

English 206: Life-Writing Fall 2017 M/W 10-11.20 SJ1 3020

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Office SJ Sweeny Hall 2201

Office hours: Mon 2.30-4 or by appointment

Course Description

Our memories tell us the stories of our lives, constantly reworking and reimagining them. But how do we and others construct our ‘selves’ through language? In this course we will read memoirs/autobiographies and diaries to explore the relationship between self and language, examining the way individuals create themselves through language and in the context of available cultural narratives.

I will be happy to discuss your essays during office hours and to work through the essay writing process with you on an individual basis. In addition, please drop in during regular office hours or make an appointment if you can't come during the scheduled time to talk about your work and the course. The best way to reach me outside class is to e-mail me. Please remember to include the course number in any e-mails you send (otherwise I tend to treat them as spam) and to give your full name in the e-mail text.

Electronic devices: To minimize distractions in class I ask that you not use phones or other electronic devices. If you need to use a laptop for accessing a text or for medical reasons that is permissible, but otherwise I prefer you do not use computers. They can be distracting to you and other students. Cognitive psychologists have shown that you think better and retain information more fully if you take notes in class by hand.

Please read the course material before class and reread it after to reinforce your understanding of it and think about it in connection to other works on the course. The short journal assignments are designed to help you think about the various writings or related ideas and articulate your response as we go through the term.

Please bring your text to each class - in English we engage in ‘close reading’ which means you need to have a copy of the text (preferably print) to refer to in class.

The following texts are required reading

Critical readings:

Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 2010 ed.

Digital reserve readings are given in the schedule – please look ahead and print these out to bring to class.

Texts available at the UW bookstore:

You may use any edition of these. They are all available through the university bookstore, but for all texts, I suggest you keep costs down by looking for used copies of the books. *A Very Private Diary* is also available on Kindle.

Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life*
Jeanette Winterson, *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal*
Mary Morris (Carol Acton ed.) *A Very Private Diary: A Nurse in Wartime*
Lamees Al Athari, *Waiting for the Rain: An Iraqi Memoir*

Essay writing online help:

<http://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/resources/essays.php>

Assignments:

20% 2 journal entries - approx 3 pages each (each one worth 10%)

30% Critical/analytical essay 6 pages:

40% Critical/Analytical essay 8-10 pages or a creative autobiographical piece 8-10 pages
+ 3 page commentary – written work must indicate use of secondary sources with clear
in-text citation and a bibliography/works cited at the end

10% attendance and participation – this will be based on regular attendance in class,
participation in class discussion and on 4 randomly distributed in-class written reflection
pieces

Further information on the above assignments will be available via a Learn e-mail/on the
Learn site

Weekly schedule

Week 1 (Jan 6/8) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, chapt 1)

Introduction to Life Narratives

Extract from Helen Keller's autobiography digital reserve (for Wed 8th) **Journal
guidelines**

Week 2 (Jan 13/15) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, chapt 2&3)

This Boy's Life

Week 3 (Jan 20/22) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, (chapt 4) **Reflective Journal 1
due as hardcopy on 22nd in class**

This Boy's Life; Tim Winton, 'The Boy behind the Curtain' (digital reserve)

Essay topics for Essay 1 and some essay writing strategies

Week 4 (Jan 27/29) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, chapt 5&6)

Why be Happy

Week 5 (Feb 3/5) *Why be Happy*

Week 6 (Feb 10/12) Film: Sarah Polley, *Stories We Tell*

(Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, Appendix A)

Essay 1 due in Wed class

Reading week 17th - 21

Week 7 (Feb 24/26)

Very Private Diary

Topics for Essay/Assignment 2

Week 8 (March 2/4) *Very Private Diary* **Reflective Journal entry 2 due**

Week 9 (March 9/11) Rousseau; bell hooks and the autobiographical essay; TBA

Week 10 (March 16/18) *Waiting for the Rain*

Week 11 (March 23/25) *Waiting for the Rain*

Week 12 (March 30/April 1) Review **Final essay/creative assignment due April 1**

There may be minor changes to the timetable above

Late assignments will have 2% deducted per day late. However, if you request an extension at least 24hrs before the deadline, either in person or via e-mail, I can arrange a new deadline with you without penalty. It is in your own best interest to hand work in on time so you don't become overwhelmed with overdue work. Please let me know if ongoing illness or family or personal issues cause problems during the term as it makes it much easier for me help you plan work accordingly if I know about such issues.

Important Information

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Federated University and Affiliated Colleges are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

[Academic Integrity Office \(UW\):](#) A resource for students and instructors.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 \(Student Discipline\)](#).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Students who decide to file a grievance should refer to [University of Waterloo](#)

[Policy 70 \(Student Petitions and Grievances\)](#). For more information, students should contact the Associate Dean of St. Jerome's University.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline or University of Waterloo Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) if a ground for an appeal can be established. In such a case, read [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](#).

Note for Students with Disabilities: The [AccessAbility Services \(AS\) Office](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

Mental Health Services: Lindsay Thomson is St. Jerome's University's Wellness Coordinator. She can be contacted at 519-884-8111 x28361 or at lindsay.thompson@uwaterloo.ca. Her office is Sweeney Hall 1016.

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 x32655
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from the Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Extended Assessment Unit Phone: 519-749-4300 x6880
- [Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): Support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 x222

Full details can be found online at the Faculty of ARTS [website](#)

Download [UWaterloo and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information