ENGL 386: Creative Nonfiction
MWF 10:20 - 11:10 am
Dr. Stabile

Course Description: Creative nonfiction (called the fourth genre) is a vibrant field for reflection, inquiry, and innovative play. A generic hybrid, the essay (from the French essai for “trial” or “attempt”) is flexible, malleable, and experimental. As narrative-driven as fiction and as lyrical as poetry, the creative nonfiction essay’s forms are variable: including the personal, nature, travel, reportage, lyric, braided, and hermit-crab essay. And its content is limitless. Current debates fixate on the lived, experiential, and remembered truth, but the essay, above all, crafts that truth through literary conventions. Unlike the academic essay that proves an argument, moreover, a literary essay translates the situation, as writer Vivian Gornick insists, into the story. More than narration, an essay explores what the story means. Understanding the essay as both an aesthetic object and intellectual foray, essayist Joan Didion says: “I write to find out what I’m thinking, what I’m looking at, what I see and what it means.” To essay—or assai—is most importantly, then, a verb. It calls us to question, to challenge, to rethink, to disrupt, and to act.

Learning Outcomes:
• “read like a writer” by examining the “architectures” of the essay
• understand and write the experimental forms of the creative nonfiction essay
• conceptualize and employ a variety of aesthetic techniques
• work by analogy through imitating other arts (including architecture, papercutting, sculpture, and frottage)
• translate their experiences into prose that engages the “situation” and the “story”
• gain awareness of nonfiction writing as craft rather than confession
• write essays that engage both the self and the world
• understand the ethical questions regarding “fact” and “truth” in creative nonfiction
• practice critical, creative, and reflective thinking through close reading and discussion of assigned essays
• openly consider and respond to divergent viewpoints
• provide constructive feedback on their peers’ writing in small groups and class workshop
• learn to use feedback from instructor and peers in order to revise their own work
• attend two public readings of visiting creative writers
• present a selection of their creative nonfiction work at a Creative Writing reading