

ADVANCED CREATIVE NONFICTION
READING & WRITING ESSAYS
WITH *RIVER TEETH* & *BEAUTIFUL THINGS*
JILL CHRISTMAN: ESSAYIST, EDITOR, TEACHER

- ESSAY LINKS ARE FROM [BEAUTIFUL THINGS](#) (FREE TO EVERYONE: IF YOU HAVEN'T SUBSCRIBED, PLEASE DO!) OR [PROJECT MUSE](#)
- [RIVER TEETH REVISITED](#) (*RTR/LESSONS & EXERCISES CREATED BY RT INTERNS)

*Hello Essay Lovers & Teacher Friends: In Spring 2024, I built a version of the Advanced Creative Nonfiction course here at Ball State University (also home to [River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative](#), [Beautiful Things](#) (RT's weekly online magazine of micro-essays), and the associated literary editing course built around *River Teeth*. The course went terrifically well, and I wanted to make the template available to other cnf teachers whose students have access to the rich resource that is Project Muse. Please feel free to use/adapt whatever works for you and your students here. I've cut it down to its bones, leaving just the course description, suggested resources, and calendar. Of course, there's a lot more where this came from—both in the RT archives on Project Muse, new essays each week up at *BT*, and fresh lessons on [a variety of cnf-related subjects in RTR](#): if you have questions or have a version you want to share with other students of the essay, we'd love to have you reach out to us at riverteeth@bsu.edu. Thank you! Happy reading and writing.

I WOULD SAY THAT THE FIRST THING WE LOOK FOR IS SOMETHING URGENT. . . . WE
WANT TO PUBLISH SOMETHING THAT A WRITER WAS BORN TO WRITE.

~ DAN LEHMAN, FOUNDING EDITOR, *RIVER TEETH*

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND PHILOSOPHY

This advanced creative nonfiction class will focus on the art of transforming lived experience and the observable world into essays. Using our own lives and perceptive faculties as the lens through which we record the world, we'll start by writing our memories—looking inward to reach outward—but we'll also expand our scope to write about things beyond the self: other people, other creatures, other places, and other ways of living in the world. We'll consider the fundamental parts of an essay—the beginning and the end, full-blown scenes and mind-expanding reflections, white space and titles, allusion and dialogue, and of course, the echoes, patterns, and connections that lead us to new meaning. Most of our reading will come from [River Teeth](#) (biannual print journal of narrative nonfiction) and [Beautiful Things](#) (weekly online magazine of micro-essays), premier creative nonfiction journals housed right here at Ball State. Class time will be divided between discussions of published works, writing exercises (generative techniques, constraints, play!), writer visits, and peer workshops. Throughout, we'll think about what it means to write something that *matters*, something that feels really *true*.

OTHER FANTASTIC ONLINE NONFICTION WRITING RESOURCES

- [The Humble Essayist](#) (a blog on the art of the essay)
- [Essay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies](#)
- [Essay Daily](#) (“an ongoing conversation about essays”)
- Video archives of reading, lectures, and craft talks from [The River Teeth Conference of Nonfiction](#)

COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK 1: OPENING CEREMONIES & WRITING CHILDHOOD

T (Date) Introductions, Interviews, Inspiration—& Table-Tent Drawing Day!

R (Date) Small Groups & Conversation Day with *Beautiful Things*
[“The Extinction Museum: Exhibit #207”](#) (Hall, BT 2021)
[“The Heavy Bag”](#) (Ahmad, BT 2021)
[“The Fawn”](#) (Barham, BT 2022)
[“Playing Hooky”](#) (Walsh, BT 2023)

WEEK 2: BEGINNINGS

T (Date) The History of *River Teeth & Beautiful Things*
[“Editor’s Notes”](#) (“It’s been a busy season here. . .”; Lehman & Mackall, 17.2)
[“Editor’s Notes”](#) (“In the fall of 2018. . .”; Christman & Neely, 21.2)
[“Editor’s Notes”](#) (“As I write this note. . .”; Christman, 25.1)
[“Drowning Catfish”](#) (Tucker, Spring 2011)

R (Date) Beginnings
[“Caution Horses”](#) (Goodman, 2023)
[“Lydia Walked”](#) (Childers, BT 2023)

WEEK 3: IMAGE, METAPHOR, & ALLUSION

T (Date) [“The Best Fried Chicken”](#) (Hood, 2017)
[“Washed Clean”](#) (Leamon, 2023)
[“Ceremony”](#) (Talbot, BT 2014 & 2023)

R (Date) [“And I Will Give You as Many Roast Bones as You Need”](#) (Ironman, 2019)
➤ [RTR](#) “Allusion as Structure in. . .” (James, 2020)
[“Down to Dust”](#) (Carlson, 2023)
[“Ceremony”](#) (Barham, BT 2021)

WEEK 4: SHAPE & STORY

T (Date) [“The Book of Knowledge”](#) (Harvey, 2012)
[“Laying on of Hands”](#) (Harvey, 2008)
[“The Undertaking”](#) (Rogers, 2022)

[“The Aquarium”](#) (Rapport, BT 2023)

- R (Date) [“God Forbid a Black Girl”](#) (Oberhammer, 2023)
[“Tenderness”](#) (Milstead, 2022)
[“Accord”](#) (Khanna, BT 2023)

WEEK 5: (MORE) SHAPE & STORY

- T (Date) [“Paddling the Middle Fork”](#) (Christman, 2009)
[“The Deer I Shot”](#) (Shea, 2012)
➤ [RTR](#) “Complicating Chronology: Non-linear Narrative in ‘The Deer I Shot’”
(Mathew, 2024)
[“The Paper”](#) (Wei-Chiun Ho, BT 2023)
- R (Date) [“Almost Thirty”](#) (Weaver, 2019)
➤ [RTR](#) “A Balancing Act in Narrative Rhythm” (Hoffer, 2020)

WEEK 6: SKETCHING CHARACTERS

- T (Date) [“Casting Lessons”](#) (Patterson, 2023)
➤ [RTR](#) “Casting Characters: Introductions Through Observations” (Rice & Stevens, 2024)
[“Crime Spree”](#) (Cooper, 2021)
[“Jumping in Leaves”](#) (Gross, BT 2020)
- R (Date) [“Los Perdidos”](#) (Alvarado, 2018/[RTR Isabel Vazquez-Rowe](#))
➤ [RTR](#) “A Migrant Haunting: Tracing Spectral Memory in ‘Los Perdidos’”
(Vazquez-Rowe, 2024)
[“New Harlem”](#) (Harris, 2021)
[“We Call Up Danger Only to Send It Away”](#) (Pharr, 2023)

WEEK 7: WORKSHOPS

- T (Date) Workshops x 3: (Students)
[“The Inside of Bones”](#) (McMasters, BT 2021)
- R (Date) Workshops x 4: (Students)
[“Fear of Poetry”](#) (Monpere, BT 2020)

WEEK 8: (MORE) WORKSHOPS

- T (Date) Workshops x 4: (Students)
- R (Date) Workshops x 4: (Students)
[“The Drive Home”](#) (Goode, BT 2021)
[“Candy Cigarettes”](#) (Panning, *Brevity*)

WEEK 9: BRITTANY MEANS (& WRITING DIFFICULT MATERIAL) WEEK

- leaving Brittany's memoir here because it began here at Ball State—and [it's amazing](#)

T (Date) [Hell If We Don't Change Our Ways](#) by Brittany Means: beginning – pp. 149
["Bathing"](#) (Winograd, 2010—in *Fourth Genre*, also on Project Muse!)

R (Date) [Hell If We Don't Change Our Ways](#): pp 150 - end
["Something About Shoes"](#) (Gottlieb, 2023)

WEEK 10: IN PRINT XIX WEEK!

T (Date) In Print Day: Visit from Brittany Means

R (Date) In Print Day: NO CLASS TODAY—attend events on Tuesday & Wednesday!!!!
➤ Here's another idea I think y'all should implement in your own visiting author programs! We are celebrating our 20th year of the [In Print Festival of First Books](#) in 2025: read about it [here](#) & support debut writers.

WEEK 11: WRITING FAMILY

T (Date) ["Tikkun Olam Ted"](#) (Graev Lipson, 2021)
["The Caul of Inshallah"](#) (Kahf, 2009)
["The China Tea Set"](#) (Ashraf, BT 2020)
["Writing and Publishing a Memoir: What in the Hell Have I Done?"](#) (Dubus III, 2012)

R (Date) ["Captain Love"](#) (Walker, 2012)
➤ Did you know that *River Teeth* used to host a nonfiction conference & that extraordinarily cool essayists gathered there to read & talk about essays? And that you can access those [conference video archives](#) on the *River Teeth* site, including [this fantastic reading by Jerald Walker?](#) Well. Now you do.
["Learn to Fly"](#) (Finney, 2022)
["Paper Boats"](#) (Martin, BT 2023)
["Chewing Band-Aids"](#) (Christman in *Family Trouble*)

WEEK 12: BEGINNINGS & ENDINGS

T (Date) ["Trailer Trash"](#) (St. Germain, 2023)
["Riding in the Dark"](#) (Morales, 2011)
["My Sister Passes Me on a Bench at the Zoo"](#) (Urban, BT 2020)

R (Date) ["December 1, 2020"](#) (Brina, 2023)
["Side B"](#) (Layden, 2021/RTR Maddie)
["On Massachusetts General Hospital Reaching Out to Schedule Your COVID-19 Vaccine"](#) (Kilch Gaffney, BT 2022)

WEEK 13: WORKSHOPS

- T (Date) Workshop x 3: (Students)
[“Church of the Goat Man”](#) (Driskell, 2023)
➤ Woot! Y’all can find this one in the 2024 Pushcart Anthology, and we’ll have a [Goat Man RTR up soon!](#)
- R (Date) Workshop x 4: (Students)
[“The Weight of Bones”](#) (Filardo, BT 2019)

WEEK 14: (MORE) WORKSHOPS

- T (Date) Workshop x 4: (Students)
[“Champagne Blood”](#) (Champagne, 2023)
- R (Date) Workshop x 4: (Students)
[“Honey \(I Put Down My Axe\)”](#) (Haidri, BT 2023)

WEEK 15: CONFERENCES, REVISION, & A SNIPPET ON PUBLISHING

- T (Date) Conferences
- R (Date) Publishing Nonfiction Day

FINALS WEEK

- T (Date) (Time) FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE: READINGS & FESTIVITIES!