Shaping Memories into YA and Middle Grade Fiction Syllabus

Instructor
Alex Sanchez
Email
Alex@AlexSanchez.com
Modality
Remote learning

Quarter: Spring 2022
Start – end date: 8 sessions between March 30 – May 18
Session day/time: Wednesday 6:00 – 8:30 PM CT
Course Code and Section: WRIT61801 22S1

Course Overview
We each have our own rich trove of growing up stories. Through writing prompts, readings, and studying fiction craft techniques, we’ll explore how to shape those memories into YA and middle grade stories pulsing with real life.

Note to students
(No additional information to students.)

Required texts
No required texts. Handouts will be provided.

Course outline

- Class discussion/participation: What is YA fiction? Middle Grade fiction? Differences and characteristics. Where do stories come from? What are your growing up stories?
- In-class writing exercise: List/mind-map 8-12 (or more) defining moments in your growing up. (Give example of my own list.)
- Reading and discussion: “The Sound of Summer Running” by Ray Bradbury. What is the story about? On the surface? Below the surface?
- In-class writing exercise: Develop one of the moments from your list into a fuller capsule. (Give example of my own.)
Class 2: Coming-of-age character arcs.

- Reading and discussion: “Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan. What does the narrator want? What is her deep yearning? How does she need to change in order to achieve her goal?
- Class discussion/participation: Character Wants, Needs, and Yearning. What is a character’s tangible external goal/problem? What is the deep yearning that drives a character to their goal/ solve their problem? How does a character need to change in order to achieve their goal/ solve their problem? What is the role of wants, needs, and yearning in a character’s arc?
- In-class writing exercise: Develop a moment from your growing up when you wanted something badly.

Class 3: Empathy.

- Class discussion/participation: Why is empathy important to create a compelling character? How can you create empathy for your character? How do you make your reader care? Sympathy, jeopardy, admiration, vulnerability.
- Reading and discussion: First pages from various novels.
- In-class writing exercise part 1: List/mind-map what made you empathetic when you were growing up? Who cared about you? Who did you care about? How were you in jeopardy? How were you vulnerable? What were you admired for?
- Reading and discussion: “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros (MG tween voice)
- In-class writing exercise part 2: Develop one of the items in your list into a story.

Class 4: Voice.

- Class discussion/participation: What do we mean by voice in MG/YA literature? Why is voice so fundamental in MG/YA lit?
- Reading and discussion 1: “Raymond’s Run” by Toni Cade Bambara (MG tween voice)
- In-class writing exercise: Choose a moment from your list that occurred in your middle grade years (10-13). Expand on the moment, writing a brief piece in a MG tween voice.
- Reading and discussion 2: “Teen American History” by Judith Ortiz Cofer (YA teen voice)
- In-class writing exercise: Choose a moment from your list that occurred in your teen years (13-18). Expand on the moment, writing a brief piece in a YA teen voice.
- How can you use childhood photos as inspiration?

Class 5: Antagonists.

- Class discussion/participation: What are the external forces (individuals, groups, society, social forces, nature) and internal forces (flaws, misbeliefs, lies, fears, doubts) that act as obstacles to a character achieving their goal? What is the role/relationship of antagonistic forces in a character arc?
- Reading and discussion 1: “Thank You, Ma’am” What are the internal/external antagonistic forces?
- In-class writing exercise 1: List/mind-map what were the internal and external forces that acted as obstacles in your growing up? (Give my example)
- Reading/ discussion 2: “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid. What are the internal/external antagonistic forces?
- In-class writing exercise 2: Add to your list/mind-map of internal forces that acted as obstacles to your growing up? (Give my example)
- In-class writing exercise 3: Develop one of your obstacles into a brief story.
Class 6: Emotional Truth and Historical Accuracy.

- Class discussion/participation: What is the difference between autobiography, memoir, and creative nonfiction? What happens when the lines between ‘reality’ and fiction are blurred?
- Reading and discussion 1: “Memory and Imagination” by Patricia Hampl
- Reading and discussion 2: “The First Day” by Edward P. Jones and his commentary.
- In-class writing exercise: Choose a grade from middle school or high school. (For example: 9th grade) List: ‘I remember…’ ‘I can’t remember…’ ‘I don’t remember…’ ‘I wish I could remember…’ ‘I’m not going to tell you…’

Class 7: Setting and Symbols.

- Class discussion/participation: Why is setting so important in MG/YA fiction? How can setting be used to communicate MG/YA stories?
- Reading and discussion: “The House on Mango Street” by Sandra Cisneros
- In-class writing exercise: Draw a map of a city in which you grew up. (Give my example.) Draw a map of a house in which you grew up. (Give my example.)
- In-class writing exercise: What can you remember from a childhood setting?

Class 8: Point of View, Narrative Device, and Perspective.

- Class discussion/participation: What is Point of View? Narrative Device? Perspective? How can each be used to show a MG/YA character? To whom is a character telling a story (narrative device)? What is the concept of a ‘container’?
- Reading and discussion: Rainbow Boys movie scene. So Hard to Say. “If You Kiss a Boy.”
- In-class writing exercise 1: Two-step point of view exercise.
- In-class writing exercise 2: Two part narrative device exercise (teen telling story).
- Course review: Putting together all you have learned. Questions/Comments.
- Developing an action plan for your writing.

Accessibility Information

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class session at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

Accessing Remote Courses

Remote courses are taught through our Canvas platform. Approximately two weeks before your class begins, we will add you to your canvas site using the email address you provided at the time of registration. An invitation will then be sent to that email. Click the “Get Started” button in the email to begin the Canvas login process. For step-by-step instructions, please visit https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts. Once you’ve created your Canvas account, you can access any Graham School canvas course for which you are registered at: https://canvas.uchicago.edu.

Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zme1@uchicago.edu.