

Poetry Planet

English 684 Poetry Planet
Tuesday 7:20-10:00 pm
Professor Peter Streckfus
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Poetry Planet is an umbrella course intended for students preparing to take the MFA exam in Poetry and presumes that a large portion of class work will be independent reading and research in poetry. The course aims to model “writerly reading” and research as well as to provide a resourceful and supportive community. The challenge of the exam is first to form a group of poets, and then to master each poet’s oeuvre, both by reading the work itself and relevant criticism, while remaining loyal to close reading and the impact of the poetry on you, the poet. It is expected that each of you finish the semester with your list of 20 poets and a working rationale. You will be required to read 5 of the your poets on your list and work on corresponding notebooks and anthology entries for each of the poets.

You will be encouraged to form study groups with classmates and a large portion of class time will be devoted to presentations on particular poets but also relevant historical and cultural markers. Our primary means of sharing and documenting our collective findings will be the class wiki; you should be able to log-on at <https://my.pbworks.com>.

Throughout the semester, additionally, we will tour the Mason library and learn about the library resources, host third-year students to hear about their exam experience, finalize a committee, and practice answering exam questions.

The Poetry Planet endeavor in many ways is beyond the normal syllabus description. I propose a schedule below but intend to work with a more flexible schedule (see wiki) that we will establish in the first two class meetings and likely revise as the semester progresses.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Full participation in presentations, group discussions, and workshops. Attendance at all classes is obvious.
2. 20-poet list—half due 9.29 (by email); full list due 12.8.
3. Rationale (description of your list’s formal, theoretical, and thematic foci; your particular reading interests; lines of affiliation and influence among your poets)—Draft due 10.06 (please make copies); full list due 12.8.

4. Read 5 poets on your list completely and complete a reading journal. It should include notes about the poetry, an annotated bibliography of secondary resources, an anthology or table of contents for the anthology, and whatever other relevant material you've accumulated. Journal due December 15 (email).

SCHEDULE

After determining class interests and preliminary lists, we will dedicate each week to a particular time period/movement/school of poetry. I have written out a basic plan, but I expect this will change according to your individual lists.

For each class session: one student will prepare to lead a discussion of the central poet (focusing on one predetermined text); one student will research the historical context; one student will research relevant work in art/science/music; two students will make smaller presentations (15 min) on poets related to the central poet. I expect these conversations, in sum, will run approximately 1 hour 40 minutes. The students making presentations on poets should make a corresponding "POETS PAGE" on the wiki, for the entire group to use as a resource. All discussion leaders should prepare a set of questions for group discussion. All participants, especially those not facilitating discussion, should read a little about each poet, in addition to reading the selected work, and have developed a few questions and ideas for discussion. Anyone, including discussion leaders, who wants to bring in material outside of the assigned reading to use as reference points for further discussion should do so.

The remaining hour of class will be used to discuss your own work. Each week you will be responsible for writing a poem (bring copies) after the work we have studied *or* you may memorize a poem and recite it. Poems will be read out-loud and discussed in terms of the ways in which the poet imitated might influence our contemporary writing practice. The weeks we discuss the rationale, lists, or do other exam-related exercises you will not be responsible for a poem or recitation.

09.01 | Introduction

View contents of wiki
Plan panel for next week
Assign scheduled tasks

09.08 | Metaphysical Poetry

7:20-8:20

Panel discussion with MFA poets who have taken the exam (contact poets for this)

Invitees : Jeff (Holly invites), Frank (Doug invites), Q (Maddy)

8:30-10:00

Donne's Holy Sonnets (Doug)

Thomas Traherne (Holly)

Henry Vaughan (Melanie)

Art Science and music (Ben B)

Historical Context (Dani)

09.15 | Victorians

Hopkins Sonnets (Maddy)

Robert Browning (Cloud)

Elizabeth Browning (Ben R)

Art Science and Music (Doug)

Historical Context (Holly)

09.22 | Romantics

Keat's "Ode on a Nightingale" (Melanie)

Coleridge (Ben B)

Wordsworth (Dani)

Art Science and Music (Maddy)

Historical Context (Cloud)

09.29 | NO MEETING: FFTB | DUE: Draft of half of MFA list (be email)

10.06 | Modernists | DUE: Draft of Rationale (bring copies to class)

Stein's *Tender Buttons* (Ben R)

Moore (Doug)

Crane (Holly)

Art Science and Music (Melanie)

Historical Context (Ben B)

10.13 | NO MEETING: Columbus day

10.20 | Modernists

Eliot's *The Wasteland* (Dani)

Williams (Maddy)

Frost (Cloud)

Art Science and Music (Ben R)

Historical Context (Doug)

10.27 | Surrealism/Deep Image/Prose Poetry (TBA)

1st poet (Holly)

2nd poet (Melanie)

3rd poet (Ben B)

Art Science and Music (Dani)

Historical Context (Maddy)

11.03 | Post-War & the Confessional

Sharon Olds/ Sylvia Plath (TBA)

1st poet (Cloud)

2nd poet (Ben R)

3rd poet (Doug)

Art Science and Music (Holly)
Historical Context (Melanie)

11.10 | New York School

1st poet (Ben B)
2nd poet (Dani)
3rd poet (Maddy)
Art Science and Music (Cloud)
Historical Context (Ben R)

11.17 | Objectivists

1st poet
2nd poet
3rd poet
Art Science and Music
Historical Context

11.24 | L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poets

1st poet
2nd poet
3rd poet
Art Science and Music
Historical Context

12.01 | Contemporary Poetry & Making mock exams (TBA)

1st poet
2nd poet
3rd poet
Art Science and Music
Historical Context

12.08 | Answer one exam question in one hour | DUE: Final version of rationale and list

12.15 | Journal for five (to seven) poets from your list due via email.

Read 5 poets on your list completely and complete a reading journal. It should include notes about the poetry, an annotated bibliography of secondary resources, an anthology or table of contents for the anthology, and whatever other relevant material you've accumulated.