literature and the Arts Presentation (1 presentation on a daily selection of Angelou or Wolff)*

*“Art is art because it is not life.”*

*--William Butler Yeats*

This presentation will place writing within the other arts. It's a very informal way for you to lead the class discussion and have the chance to teach the class something new (it's so informal that I'm not grading it - I really want you to relax and have fun with this, no worries about my assessment here). Examine here the aesthetic connections between a work of art and the written words (you can choose more than one work if you like). What do they share in common? What techniques do they employ? What effects do they achieve? How do they work to achieve this effect? What is in common and what is different? What are the advantages of each medium? Any perceived limitations? How do these advantages and limitations play out in the work? What about the form? How do the artists/writers use form to convey meaning? Is the choice of topic what decides the form? How would the content of one work appear in the medium of the other? Why choose one form over the other? Familiarize yourself with the techniques of each art you choose to examine and relate them to each other. I can help you figure this out if you like.

Here are some more ideas: What did the writer do first? Second? Why? What next? How effective is it? Why? What is the tone of the piece? The voice? What are the time frames/limitations? Describe the style. Why this style and not another? You need to lay out the writer's plan clearly and carefully for the rest of the class, and you need to draw your class mates into the discussion. You are the teacher and the mediator; of course I will help you if you like. I will invent and lead the class in a quick writing exercise through which we can imitate the techniques and themes this writer is used that makes the work so brilliant, perhaps a paragraph, the development of a character, etc.' a logical construct, a technical device, etc. You have about 25 minutes in which to do all of this, so plan your time wisely. Take into account three things: discussion time, and perhaps even sharing time in small groups. The point here is to not only examine what the writers we will be reading have to say, but also to examine how they say it, and

how writing integrates into the other art forms. Finally, the purpose of these discussion lies in giving us the chance to try to use another writer's plan in constructing for our own texts. You must select from a piece of writing which we will have read for class on the day of your presentation; you may select any work of “other” art that you wish. Bring audiocassettes, videotapes, paintings, photographs, etc--just make sure I know what kind of equipment you will be needing ahead of time.

You will do one of these presentations. Bring one piece of art by someone else and one by you.

Yes! You! This must be a new piece that you have done for this class. It can reflect either on what you are reading or what you are writing in your own work. Anything you've always wanted to try--use techniques with the medium that you see as analogous to yours in your writing or the authors in the author's writing. Have fun with it.

*Individual Conferences (3 formal meetings during the semester)*

We will meet formally three times during the semester. Use this time wisely. Talk with me about whatever concerns you. Mostly I will talk with you about your writing. Be prepared to discuss your peer review experience, revision plans, strategies for revisions, etc. I'm here to help you. These conferences are less evaluation than they are advice (although I will give you an assessment of how you are doing in the class). Use me as a resource, all semester, but especially in conference.

*Visiting Writer's Series Readings (your choice of 2 readings to attend)*

You must go to at least two of the Visiting Writer's Series readings or discussions. There are three readings this semester, and many more 'local' readings in Holland, Saugatuck, Kalamazoo, and Grand Haven (which you can go to if you cannot make the VWS dates listed). The dates for VWS are marked on our class schedule. If you cannot make the VWS, contact the Barnes & Noble in Holland, Uncommon Grounds in Saugatuck, Athena Book Shop in Kalamazoo, or The Bookman in Grand Haven for a list of readings in the area. Attending readings is your chance to speak with a publishing writer in the flesh and blood, to ask him or her questions, and to hear the words performed. Turn in your impressions (one to two pages double spaced typed) to me on the class date following the readings you attend. A good response is one done with care and attention to the work presented and the writer delivering it. They are not graded, but used at the end of the semester to determine borderline final grades.

*Final Portfolio*

*"When he finished, more triumphant stories rainbowed around the room riding the shoulders of laughter."*  
--Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

The final portfolio at the end of the semester should contain your polished and edited work. Keep all your work for the semester. Including drafts, final stories, short aesthetic analyses, notes, everything. At the end of the semester I will ask you to write a 2 to 3 page narrative introduction to your portfolio describing the evolution of your works, any recurring themes, predominant images, how you feel about your writing, how this feeling may have changed, you decide. I have a formal guidelines sheet that I will hand out later in the semester. If you would like a sneak preview earlier than that, just send me an email and I would be happy to share the guidelines with you on an attachment file (the easiest and quickest way). If you would like me to mail you your final grades at the end of the semester please turn in (with your final portfolio) a self-addressed stamped postcard with your name and section on the reverse side.

**Grading**

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Attendance, Literature and the Arts Pres., VW S responses | +/- used for borderline eases |
| Peer review Criticism                                     | 15%                           |
| Aesthetic Analyses and Creative Research Methods Journals | 15%                           |
| Thirteen sets of Dailies (seven days each)                | 10%                           |
| Review  | 10%                           |

Final Stories (three) (drafting taken into account here)

50%

As you may notice, I strongly consider your involvement in and commitment to the work of the class and your participation in helping others learn. You must make certain that you have completed all your assignments (assignments that are not turned in will receive the grade of zero). I do not grade individual journals or drafts; often graded writing isn't revised or rethought. I will, however, let you know how you are doing during our conferences so that you can approximate your progress. I can't emphasize enough how "temporary" everything is until the end of the semester. Anything can happen by that time. Please feel free to talk to me at any time if you feel uncomfortable or need to know about your grade. I will discuss and evaluate your work with you at our scheduled conferences and would be glad to speak with you at any other time as well.

### ***Attendance***

If you know that you will be absent for class, please tell me in advance. You will be responsible for completing the assignment due that day. If you are absent on a day a story, journal, or portfolio is due (at the end of the semester), you'll need to make sure I get it on time by bringing it by my departmental mailbox or office before I leave for the day, or by bringing it by my home before dinner time in cases of extreme emergency. Excused absences include those based on illness, death in the family, or those approved by Hope policy. You must be here at least 80% of the time in order to pass this course. That means that if you miss more than 5 days of class, you will fail the course automatically. I find, however, that if students miss more than 3 classes, their grades often suffer dramatically. You can't, for instance, make up missed in-class writings or peer evaluations. Besides, everybody in here has something important to add to our understanding. We need you here. Can't do any of this without you. Those students who do well are usually those who come to class. Here's what Hope has to say about attendance: "C2. (f) Student Class Absences

"...In general, the mode of instruction and learning at Hope includes group sessions. Here, the teacher makes his/her primary impact through lectures, the asking and answering of questions, and the discussion of ideas. Here, too, occurs the exchange of ideas among students, which also can be very illuminating. When a course is so structured that the class session is considered an integral part of the learning process, and when a student contracts for such a course, s/he misses an irreplaceable element when s/he misses class.

"Occasionally another College activity (sporting event, field trip, music or theatre performance) conflicts with regularly scheduled classes. It is the responsibility of the student to discuss this, in advance, with the instructor..."

"The Student Development Office notifies a student's teachers and advisor of any illness which is expected to result in hospitalization, more than three days of missed classes, or the need to go home temporarily. The Health Center Staff does not write excuses.

“...The College recognizes the educational value and public relations significance of performance tours, athletic meets, and academic field trips conducted during the spring recess, but at the same time must be concerned with effects on our academic program of requiring large numbers of students to be absent from class for such purposes.

“The Academic Affairs Board has therefore established the following guidelines:

“4. In no case should an extension be requested for more than two class days.”

### ***Deadlines***

I am a real stickler about deadlines. I'll be marking who has aesthetic / analyses and who does not, who has peer review responses and who does not, and whether you're missing dailies. Don't be absent on peer review days or on your presentation dates. Other people are counting on you. Don't turn in your stories late to the class, or to me. Turn in your author's letter on time. Don't miss the Visiting Writer's Series readings; mark them now on your personal calendars. I will not tolerate tardiness to class or tardiness of papers. You will be penalized one letter grade or each day material is late. If you are absent, late, or otherwise confused, you are responsible for clarifying things for yourself and getting work done. (When in doubt, ask me! Call me at home) I'll give you one "computer excuse," but I expect that you will give yourself enough time to print up your materials. I hate being policewoman. But it is simply unfair to the other members of the class who work hard at getting their materials in on time if you decide to be a slacker. Look at it this way--at least you'll know that your efforts at getting things in on time are not wasted.

### ***Academic Honesty***

All of the work you do in this class, including both writing and revision of stories, must be your own. In your prose-writings, if you quote facts or paraphrase ideas from another source, you must indicate in your paper which materials are from another source and where the material came from (I can show you the proper method of documentation). Cases of plagiarism will be handled in accordance with Hope policies on student conduct. If you plagiarize, and I can prove it, you will fail the course.

### ***A Few More Words of Advice***

The workload for this course will be reasonable but steady, and if you fall behind, it might be a bit difficult to catch up. It's useful to read ahead if you can, especially if you know that major crunches are approaching in other courses or your jobs, perhaps. If you do read ahead, write your aesthetic responses ahead of time as well so that you don't have to go back over the assigned reading to remember what you wanted to say. If you want to get an early start on your stories, that's always a good idea too. Give yourself the time to make a false start or two, before you hit on the story you want to write; James Thurber once mentioned, "Don't get it right, get it written." The due date for the first story will sneak up on you more quickly than you anticipated! (a little over two weeks!). There's no substitute for giving yourself adequate time to write. Do try to look for a quiet place, away from MTV or CNN, loud parties, and raucous roommates. We will be writing every day in class, and it would probably make a real difference to your writing if you set aside a definite time every day at home when you will write in your "writing place." I don't expect your stories to be Tobias Wolff's or Tim O'Brien's. I will consider you new at this—let yourself have the freedom and the luxury to experiment a bit, to find out what you can do. If your writing is going well, you may find yourself amazed from time to time by the words that come out on paper, the things your characters do and say.

Obviously some of you will get better grades in this class than others. It think it's true that "talent" plays a role in a course like this, but it's not by any means everything. William Faulkner captures what I feel about this issue well when he said

At one time I thought the most important thing was talent. I think now that the young man or the young woman must possess or teach himself training himself, in infinite patience, which is to try and to by until it comes right. Lie must train himself in ruthless intolerance--that is to throw away anything that is false no matter how much he might love that page or that paragraph. The most important thing is insight, that is to be—curiosity--to wonder, to mull, and to muse why it is that man does what he does, and if you have that, then I don't think the talent makes much difference, whether you've got it or not. (*Paris Review*, interview)

I hope that it will become clear to you as you go through the course that hard work, enthusiasm perseverance, and good humor will play a significant role in success in this class. Remember that only half of your final grade will be determined by the quality of your own fiction stories. That leaves 50% of your grade that will be affected by your Review, aesthetic / analyses, dailies, your hard work on revising and drafting, and your ability to read and respond imaginatively to your colleagues and your stories.

Keep a notebook by your bed and make a note of ideas, dreams, random thoughts, and overheard pieces of conversations. Don't wait until tomorrow to write down what's on your mind. \*\*\***And keep every shred of paper you write on.**\*\*\*\* Use a computer if you can; it's easier for revision.

As you read the selections for the course, try to imagine what the action looks like-- try to see it as though it were a movie you were running for yourself inside your head. That's the best, most constructive way to read like a writer. Do that, too, as you write your own stories: act them out in your mind, hear the dialogue (say it aloud as you write it, even if your roommate tells you you're beginning lose your mind). Above all, as you read and write the nonfiction for this course, have as much fun as possible. If the work starts to seem like torture, there's definitely something wrong! If in doubt about any of the above, please see me or call me. Syllabi are often daunting and authoritative. That is not the kind of teacher I am. Some of the information you just read may sound a bit overwhelming; I will give you more information as time goes by. I trust that you will find this class both rewarding and fun. Most of all, relax. I expect you to work hard, but not to tear your hair out or stand suicidally on top of tall buildings holding a jug of kerosene and threatening to burn the campus down (this once happened to a friend of mine). If you stress out about anything involving this class, see me. (I know, I've now said so too many times). I look forward to working with all of you on an individual basis.

*"My writing has drawn, out of a reluctant soul, a measure of astonishment at the nature of life."*

--Bernard Malamud

**English 258  
Fall, 2001**

**S. Atefat-  
Peckham**

# August

| Sun | Monday | Tue                              | Wednesday  | Thurs | Fri | Sat |
|-----|--------|----------------------------------|--|-------|-----|-----|
|     |        |                                  |  |       |     |     |
|     |        |                                  |  |       |     |     |
|     |        |                                  |  |       |     |     |
|     |        |                                  |  |       |     |     |
|     |        | 28<br>(first<br>day of<br>class) | <b>29 In Class: Introductions to the class and course</b><br><hr style="border: 0.5px solid black;"/> <b>For Next Time: 1 page response to the course syllabus and 1 page about yourself</b> | 30    | 31  | 1   |

**English 258  
Fall, 2001**

**S. Atefat-  
Peckham**

# September

| Sun       | Monday  | Tue | Wednesday   | Thurs     | Fri       | Sat       |
|-----------|---|-----|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 2         | <p>3 In Class: Introductions to the class and course<br/><i>Personal History</i>,<br/>Lifelines—Mining<br/><u>Memory Image and Story</u></p> <p>For Next Time: 1 page response to the course syllabus and 1 page about yourself<br/>Read Angelou, <u>I Know why the Caged Bird Sings</u> (ch. 1-8, p. 1-44)</p> | 4   | <p>5 In Class: <i>Learning From the Greats</i>, Bring Abstract to Life, Concrete Language<br/>Total Recall Freewrites<br/>Discuss Angelou (ch. 1-8, p. 1-44)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Angelou (ch. 9-15, p. 44-87)</p>                     | 6<br>(NY) | 7<br>(NY) | 8<br>(NY) |
| 9<br>(NY) | <p>10 In Class: Early Memory (Child—Adult)<br/>Discuss Angelou (ch. 9-15, p. 44-87)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Angelou, (ch. 16-21, p. 87-128)</p>   | 11  | <p>12 In Class: <i>Beginnings</i><br/>Ways, First Sentences, Discuss Angelou (ch. 16-21, p. 87-128)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Read Angelou (ch. 22-25, p. 128-170)</p>  | 13        | 14        | 15        |
| 16        | <p>17 In Class: Chars. Fr. Past, Discuss Angelou (ch. 22-25, p. 128-170)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Bring Draft 1 for Peer Review (4 copies + Author's Letter)</p>   | 18  | <p>19 IN Class: PEER REVIEW OF DRAFT 1 (4 COPIES &amp; YOUR AUTHOR LETTER)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Read Angelou (ch. 26-30, p. 170-206) DRAFT DUE IN TO ME FRIDAY</p>   | 20        | 21        | 22        |
| 23        | 24  | 25  | <p>26 VWS Reading 7 pm Knick: Linda Scott DeRosier; Clyde Edgerton<br/>In Class: <i>Characterization</i><br/>What Do You Know? Discuss Angelou (ch. 26-30, p. 170-206)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Finish Angelou (ch. 31-36, p. 206-246)</p> | 27        | 28        | 29        |
| 30        |   |     |   |           |           |           |

# October

| Sun        | Monday  | Tue                              | Wednesday  | Thurs      | Fri        | Sat        |
|------------|---|----------------------------------|--|------------|------------|------------|
|            | <p>1 In Class:<br/><i>Characterization</i><br/>A Character's Inner Life<br/>Discuss Angelou (ch. 31-36, p. 206-246)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Read Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 1-56)</p>  | <p>2<br/><br/>No<br/>Classes</p> | <p>3<br/><br/>No Classes—Critical Issues<br/>Symposium</p>   | 4          | 5          | 6<br>(MN)  |
| 7<br>(MN)  | <p>8<br/>(MN)<br/>No Classes—Fall Recess</p>  | 9<br>(MN)                        | <p>10<br/>(NE)<br/><br/>TBA</p>  | 11<br>(NE) | 12<br>(NE) | 13<br>(NE) |
| 14<br>(NE) | <p>15 <i>Learning From the Greats</i>, Bring Abstract to Life, Concrete Language<br/>Switching Perspectives<br/>Discuss Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 1-56)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 57-106)</p>                             | 16                               | <p>17 In Class: <i>Beginnings</i><br/>A Story's History, Discuss Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 57-106)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Read Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 107-154)</p>   | 18         | 19         | 20         |
| 21         | <p>22 VWS: TBA, 7 pm<br/>Knick<br/>In Class:<br/><i>Characterization</i><br/>Characters Places and Backgrounds, Discuss Sort of Person Who Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 107-154)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Read Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 155-233)</p> | 23                               | <p>24 VWS Reading 7 pm Knick:<br/>Marjorie Agosin<br/>In Class: PEER REVIEW OF DRAFT 2 (4 COPIES &amp; YOUR AUTHOR LETTER)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Read Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 155-233) GET DRAFT 2 READY TO TURN IN TO ME. Bring a blank audiocassette to class.</p> | 25         | 26         | 27         |
| 28         | <p>29 TURN IN DRAFT 2<br/>In Class: <i>Dialogue</i><br/>Not quite a fight, Discuss Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 155-233)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Finish Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 237-288)</p>   | 30                               | <p>31 In Class: <i>Dialogue</i><br/>All Art Not Talk, Discuss Wolff, <u>This Boy's Life</u> (p. 237-288)</p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Take a breath—we're watching a film next class period</p>   |            |            |            |

**English 258**  
**Fall, 2001**

**S. Atefat-  
Peckham**

# November

| Sun           | Monday   | Tue | Wednesday  | Thurs            | Fri                    | Sat           |
|---------------|--|-----|--|------------------|------------------------|---------------|
|               |  |     |  | 1                | 2                      | 3             |
| 4             | <p><i>5 Literature and Film</i></p> <p>In Class, <u>This Boy's Life</u></p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time; HAVE YOUR SERVICE RESEARCH DONE BY NOVEMBER 6. Bring Review mat., &amp; creative to submit to journals &amp; handouts on submitting.</p> | 6   | 7  | 8                | 9                      | 10            |
|               |  |     | <p>INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES<br/>(LUBBERS 312)</p>  |                  |                        |               |
| 11            | <p>12 In Class: CREATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL 1</p> <p><i>Personal and public spaces</i></p> <p><u>Writing a Review</u></p> <hr/> <p>CREATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL 2/3 DUE.</p>  | 13  | <p>14 In Class: CREATIVE RESEARCH JOURNAL 2/3 <i>Personal/Public, Art of the Interview, Experience: Service Learning</i></p> <p><u>Writing a Review</u></p> <hr/> <p>For Next Time: Bring Review mat., &amp; creative to submit to journals, &amp; handouts on submitting.</p> | 15               | 16                     | 17            |
|               |  |     |  | VWS Reading 7 pm | Knick: Jones and Chang |               |
| 18            | 19   | 20  | 21   | 22               | 23                     | 24            |
|               | <p>Revising a Review</p>   |     | <p>Thanksgiving (unofficially)</p>   | Thanks-giving    | Thanks-giving          | Thanks-giving |
| 25            | 26   | 27  | 28   | 29               | 30                     |               |
| Thanks-giving | Workshop for Story 3   |     | Workshop for Story 3   |                  |                        |               |

# December

| Sun | Monday                    | Tue | Wednesday   | Thurs | Fri                           | Sat                                 |
|-----|---------------------------|-----|---|-------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|     |                           |     |   |       |                               | 1                                   |
| 2   | 3 Workshop for Story<br>3 | 4   | 5<br>QUESTIONS AND<br>CONCERNS...<br>CLASS PARTY...<br>FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE<br>SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8 | 6     | 7 (last<br>day of<br>classes) | 8<br>FINAL<br>PORT-<br>FOLIO<br>DUE |
|     |                           |     |   |       |                               |                                     |
|     |                           |     |   |       |                               |                                     |
|     |                           |     |   |       |                               |                                     |