Introduction to Poetry
BY BILLY COLLINS

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem’s room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author’s name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Course Description:

By design, this is a ‘writing/reflecting-intensive’ course. What this means is that the focus of the course is on YOU, the writer. While we will spend time reading works by several ‘great’ authors, most of the course will be about developing your own skills as a writer across three genres: poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. We may also dabble a bit with drama, if time permits.

This is not the right class for people who do not like to write…or share their writing. I recognize, of course, that there can be a bit of discomfort when it comes to sharing what you’ve written, but ‘putting it out there’ is how you evolve. Being uncomfortable can be rewarding, and out of respect for the chance that you are taking in sharing your work, I will also share mine.

I hope you will find this course to be both rewarding and challenging. I hope it inspires you to be a bit more introspective. I hope you will become more daring. And I hope, more than anything, that it will be a first step—that the writing will continue even when the course comes to an end.
From the College Catalog:

A workshop in original composition and revision of prose and poetry. Emphasis is on the individual conference, class consideration of student writing, and the practical problems of the writing of manuscripts. Three hours lecture per week.

Course Texts & Materials:

- *Wild Mind: Living the Writer’s Life* by Natalie Goldberg
- *Poemcrazy* by Susan Wooldridge
- Please purchase a folder that will hold all drafts and final copies of your work. You should get into the habit of saving drafts.
- I strongly suggest that you purchase a travel/pen drive to use during class.

Evaluations: Your final grade will be based on the following:

- **Final portfolio** (40%) - Your final portfolio is a compilation of your work for the semester and will be turned in at the beginning of class on the scheduled final exam date. The portfolio should include samples of all of your work, but should feature your best, most meaningfully revised work. The portfolio should be presented in a professional, self-respecting fashion, and not just as sheets of paper stapled. You can get creative with the presentation if you want to, but something simple and organized will suffice. Details regarding the portfolio will be distributed around mid-term.
- **Your Wordpress Blog** (20%) - You are expected to keep a wordpress blog during the semester. All final pieces will be included on your blog, but in addition, you will also include some of the exercises that you complete as part of the *poemcrazy* experience. It is also a place for you to write about your own progress.
- **Workshops** (20%) - You are required to share your work in class, and you are required to meet with me for an individual conference every third week. Dates will be announced in advance.
- **Final Presentation** (10%) - A reading of your favorite pieces
- **Miscellaneous** (10%) - This includes revision scores, classwork, participation, etc.
- **Extra Credit** - If you are interested in earning extra credit, you can submit work to the college’s literary magazine, *The Beacon.*

General Course Guidelines:

- **Attendance Policy:** Class participation, including being familiar with any readings, and being present (physically and mentally) for each class constitutes a significant part of your final grade. While regular attendance is expected, every student is granted up to THREE absences for whatever reason. However, missing more than three classes will negatively impact your final grade (10 points for each absence). I consider myself a reasonable person and am happy to discuss problems that may interfere with your attendance, but please understand that your presence in class is very important to me; your presence is a sign of your commitment. **If you must be absent, please ask another student what you have missed.**
Please NOTE: An absence from class does not excuse you from submitting an assignment on the day it is due. For EVERY CALENDAR DAY that the assignment is late, you will lose one full letter grade. If you miss a presentation day, and the absence has not been excused, you must write an essay in lieu of the presentation. The highest grade you can earn on that paper is 80%.

- **Lateness**: Students are expected to arrive to class on time and prepared. If unforeseen circumstances arise and you must come to class late, please enter quietly. If lateness becomes an issue, it too will negatively impact your final grade.

- **Paper Format**: Writing Projects must be double-spaced, typed in a standard (Times) 12 pt. font with one-inch margins. No exceptions.

- **Email**: I communicate with students mainly through email, so you should get into the habit of checking your email daily. This is how I will reach you if I need to ask you a question, clarify a point, announce a change of assignment or due date, send a general course announcement, or cancel class because of an emergency.

- **Workshop Etiquette**: A workshop is about the writing, not about its participants. In this workshop your critique is expected to be about the work and not about its author, even if the author informs us that the material is autobiographical. A writing workshop is a place where writers gather with the specific goal of not only bettering their own work, but also helping other participants to do so as well. The golden rule, therefore, is: treat your colleagues and their work as you would like you and your work to be treated—with respect and with the sole aim of helping them improve their work and writing skills.¹

- **Academic Integrity**: Plagiarism is a serious offence. Any student who copies and/or takes credit for someone else's work—including paraphrasing or quoting someone's ideas or words without properly citing your source—will earn a failing grade for the assignment and perhaps even for the course.

- **PLEASE**: Let me know if you need any assistance. I will do the best I can to provide helpful feedback on your writing assignments but nothing can take the place of some one-on-one time. I've often found that one 20-minute conversation can solve many problems and prevent students from making the same mistake twice. If you find that you have questions about anything, please ask.

- On a practical note, please turn off all cell phones before you enter the room. Having a cell phone out during class is disrespectful to me and to your classmates. If I see you using a cell phone, even just to read a text message, I will kindly ask you to leave. It's that simple.

¹ Adapted from Mohammed Naseehu Ali @ NYU Creative Writing Program