

**English 1134.106, True Stories.** TR 11:15-12:30, GSH 158.

Prof. J. Robert Lennon • GSH 339 • jrl24@cornell.edu  
Office Hours: Thurs 1:00-3:00, Wed by appointment only

In this class, we'll be reading nonfiction by people who are trying to understand themselves and the world they live in. Some of them are reporters, some critics, some cartoonists. Others don't know what they're supposed to be. Some of the writers we'll be reading are making arguments, trying to persuade you to adopt a point of view they think is important. Some of them just want to show you something they like. Some of them are in pain and want to let you know. Some are merely thinking things through and don't really expect to answer the questions they ask.

Even the most outward-focused of the essays, books, comics, and podcasts we'll be discussing are, on some level, expressions of the self. All good writing is. If the works we study this semester are good, it's not merely because their writers did good research and described it in grammatical sentences. It's because of their intense relationship to their subject.

You may be laboring under the misapprehension that you are not interesting and don't have a whole lot to say. In this class, you will try to discover what is interesting about you (believe me: there's plenty), and how to express it to others. You may do so through your critical insights into others' work, or by investigating people and things that compel you. You may also write directly about your own feelings and experiences.

Here are the requirements for this class:

1. **READING.** You must **read all the assigned readings.** Be warned, there are a lot of them. You must also **lead discussion** of the day's story at least once. This means preparing a short (5-10 minutes) lecture to get discussion moving. **(10% of your grade)**

2. **CLASS PARTICIPATION.** You must keep good attendance and participate in class discussions. You will also submit your work for at least one **in-class workshop**. Workshops will take place on Thursdays, and there will be two full classes of them at the end of the semester. You're also responsible for submitting a short written memo to each of your peers who workshops an essay; you should print out two copies, one for the writer, and one for me. Class participation counts for **20% of your grade**. You get three absences; for each one after that, you lose a third of a grade (ie., A to A-minus; A-minus to B-plus; B-plus to B, etc.).
  
3. **WRITING.** You must write **six essays** of up to five pages. At least three of these should be critical responses to the readings. The others may be on subjects of your choosing, including your own life and the people and things that interest you. You must also **keep a journal** in which you take notes on the readings and do in-class writing assignments. I won't collect the journal, but it may and should serve as source material for some of your essays. The essays count for **70% of your grade**, and I will calculate this grade based on the three best ones. This will give you the opportunity to try something unusual and risky without worrying about the bottom line. You will be required to revise and refine those three, too, so there will be plenty of ways to earn an A.
  
4. **CONFERENCES.** You must meet with me **at least once**, during office hours or at an appointed time. I'll schedule everyone for a conference the week before fall break, and you may meet with me additional times if you need it.

**You should hand in first-draft essays on a regular basis** – the point is to have a gradual evolution of your writing, and indeed your critical thinking, through repeated revisions, conferences, and class discussions.

**Notes on workshops.** For your workshops, you will distribute an essay to everyone in class, and we'll discuss its strengths and weaknesses. If your workshop is on a Tuesday, you must email the class your essay by **Sunday at 5pm**. If your workshop is on a Thursday, you must email it by **Tuesday at 5pm**. Once everyone has signed up for one workshop, you may take as many additional slots as you like. When you are up for workshop, remain silent and listen to your peers' comments until the end of the session, when you will be permitted to respond and ask questions. Comment on your peers' work rigorously, but with respect and compassion. To write about our own lives, feelings, and convictions is to open ourselves up to embarrassment – no good writing happens without this openness. Reward your classmates for their candor by not being a jerk.

**Classroom etiquette.** We shall rock it old-school this semester, so make sure that the materials you need for class have been printed out. **Phones must be turned off** or in airplane mode. Laptops and tablets should **stay in your bag**. **Make eye contact** with people when you talk to them, and when they are talking. Address your peers directly when critiquing their work, rather than through me. Also, let's enjoy ourselves. This class will be a lot of fun, I promise. Err on the side of enthusiasm!

## Schedule

T	8/25	Introduction; Clowes, "Just Another Day" (handout)
Th	8/27	Laich, "Mandatory Date Night"
T	9/1	Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i>
Th	9/3	Satrapi, <i>Persepolis</i> , <b>workshops</b>
T	9/8	Roderick on the Line #55, "A Welsh Troll"
Th	9/10	<b>*** no class ***</b>
T	9/15	Whitehead, excerpt from <i>The Noble Hustle</i>
Th	9/17	Didion, "In Bed," <b>workshops</b>
T	9/22	Castle, "The Professor"
Th	9/24	Castle, "The Professor," <b>workshops</b>
T	9/29	Törzs, "Other People"
Th	10/1	Bolin, "...Baby One More Time," <b>workshops</b>
T	10/6	Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"
Th	10/8	<b>*** CONFERENCES no class ***</b>
T	10/13	<b>*** FALL BREAK no class ***</b>
Th	10/15	Beard, "The Fourth State of Matter," <b>workshops</b>
T	10/20	Lasdun, <i>Give Me Everything You Have</i>
Th	10/22	Lasdun, <i>Give Me Everything You Have</i> , <b>workshops</b>
T	10/27	Brockmeier, excerpt from <i>A Few Seconds of Radiant Filmstrip</i>
Th	10/29	Washuta, "Consumption," <b>workshops</b>
T	11/3	Moore, "Son of Mr. Green Jeans"
Th	11/5	Train, "Kwi-Kwi, Kwa-Kwa," <b>workshops</b>
T	11/10	Coates, "The Case for Reparations"
Th	11/12	Mystery Show #3, "Belt Buckle," <b>workshops</b>
T	11/17	Tran, <i>Vietnamerica</i>
Th	11/19	Tran, <i>Vietnamerica</i> , <b>workshops</b>
T	11/24	Antrim, excerpt from <i>The Afterlife</i>
Th	11/26	<b>*** THANKSGIVING BREAK no class ***</b>
T	12/1	workshops
Th	12/3	workshops