

Winter 2018, The Elements of Story with Zulema Renee Summerfield

This workshop is ideal for writers with an early draft of a story, an in-progress story that has stalled, or an idea for a story that hasn't quite found its form. We'll take in-depth looks at basic elements of craft, from plot and dialogue to setting and voice, exploring ways to weave these elements into our own work. Each week, we will share our stories in a supportive, creative workshop setting, with an eye towards exploratory revision and eventual publication.

Zulema Renee Summerfield is a writer, educator, and creative coach. Her first novel, *Every Other Weekend*, will be published by Little, Brown in the spring of 2018, and was recently named a selection for the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Award. She is also the author of *Everything Faces All Ways at Once*, available from Fourteen Hills Press. Her short fiction has been published in a number of literary journals, including *Guernica* and *The Threepenny Review*. A MacDowell Colony fellow, she is currently at work on a collection of short stories.

Each week of this course will feature a blend of in-depth craft discussions, generative writing exercises, and examinations of published short stories by masters of the form. We will also focus on effective, engaging workshop techniques that allow us to approach both our own work and the work of our peers with fresh eyes.

For our craft discussions, we will be working primarily with *On Writing* by Stephen King. The instructor will provide PDFs or printouts of all the readings. (Though students may find the King book to be a great addition to their bookshelf.) The short stories listed below are just to give a general idea and are subject to change.

Week One: The Reading and Writing Life

We'll spend this week getting to know one another, discussing what brought us to the course, and goals that we have for the next six weeks. We'll reflect on a selection from *On Writing* and discuss our individual reading and writing lives. We'll also spend some time doing generative writing exercises and mind-mapping the question "Why write?" We will also be introduced to some of the concepts/terms that will come into play throughout the course, with a special emphasis on how we will workshop one another's stories.

Week Two: Plot

This week, we'll dive in headfirst to the craft element that writers (of all stages of their careers) seem to struggle with most: plot. We'll look to King for advice on how to excavate plot like digging up a fossil (that is, with delicacy and the right tools), as well as discuss methods for

allowing character to determine plot and not the other way around. We'll turn to JD Salinger's "The Laughing Man" as one writer's approach to this most tricky of craft elements. Through writing exercises and class discussion, we'll take a closer look at plot—what it is and how it works. We will workshop two stories this week.

Week Three: Dialogue

Again looking to King for advice, we'll take an in-depth look at creating compelling dialogue. We'll answer the basic question "What should dialogue do?" and explore techniques for doing so in our own work. Through in-class writing exercises, we'll explore techniques for enhancing our writing ear, from ethical eavesdropping to working with gesture in order to enhance our characters' words. We'll read Denis Johnson's "Emergency" for a close-up examination of all the things dialogue can do. We will workshop two stories this week.

Week Four: Lyric Detail and Voice

King says, "Thin description leaves the reader feeling bewildered and nearsighted. Overdescription buries him or her in details and images." How then to find a happy medium? This week, we'll explore brief descriptive passages from the works of a number of published authors, and then try them on for size. In this way, we will begin to explore how writers use lyric detail to develop their voice, and how we might use such detail to create our own. We'll also take a close look at "Crossing the River No Name" by Will Mackin, a story that deploys lyric detail to carry us across landscapes and into and out of time. We will workshop two stories this week.

Week Five: Setting

Ursula Le Guin once said "Where we are affects who we are, what we say and do, how and why we say and do it." This week, we'll take an in-depth look at the ways setting can be utilized to enhance theme and mood, and how it might be used to reflect a character's state of mind. We'll look at a handful of published examples of effective uses of setting, with special emphasis on stories by Junot Diaz and Annie Proulx. We'll do writing exercises to explore place, and discuss how setting can be used to enhance our own work. We will workshop two stories this week.

Week Six: Revising and Submitting Your Work

This week, we'll turn to King for some advice on that most dreaded of tasks: revision. Often when we revise, we get caught up in the hamster wheel of micro-changes or so consumed by big-picture thoughts that we can't see our way forward. We'll expand on the techniques we've been using in workshop so that we might return to them as we move forward from the course. We'll also go over the submission process and share some resources for publishing your work. We will workshop two stories this week.