



GERMANTOWN  
FRIENDS SCHOOL

## ESSENTIALLY ENGLISH 2020

LITERATURE AND WRITING COURSES FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, ALUMNI, AND FRIENDS

### Visions of American Empire

Joseph McGeary

Wednesday Evening and Daytime (E,F,G,H)

In this course, we will explore powerful and exciting works of fiction and journalism that raise questions about the foundational myth of American exceptionalism, the idea that America was created out of a rebellion against an oppressive empire and is therefore immune to any imperial designs of its own. These works compellingly suggest that the idea of empire is woven into the American way of life and that America's status as leader of the free world has depended upon violent military interventions from Korea and Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan and beyond. In his seminal 1955 novel, *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene exposes the aggression concealed behind America's "innocent" efforts at anti-communist nation-building in 1950's Indochina. Don DeLillo's 1988 novel, *Libra*, spins a conspiracy theory about the Kennedy assassination that is as wildly fantastic as it is highly credible in connecting the dots between Dealy Plaza in Dallas, the Cold War, and the CIA's secret meddlings in Cuba in the early 1960s. *Salvador* by Joan Didion and *Dispatches* by Michael Herr are two great works of war reportage set in the imperial theaters of Southeast Asia and Central America. *Eat The Document* by Dana Spiotta links the culture of imperialism from the Vietnam era to the insidious effects of global capitalism at the end of the 20th century. Spiotta's narrative concerns a young woman who goes into hiding after becoming involved in violent protests against the war in Vietnam. It is a moving tale that raises questions about the complicity of all Americans in the culture of empire that has cast a shadow on the American Century. Students will do presentations on independent research and will write both critically and creatively.

Joseph McGeary, a teacher at GFS, holds a Ph.D. in English from Duke University. His research interests include postcolonial studies and the history of resistance to American empire.

### Literary Pairings: A Writing Class

Robin Friedman

Daytime (F)

Tracy K. Smith, in writing to Rita Dove about her work, claimed: "I felt like there was a family that I could somehow find in the pages of those books, and I wanted to sound exactly like you." Forrest Gander described his longtime collaboration with his wife, the poet C.D. Wright, "Our vocabularies were forever a collaborative improvisation." Best friends, Ada Limon and Natalie Diaz, embarked on a project titled "Envelopes of Air," in which they wrote eight poem-letters to each other. Reflecting on this project, Ada Limon said: "Writing to Natalie Diaz was one of the great pleasures of my creative life because there were always new questions, a new way of looking, and she was guiding me as much as I was guiding her so that it was a dance, two brains dancing without answers." In this class, we will explore the nature of influence, kinship, collaborative improvisation, imitation, and dialogue through the work of five pairs of poets whose work is in conversation with each other, who are best friends or married, who are writers living in different centuries with similar aesthetics and preoccupations. We will read extensively and use the poems we read as anchor and inspiration for poetry of our own. Students will also dream up a collaborative writing project with a classmate. In this class, you can expect to write one critical essay and a small, polished collection of poems. We will share our collaborative projects and our poems at a reading at the end of our time together.

This is Robin Friedman's seventh year at GFS. She previously taught English in New York City, where she also helped young people write a newspaper and make short documentary films about social justice issues. She loves reading (and writing) poetry.

## Watching the Detectives

Anne Gerbner

Daytime (E,F)

In this class, we will track the footsteps of detectives who crack impossible cases and survive harrowing situations. We will begin with Edgar Allen Poe, credited with the first American detective story, whose locked rooms, red herrings, surprise culprits, and inept police are still mainstays of the classic detective story. We will briefly investigate Sherlock Holmes, and then cross the Atlantic to follow hardboiled Sam Spade in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* and Raymond Chandler's "Trouble is My Business." We will study Walter Mosley's private eye Easy Rawlins and a range of women detectives who solve crimes in a morally ambiguous world. Throughout the course, we will discuss crime, justice, police, race, class, and gender, comparing detective fiction with true crime writing. There will be abundant, suspenseful reading to enjoy in this course, as well as three written assignments, creative and analytical.

Anne Gerbner teaches English at GFS. Ever since she was a kid reading Nancy Drew books under the covers with a flashlight, her secret vice has been reading detective fiction.



## To Catch a Fire: Calibans, Revolutionaries, and Caribbean Writing

Adam Hotek

Daytime (E,F,H)

Bob Marley wrote, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds." In a post-colonial context, how does one "emancipate" one's self? What psychic and artistic dimensions emerge when the West Indian writer moves to "satisfy my soul"? In this class, we will explore the lyrical power and social vision of a range of West Indian writers and poets. We will consider how these authors construct notions of national, racial, ethnic, and political identity. We will also explore how such writers constitute a unique aesthetic that draws from a distinctly West Indian sensibility, Afro-centric folklore, and Voodoo and Reggae culture. We will examine how various writers have responded to the hurricanes that occurred in the Bahamas and Haiti. The authors we may read include Aimé Césaire, Edwidge Danticat, Paule Marshall, Jacques Roumain, Zora Neale Hurston, Sam Selvon, George Lamming, Kamau Brathwaite, CLR James, Derek Walcott, Frantz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter. Students will produce an in-class presentation and two formal essays.

Adam Hotek is a veteran Essentially English teacher currently working at GFS. He is interested in Afro-American studies and Modernist and Postmodernist writing.

## Hope & How to Have It

Chelsea Koehler

Wednesday Evening

Is hope a muscle? Is it a fool's errand? Is it the thing with feathers? Hope feels hard to find these days, and for good reason. What can we learn from contemporary writers about how to stay generative and bright while facing down a dark future? This course will examine ways in which creativity can function as an antidote to despair. To learn from others, we will read memoirs, essays, and poetry from authors such as Ross Gay, Hanif Abdurraqib, Saeed Jones, Rebecca Solnit, and Lacy Johnson. We will also delve into interviews and podcasts. To generate their own theories and practices, students will write poems and essays, conduct interviews, create recordings, and collect artifacts. Work for this course will include daily journal writing and weekly semi-polished pieces. One critical paper, a creative response project, and a community action experience will punctuate our time.

Chelsea Koehler teaches English at GFS. She formulated almost all the ideas for this course while running in the very early morning. A sucker for metaphor, she's still trying to figure out if the darkest hour really is the one just before dawn.

## Character Arcs: Navigating the Transformative Journey of the Inner Self

June Gondi

Daytime (E,F,G,H)

Do you wish to understand how the dynamics of realistic human change play out in fiction that grabs a reader's emotions and keeps them hooked until the last page? By utilizing the foundation of the three-act story structure, you will learn how to determine which arc—positive, negative, or flat—is right for your character. To examine the types of story beats that create compelling character arcs, we will read screenplays and watch movies, which may include: *Toy Story*, *Thor*, *Secondhand Lions*, *Three Kings*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, *Gladiator*, *The Godfather*, *Star Wars*, *Chicken Run*, and *Jurassic Park*. In this class, students will produce the three types of character arcs that will serve as outlines for short stories, screenplays, or novellas.

June Gondi, an English teacher at GFS, was born and raised in Kenya, but has spent the better part of her life in the U.S., where she's experienced adventures similar to her fictional characters. She hopes that she's grown much like her fictional characters, who are forced to adapt to what life throws at them.

## Poetry Since 1950

Alexander Guevarez

Monday Evening and Daytime (F,G)

This course considers poets and poetic movements from the second half of the 20th century in the United States, England, Ireland, and the Caribbean. Authors include Bishop, Lowell, O'Hara, Ginsberg, Plath, Ashbery, Merrill, Larkin, Gunn, Hill, Heaney, Muldoon, and Walcott. Attention will be given to developing skills of literary interpretation and critical writing; diverse genres and social histories; and (post)modernity's multiple canons and traditions. Students will write a short paper or two, and a longer one in conclusion, equal in scope and ambition to a publishable review-essay or scholarly article. Our writing will also include short creative exercises—parodies, translations, imitations—all by way of learning the genre from the inside.

Alexander Guevarez was born and raised in Newark, NJ. He was educated at Amherst College and, most recently, Johns Hopkins University, where he coedited the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* (Sixth Edition). He currently teaches English at GFS.

## Tempest

Sam Sullivan  
Daytime (G,H)

Surely, reality television is one of American culture's summary achievements. Among the first and longest-running of these shows is that oh-so-subtle homage to settler colonialism, CBS's *Survivor*. Here the 'giddy multitudes' are pit against one another for the sake of our entertainment as they vie for their 'survival' on an island, a tropical 'someplace,' where there is literally no civilization whatsoever. Like, no Starbucks. But seriously: this 'reality'—which happens to be the reality of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*—just happens to be our Real World. We are at present the summation of a hostile takeover of this land—chock full of PhDs and Prophets, swindlers and 'giddy multitudes,' poor and outcast Native Sons, society queens and working mothers. Our production crew is working off its student debt—it would rather be doing more avant-garde work. That at least is one interpretation. But I am certain that to interpret and to reinterpret the play is to challenge these categories—media, power, the body, the landscape—that shape our society today. Our class will be a guide to *The Tempest* and its interpretations and adaptations across historical contexts. We will read and write and talk; students should expect one major analytical essay, one creative piece, and one short explication. Drawn from the sources pertaining to the 'first contact'—Montaigne, Erasmus, Strachey—*The Tempest* is and was a map of the ways culture talks about America. Our readings lead us homeward and astray.

Sam Sullivan teaches in the GFS English department. He has lived in many of the cities on I-95. He has authored a controversial and difficult-to-find pamphlet on lightboxes called "Representations of Lo Mein."

## "How Dare You:" Public Intervention in the Face of Climate Change

Rachel Reynolds and Geo Decas O'Donnell  
Wednesday Evening

We are living in a time of environmental crisis, a moment in which the future feels intimately—and urgently—at stake. In this class, we will examine how voices of opposition operate in the public sphere, working to understand the complex machinations of power in the face of resistance, and empowering students to step into the fray. To support this process, we will explore a variety of texts, including *Silent Thunder* by Katy Payne; *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer; *Active Hope* by Joanna Macy; *The Invention of Nature* by Andrea Wulf; and *Whereas* by Layli Long Soldier. We will analyze performance by exploring works by Bertolt Brecht and the Theatre of the Oppressed, as well as the installations of Cecilia Vicuña and "banner drops" (which are exactly what they sound like). We'll also research direct action, from student-led protests to Act Up to Extinction Rebellion, unpacking strategies for public storytelling. Along the way, students will write reading responses and keep research logs. In the end, each student will generate a piece of work that tackles climate change and is designed for public consumption.

Rachel Reynolds teaches 7th grade English at GFS. This is her second Essentially English class. She is the former Director of the (In)Visible Memoirs Project—a statewide, community-based writing workshop program in California—and her prose, poetry, and reporting have appeared in *VICE*, *Liminalities*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *HipMama*, *Duende*, and more.

Geo Decas O'Donnell is a writer and theatre-maker. With his theatre company, CollaborationTown, he won the Otto Renee Castillo Award for Political Theatre in 2014. He has also devised a play about the HIV/AIDS direct action group ACT UP, as well as a puppet musical about extinction. He is deeply committed to fighting for environmental justice and preserving biodiversity. He currently teaches theatre and playwriting at GFS.



## Walk This Way, Talk This Way: Crafting the Journey

Adam Hotek  
Daytime (E,F,H)

What is the connection between storytelling and travel? In this class, we will explore this issue by reading a range of texts that can be classified as travel narratives. We will examine how various modes of transportation (cars, bicycles, feet) shape stories. We will assess the symbolic, cultural and ideological significance of how people travel and where they go. We will look at trips to Hell, California, sacred sites, even trips that don't seem to go anywhere. In addition to looking at these travel dynamics, we will also interrogate how race, class, and gender inflect various forms of movement from one place to another. The writers and artists we may examine include Geoffrey Chaucer, Dante Alighieri, Jack Kerouac, Herman Hesse, William Faulkner, Sui Sin Far, Maxine Hong Kingston, Toni Morrison, Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Joyce Carol Oates, Isabelle Eberhardt, Flannery O'Connor, Tracy K. Smith, Herman Melville, and a select group of filmmakers. Students will produce response pieces, a formal essay, and a travel narrative of their own.

Adam Hotek, a teacher at GFS, has traveled to every state in the United States. He is interested in psychoanalysis, Modernism, Postmodernism and Afro-American studies.

## Medieval Miscellany: Monsters, Monks, Magic, and Manuscripts

Pierce Buller  
Monday Evening

The medieval period produced works of exceptional literary brilliance that are worthy of our continuing study and appreciation. We will engage in close study of two of these literary works: *Beowulf*: an early medieval epic where Grendel, most monstrous of medieval monsters, stalks the night, and where a gold-hoarding dragon waits for warriors in its lair; and *Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Gawain's search for the mysterious Green Knight, who challenged King Arthur's court, brings us deep into a world of magic, layered meaning, and a complexity far beyond the world of the quest. Although *Beowulf* and *Gawain* will be the focus of our class, we will also enjoy other medieval works, such as battle poems, chronicles of warring kings and powerful queens, and readings from throughout the entire medieval world. We will be sure to reflect on our readings from critical literary perspectives and see that examination through the lens of gender, textual analysis, and social and economic power reveals. Finally, we will spend time with the unique manuscripts that held these works and their own particular history, note the skill of the scribe and the translator, and reflect on our own present fascination with the medieval world. Close reading, discussion, and two projects of significance will allow us to fully engage with this literature of beauty, depth, and continuing illumination.

Pierce Buller received a master's degree in Medieval History from the University of Pennsylvania and an undergraduate degree in English and History from Colgate. He has taught in the GFS Essentially English program for many years.

## Moral Injury and War

Peter Yeomans

Wednesday Evening

The course aims to help students clarify their own moral obligations around issues of war and militarism. The course will draw on fiction, essays, and film to explore dimensions of moral responsibility in relation to American military warfare. We will use literature and film to take an unflinching look at the realities of warfare and to fully humanize those who have chosen to serve in the US military. We will study the emerging concept of moral injury. We will read and listen to the voices of different constituents—veterans, activists, journalists, military chaplains (some of whom will visit the class)—as they struggle to uphold personal moral values while serving, protesting, or ministering. The course will include a field trip to the VA Medical Center in West Philadelphia to attend a ceremony focused on moral injury on May 4. How different or similar am I to those who serve in the US military? Under what circumstances might I serve in the military, and in what capacity? What is my responsibility to American combat veterans or to people overseas who have been affected by American military intervention? Who is responsible for the wars conducted by our government? The scope of the investigation will draw primarily from the context of the Vietnam War, as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have taken place since 2001. Some course material will include graphic depiction of the realities of warfare that may be disturbing for some. Possible texts: *Dispatches* (Herr), *What It Is Like to Go to War* (Marlantes), *Billy Lynn's Long Half Time Walk* (Fountain), *Redeployment* (Klay). Short essays and films will also be assigned. Possible films: *Restrepo*, *A War*, *The Hurt Locker*, *Thank You for Your Service*, *Soldiers of Conscience*, *The Kill Team*. Assessments will be: short weekly response papers, a longer paper, and a short piece of original narrative fiction.

Peter Yeomans is a member of Germantown Monthly Meeting and a parent of three children at GFS. He works for the U.S. Government as a clinical psychologist at the Corporal Michael Crescenz VA Medical Center, where he provides psychotherapy to military veterans. He is the program director of the PTSD outpatient clinical team. His responsibilities include teaching psychiatry and postdoctoral psychology residents, and he has many years of teaching in alternative settings ranging from the glaciers of Alaska to Philadelphia public school enrichment programs.

## Novel Fundamentals: The Verse Novel

Cordelia Jensen

Monday Evening

*The Poet X. Inside Out & Back Again. Long Way Down. Out of the Dust.* The verse novel has emerged as a popular genre over the course of the past few decades. The well-written verse novel is unique because of its ability to draw emotion from the reader. In this class, we will explore exactly how the successful verse novel achieves this so powerfully. This class will look at how to create a strong image system for your verse novel, how to optimize the use of line breaks and white space, how to incorporate dialogue and secondary character construction in a verse novel, and other topics specific to verse novel writing. We will also cover basic story fundamentals, as they are an essential part of verse novel creation. In every class, there will be writing exercises and sharing out. This course will have a strong critique/workshop element in the last four weeks of class, in which students will submit their own verse novel beginnings to the class. Each class member will then receive verbal and written feedback from the other group members.

Cordelia Jensen is the author of two Young Adult verse novels *Skyscraping* (Penguin, 2015) and *The Way the Light Bends* (Penguin, 2018). She is also the co-author of the half verse/half prose Middle Grade book *Every Shiny Thing* (co-authored with Laurie Morrison, Abrams, 2018). Cordelia lives in Philadelphia with her husband and children (twins at GFS). She teaches creative writing at Bryn Mawr College and runs a kids' literary journal.

## Reimagining *Jane Eyre*

Anne Gerbner

Wednesday evening

Early in the novel *Jane Eyre*, 10-year-old Jane is ordered to be silent, then dragged by her aunt to be locked in a room. "I resisted all the way," says Jane. Indeed, it proves impossible to confine Jane, and over the course of the novel, Jane acquires her own voice and uses it boldly. Her voice still speaks clearly to our age and times, and Charlotte Brontë's novel has often been reworked and reinterpreted since it shocked its first readers in 1847. (One reviewer slammed the anonymous author of *Jane Eyre* for committing the "highest moral offense a novel writer can commit, that of making an unworthy character interesting in the eyes of the reader.") And therein lies the pleasure of reading this first-person narrative. *Jane Eyre* is great reading for those interested in children and adolescents who refuse to submit to their social destiny. After reading *Jane Eyre*, we will look at some of the adaptations and contemporary versions of the novel that continue or counter various characters, tropes, and themes. We will read Caribbean writer Jean Rhys' 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a prequel that imagines the early life of one of the characters on Barbados. We will compare key scenes from film versions, debate interpretations, and read short stories by contemporary writers such as Tessa Hadley, Francine Prose, and Elif Shafak. Students will write three short pieces of fiction or non-fiction.

Anne Gerbner concentrated in 19th-century literature as a student at the University of Pennsylvania. She last taught Brontë's novel to seniors at GFS.



## Georges Perec: The Rules of the Game

Elias Bartholomew

Monday Evening

Georges Perec (1936-1982) was a French author and archivist whose works include a 1,247-word palindrome, a book in which the only vowel used is e, a dream journal, a screenplay about Ellis Island, and an obsessively-detailed catalogue of fictional paintings. What animated Perec is the notion that, just as the rules of a game produce the freedom to play, so do literary rules create the freedom to write. In this class, we'll read several short texts and one novel, puzzling over Perec's experiments in form and narrative: why does restriction breed creativity? How can rules, regulations, and lists tell stories about shopping, love, mass media, paintings, or war? Assignments will explore creativity, chance, the subconscious, and boredom, as well as literary analysis.

Like Georges Perec, Elias Bartholomew has worked in libraries and thinks a lot about them. His favorite books are weird ones that make him laugh. He is currently storing energy in order to write a very long palindrome. An alum of GFS, he now works on the Academic Strategy and Writing Support team at GFS.

## **Milkman and The Sympathizer**

Joseph McGeary

Monday Evening and Daytime (E,F,G,H)

This class examines two dynamic present-day novels depicting political realities of 50 years ago that echo powerfully in our own time. *Milkman* by Anna Burns, winner of the Booker Prize for Fiction in 2018, tells the story of a young woman forced to live amid the turmoil of Northern Ireland in the 1970s, the infamous civil war of terrorist violence euphemistically known as “The Troubles.” Burns’s novel is a darkly comic and satirical tour-de-force with tonal echoes of David Foster Wallace (among others), as well as a powerful feminist manifesto examining the connections between nationalist violence, empire, and patriarchy. Viet Than Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer*, winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, turns the tables on the numerous accounts of Vietnam written from the perspective of Americans and instead, in its author’s words, “confronts the history of the American war in Vietnam from the Vietnamese American point of view.” The narrator is a half-French, half-Vietnamese communist double agent embedded in America after the end of the Vietnam War. At once a brilliant satire and a gripping espionage novel, *The Sympathizer* is a scathing critique not only of America’s involvement in Vietnam, but of the culture of militarism and imperialism that persists in the wars America has waged in the aftermath of that conflict. To quote Nguyen, “I sensed a reluctance to be angry at American culture or at the United States for what it has done. That’s why, in the book, I adopt a much angrier tone towards American culture and the US.” Students will present on independent research, write one essay, and produce one creative project.

Joseph McGeary has taught in the English Department at GFS since 2005. Among his interests are postmodern fiction and the history and theory of the novel.

## **Queer Comix**

JT Waldman

Daytime (G)

What does a subculture of a subculture look like? How are the flavors of queer identity distilled through the panels and gutters of comic books, graphic novels, and zines? This course will examine the role of sequential art within LGBTQI+ realms. Moving from the activist underground comix of the 1960/70s, to the confessional comics of the 1980s/90s, toward the mainstreaming of queer superheroes and graphic memoirs, the coming out story of Queer Comix is layered and varied. The course will start with a historic survey of queer representation in visual/literary fields by offering a range of excerpts from different comix like *HotHead Paisain: Lesbian Terrorist*, *Batwoman*, *Gaylord Phoenix*, and *Three Dollar Riot*. We’ll then dive into Tagame’s *My Brother’s Husband* and *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up With Me* by Tamiki and Valero-O’Connell to gain a better sense of contemporary queer comix and how this one-time subculture now shines in the light of the mainstream. This course will balance theory with practice as students will examine a wide range of sequential art formats (comic books, zines, graphic novels) as literature while also making their own comix related to queer identity and themes. You do not have to identify as LGBTQI+ to take this course.

JT Waldman teaches at GFS and is a comic book creator and digital designer. He is best known for his graphic novels: *Megillat Esther*, published in 2005 by the Jewish Publication Society, and his collaboration with Harvey Pekar, *Not the Israel My Parents Promised Me*, which reached *The New York Times* Best Seller List. He lectures at colleges, universities, and conferences and teaches in the Theatre and Computer Science/Digital Media Departments at GFS.

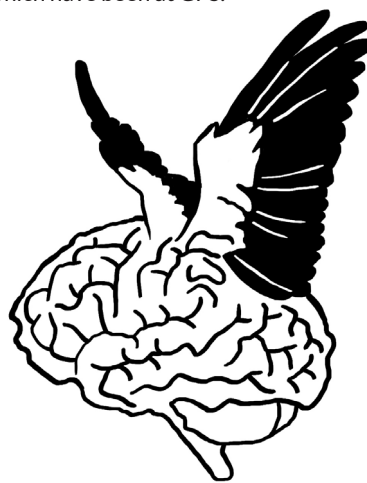
## **Peer Writing Advisor Training**

Sara Primo

Monday Evening

Are you invested in good writing? Do you want to improve your writing skills while helping others get better at theirs? This course trains you to work as a peer writing advisor during the 2020-2021 school year. This cohort will join the ranks of what many high schools and colleges are working on across the country. In preparation, we will read articles on “peer tutoring” and role-play various scenarios. Peer tutoring is a constantly shifting field with a rich history of research and technique. We will ask the timeless questions: What kind of feedback is worth giving? What is the difference between critique and criticism; editing and correcting? This is a different type of course. First of all, this course is only open to current tenth and eleventh graders. Second of all, there is a slightly extended enrollment process; if you are interested, please contact Sara Primo to schedule a brief meeting.

Sara Primo has been peer editing since 1996. She was awarded the Rose Fellowship at Brown University in 2004, during which she helped train dozens of Brown undergraduates as Writing Fellows. She has taught for 17 years, 9 of which have been at GFS.



## **Footsteps in the Grass: The Hidden Mechanisms of Effective Storycraft**

Mike Primo

Wednesday Evening

What gives a great story its power? How do our choices as storytellers affect our audience’s experience of the story? Why do some stories “work” while others don’t? Like the subtle signs that allow a tracker to locate a wild animal in the wilderness, the tools and mechanisms of successful, intentional storycraft can be seen clearly once you know what to look for. By examining a wide variety of short, self-contained texts, from prose fiction and screenplays to films and comic books, we will crawl under the hood of these stories and attempt to discover what really makes them function. We will construct an analytical understanding of techniques we only understood intuitively in the past. To paraphrase Brian McDonald: when this class is over, you will be able to see the storyteller’s footsteps in the grass. Texts may include *Second Variety* by Phillip K. Dick, *The Present* by Jacob Frey and Markus Kranzler, *Michael Clayton* by Tony Gilroy, *Heck* by Zander Cannon, *The Mire* by Becky Cloonan, and *Invisible Ink* by Brian McDonald. We will write reflections on our own reactions to the texts, create diagrammatic “disassemblies” of these stories into their component parts, and ultimately craft and sharpen a story of our own in whichever modality (prose, screenplay, comic script/thumbnails, children’s book) we choose.

Mike Primo spent a decade as an animator in games, animation, and film before co-founding a video game company in Philadelphia. He is the STEAM Program Director at Friends Select School, where he teaches Upper School filmmaking, engineering, and computer science classes.

## ***The Big Sea and I Wonder as I Wander***

Sam Sullivan

Wednesday Evening

Some poets do not aim to disrupt the status quo in their poetry. But for poets like Langston Hughes, the aim of poetry is to reveal the world to itself, in all its incoherence and beauty and injustice—and by revealing the world to itself, poetry can transform the world. Borges once described the aesthetic phenomenon, in sensuously fascistic terms, as “the immanence of a revelation that does not occur.” The idea that art is only art if it doesn’t say anything about the world amounts—paradoxically—to one of the most political and authoritarian things to be said about art. Hughes, whose life and art will be the subject of this class, took for granted that seemingly neutral categories like ‘beauty,’ ‘the soul,’ ‘light,’ and ‘poetry’ actually reflect the unfolding polemics and histories of our time. Through a thorough reading of his memoirs *The Big Sea and I Wonder as I Wander*, we will follow Hughes to Russia, to Harlem, and to Haiti and trace the contours of the questions posed by his life and work. Is it possible to cleave to the very literature that you seek to destroy? To what extent can art change the world? How does a poem speak for people beyond its author? Our course will simultaneously study Hughes’ poetry against these works of autobiography, drawing both on the prose and verse to write syntheses of our answers to these (unanswerable) questions. Those who take this class should expect viciously demanding analytical writing assignments, copious reading, and stimulation of revolutionary impulses.

Sam Sullivan teaches at GFS in the English department. He listens to Hector Lavoe cassettes. He has consulted on the composition of many successful love letters.

## **Studies in Modern Feminism**

Becca Burnett

Monday Evening

The word “feminism” conjures a host of associations. For some, it is a rallying call to political action, inciting people of all genders to take to the streets and march for women’s rights. For others, it’s a sexy label to claim, raising images of Beyoncé concerts. Some believe we are beyond feminism, no longer needing a political movement to help advocate for gender equality. Others believe the term has historically excluded and/or continues to exclude too many from its ranks: men; women of color; lesbian, bi, and trans women; women from lower socio-economic classes; and genderqueer and gender non-binary individuals. For these people, it has almost become a “dirty word”—a label to be rejected or avoided at all costs. In this class, we will examine the history of the Western feminist movement using literature to explore what feminism means, how it has evolved since the Suffragette movement, whom it serves, and whom it fails. Texts may include *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer, *An American Daughter*, by Wendy Wasserstein, and *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker, as well as short fiction by Margaret Atwood and non-fiction by Peggy Orenstein, Roxanne Gay, and Audre Lorde. Students will write analytically and learn how to perform a feminist analysis. They will also be asked to present on connections they see between the class content and media they enjoy consuming outside of class—TV, films, Internet articles, social media posts, etc.

Becca Burnett is the English Department Head at Germantown Academy, where she has taught English for the past 17 years. As she works to understand the world in which we live, she looks to stories, nonfiction, and film for clues. How might a superhero movie help us better understand our current cultural fears and fantasies? How might a text written hundreds of years ago shed light on the current zeitgeist? Becca loves to grapple with these and other questions.

## **The Writing of RIGHT NOW: A Reading & Writing Workshop**

Sara Primo

Daytime (E,G, H)

If you are forever drawn to the “New Books” section of your local bookstore, or if you wake up in a cold sweat wondering if there’s a new cutting-edge short story author that you’ve thus far overlooked, then this class might be for you. In this course, we will zero in on up-to-the-minute fiction and poetry—all of it published in 2019 and 2020. The plan is to absorb a wide range: from renowned literary publications and prize-winners to little-known, small-press gems. In almost all cases, you will be the first students writing about these works, by the likes of Karen Russell, Kali Fajardo-Anstine, and Xuan Juliana Wang. After spending some time re-articulating our personal tastes and keeping a notebook of our favorite lines, we will develop writing prompts for each other based on the “mentor texts” we find most electrifying. After workshoping our final pieces and revising multiple times, we will publish a culminating class publication. I am prepared to guarantee that you will leave this class with at least one new favorite author and one new creative habit.

Sara has been teaching in the English department at GFS for 9 years. Sara is forever drawn to the “New Books” section at her local bookstore, and she does wake up in a cold sweat thinking about all the short stories coming out she hasn’t yet read.



## ADULT REGISTRATION INFORMATION 2020

ESSENTIALLY ENGLISH at Germantown Friends School offers literature and writing courses in the months of April and May that are designed to bring people of different ages together in the classroom. Adults are invited to join these courses, which are composed primarily of our tenth- through twelfth-grade students, who must take one English elective each spring. We believe that sharing varied perspectives generates a special kind of learning, exciting for all participants. For both literature and writing courses, adults are expected to complete the reading and to participate in class discussions, but to do the writing only if they are enrolled in a writing course.

EVENING COURSES meet once a week for eight weeks, on either Mondays or Wednesdays, with the first meeting for ALL evening sections happening on Wednesday, April 15 (due to a day off on Monday, April 13). The last evening class will be on Wednesday, June 3. Because we will be closed for the Memorial Day Holiday on May 25, both Monday and Wednesday evening classes that week will meet on Wednesday, May 27, unless otherwise specified. Classes start promptly at 7:00 p.m. and run until 9:30 p.m., with one ten-minute break.

DAYTIME COURSES meet for five 50-to-60-minute sessions in an 8-day cycle, with the first cycle beginning on Tuesday, April 14 and the last day of classes on Thursday, June 4. Some courses are offered in one section only; others are offered in two or three. They will be taught in the section or sections in which there is the most demand. If you are interested in a daytime course, please indicate on the form which section you prefer.

### DAY SECTIONS, ESSENTIALLY ENGLISH 2020

Section E	Section F	Section G	Section H
Day 2, 12:05-1:05	Day 1, 2:30-3:20	Day 2, 2:30-3 :20	Day 1, 9:15-10:15
Day 3, 1:30-2 :30	Day 3, 12:05-1:05	Day 4, 12:05-1:05	Day 3, 2:30-3:20
Day 5, 8:20-9:15	Day 4, 1:30-2:30	Day 5, 1:30-2:30	Day 5, 12:05-1:05
Day 6, 9:15-10:15	Day 6, 8 :20-9:15	Day 7, 8:20-9:15	Day 6, 1:30-2:30
Day 8, 2:30-3:20	Day 7, 9:15-10:15	Day 8, 9:15-10:15	Day 8, 8:20-9:15

TO REGISTER fill out the form below, and send it before February 8 to:

Sara Primo, Essentially English Coordinator, Germantown Friends School, 31 West Coulter Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144. FEE FOR ADULTS is \$350.00 per course. Enclose a check payable to "GFS Essentially English." Please choose a first and second choice for your courses. Should courses be over-subscribed or canceled, you will be notified in time to choose another course or be refunded the registration fee. Later registration is possible if there is space in the class. After sign-up is completed, a first assignment and information about books you will need to purchase will be sent to you by your course's instructor before the beginning of spring break.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, email Sara Primo at [sprimo@germantownfriends.org](mailto:sprimo@germantownfriends.org).

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## ADULT REGISTRATION FORM 2019

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

(Please print legibly.)

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

HOME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ WORK PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Circle all that apply: Current Parent Alum Faculty Friend

Your Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

COURSE CHOICE (Number and Title)

FIRST CHOICE \_\_\_\_\_

SECOND CHOICE \_\_\_\_\_

**Germantown Friends School**  
**31 West Coulter Street**  
**Philadelphia PA 19144**

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