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Creative Writing

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An Inner Awakening: The Hidden Gemstone of Creative Writing

My journey began in the early fall of my eleventh-grade year when my identity changed forever. What I thought seemed a mark of failure, a dreaded regression. In 2004, I remember walking down the white brick-walled hallways with my AP Language Arts Teacher of Traverse City Central High School, a burgeoning class of seven hundred students walking the halls like cattle. I enrolled in AP Language Arts, however, a lack of study habits, accountability, support, and little intrinsic motivation led to a culminating lack of study skills. In addition, battling sleep deprivation, low iron, and a vitamin D deficiency, I embarrassingly withdrew from my AP Language Arts with the recommendation of my AP instructor, who advised me to enroll in creative writing. Ms. King's creative writing class fulfilled my final English requirement for graduation.

The first few weeks were a battle stemming from the stigma of an underrated elective combined with a tumultuous home life; I lacked a sense of direction in school and in life—until I took Creative Writing. Ms. King's assignments didn't fit the typical high school mold of conformity; her assignments afforded students choices and autonomy. I had an opportunity to pick what I wrote about, no longer lacking the freedom of thought and expression that had long since been repressed by a banking model of education and arbitrary standards. In this space, I no longer felt misunderstood, always fumbling to get my thoughts out verbally. I found an outlet, and now the power I now penned in my assignments helped unleash my inner voice. I enjoyed attending the class. I felt seen and heard and the lone hour became a sanctuary; I discovered empowerment through the power of choice in a judgement-free zone offering free-form self-expression and inner exploration.

My first assignment, I can recall with vivid remembrance, was having to draw a simple picture of how I felt and give it a title. Sitting in class, I was asked to draw a picture that resembles how I am feeling. I thought, how basic, this is too simple and has the appearance of being “dumb,” looking back, to drawing a vulnerable picture, I drew a stick in the mud, honestly it was the only thing that came to mind at the time feeling elated I expected to be judged for it, I wasn't given a bad grade for it; I was given the ability to express how I truly felt without punishment, during a time when I felt tethered to a mandatory standard, cornered. What Ms. King knew that I wasn't yet privy to

the fact that she was having students emotionally regulate to get our inner writer to emerge in a judgment-free zone. Two other assignments left me with a lifelong impression of her class. Creative writing was the first time I wrote and illustrated a children's book, one that I still have to this day, and I have read to my own children. The third assignment is the beginning of a book that I started and never finished, but still have and plan to finish one day. I learned the power of an introductory creative writing course and the importance of voice, allowing for self-expression that unleashes a student's ethos, quenching my inner critique, a voice that still creeps up on occasion. In a chaotic world filled with expectations, where individuals aren't often valued for having a voice, I found an outlet, an unhampered form of expression curated for high schoolers. I began to design creative projects based on my own interests, eventually climbing out from a pit of depression. I went on to work for the school yearbook. Leaving behind the intimidating atmosphere of an AP Language Arts classroom filled with staunch students. Creative writing looked motley and unkempt; it felt different. In time the class inspired me to begin writing a novel, reviving an inner spark of creativity long lost from childhood, I found again within myself; an inner awakening and the emergence of my identity from enrolling in this hidden gemstone of a class. Breaking off from my peers, I no longer felt surpassed rather liberated, finding a nourishing outlet that no longer quenched my inner being. Bit by bit, creative writing began to unfold a purpose in my life—an empowerment that set me free.

Arizona State University 2023—I enrolled in my first college-level creative writing course, inspired by a course I took nineteen years earlier; I set out to continue my creative writing journey, unsure of where the path would lead me. The asynchronous online classroom altered the learning environment. Multimodal projects became socially embedded within the innovative collage settings, lending a new space for creative literary freedom. Although the course wasn't that memorable, there were two projects that made an impression. First is a multimodal project where we cut out magazine articles, rearranged the words to create a new meaning, I remember the project falling flat, that's why it left an impression, it felt kindergarten, there was no follow up and I couldn't understand the simplicity or deeper meaning behind the assignment, it felt superficial, rushed, lacked context, and useless. I still question the meaning behind the abstract assignment. The course also lacked any feedback. I wonder if most creative writing courses lack feedback because instructors allow for freedom of expression and how do you grade individual expression and leave influential feedback? The second assignment that took the entire class we read excerpts from a spiral-bound book. It was a writer's handbook filled with creative writings, but lacked prompts for our own generative writings, however, I uploaded my annotations again without feedback. I left the class feeling

empty, uninspired, hoping to design my own college course in the future, thinking I could do better. I took a class where I hoped to grow, gain insight, and inspiration for a long-lost craft I set down years earlier. I wondered if the online, asynchronous atmosphere was to blame, or could the assignments incorporate a higher level of multimodality conducive to the online environment, fostering innovative modes for better student engagement. The class lacked one thing, memorable creative writing experiences that my inner creative longed for.

I left ASU, happy to have completed my undergraduate degree with high honors, continuing to be inspired by several instructors who encouraged and inspired my educational journey. Their positivism fed into my intrinsic motivation. The most influential of them all were: Environmental Nonfiction, Short Story, World History, and Family and Cultural Diversity. Each course introduced me to my favorite instructors and their digital pedagogies. Virtually, they challenged my education, as their course content and online presence pushed me to learn and grow while fostering an online environment of inclusion and belonging. These instructors were gems who invited deeper learning, creating an ecological landscape, intentionally curating course materials with assignments that were applicable, engaging, and demanding yet attainable; they set a high standard. Their courses were the most time-consuming. I graduated and continued my education at Indiana University-East in pursuit of a more challenging university experience, one that forced me to grow as a person intellectually, and as a communications instructor, knowing that I want to become an English communications instructor at a community college.

Flash forward to my time in graduate school. In the summer of 2025, I was admitted into Indiana University-East—my third semester I enrolled in my first elective, intuitively, I chose Creative Writing for Teachers. Having only taught as a substitute teacher at Greenspire High School for a semester, I acquired experience in teaching, like a fish to water, I walked into my classroom with confidence, eager to teach and willing to learn. Now, as a new adjunct instructor at Northwestern Michigan College, I love teaching, I have found my passion and purpose in life, and it has become a goal of mine to educate students at the college level.

Throughout my education, film has played a foundational role in my views on education and learning. The themes, messages, and influential stories told within *A Dead Poet's Society*, *Patch Adams*, and *Finding Forrester* have culminated in a deep desire to write, teach and change lives through my own pedagogy inside the classroom that extends outside of the classroom. Embedding multimodality and a freedom of thought and expression in a curated way that guides students toward a civil discourse in both synchronous and asynchronous classrooms. I am intrinsically drawn to the art of creative writing and inspired by my own inner creative expression. I am taking this

course to learn how to teach creative writing at the college level and believe that this transferable skill will lead me toward becoming a better communications instructor across the curriculum.

My graduate creative writing course has given me the ability to create and design a curriculum that fosters students' growth. I began to create a pedagogy by asking myself the question: what is creative writing, and how do we teach it? Creative writing involves tapping into a student's innermost self, viewed as a reservoir, a hidden well wherein lies a wealth of creativity and potential. We begin scrubbing away their inner critic while drawing out from within their innermost thoughts and emotions, awakening their senses, as they begin to build their creative identity. We intentionally begin to pull them in a specific direction of knowledge by exposing students to curated, diverse reading selections, by having them reflect on past experiences, as they begin a journey of self-expression through free-form writing. Along the way, we introduce them to writing camp activities, incorporating multimodal culminating projects, and as they begin to draw upon their senses, we continue to surround students with an intentional collection of ideas, offering options for writing prompts that align with educational outcomes, and then continue aiming them in a specific direction to guide their assignments. As Augustine would say, to teach, to delight and to move; creative writing follows the process of teaching to mindfully engage students' ethos, conveyed through personal experiences and their senses. As an instructor who advocates for autonomy and student-led choices on topics, providing access to digital resource alternatives, and assignment variety to foster and awaken students' creativity, empowering independent thinkers who inspire beyond the page. Providing learning opportunities for both peer-reviewed feedback and instructor feedback, lending a space for students to grow and expand their writing pieces, and encouraging students to explore and unleash their creative expression.