

# **English 3253.401**

## **What If It All Ends Tonight: Nontraditional Writing for Young Adults**

Instructor: candice iloh / candiceiloh@gmail.com  
Class Schedule –Thursdays, 5:15pm-8:15pm

Office Hours –*TUESDAYS 4-6P at the Center for  
Programs in Contemporary Writing, 2nd  
Floor/Zoom or request and by appt*

Class Location: CPCW 105

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**Instructions:** *Please read to the end, sign and return acknowledgment page to instructor by Sept 12th  
(week 3)*

## what is this course?

This workshop-style course explores how to write outside of traditional norms for young adults. We will play with choices we can make, as people or artists, to create tension, heighten emotional stakes, and shift perspective in moments of self-actualization. Through weekly engagement with literature that disrupts so-called classical literary form, we will traverse coming-of-age storytelling that centers curiosity and intention. In this course, we will ask what possibilities lie ahead when we allow a story to lose composure and take an unexpected turn in narrative, thought, or even visual presentation. In addition to practical exercises that build the essential tools of fiction (such as dialogue, characterization, and exposition), we will use pivotal scenes, paragraphs, and sentences from a diversity of authors to discuss writing that elicits an evocative, immersive reader experience.

Together, we will learn from provocative, award-winning authors such as Akwaeke Emezi, Tiffany Jackson, Kacen Callendar, Safia Elhillo, Malindo Lo, Jason Reynolds, Sara Farizan, and Elizabet Velasquez. Among these are National Book Award Winners and writers of the Most Banned Books in the U.S. We will close-read others' work and give each other feedback, working with the narratives that you've already created, as well as wish to bring into the room. At the end of the semester, class will culminate in a 2,500-word final project that has been taken through the workshop process. All students will have the opportunity to meet at least one acclaimed published author and a senior editor from Penguin Random House.

## looking ahead: course texts & class materials

### EXCERPTS

We will be exploring short excerpts of an array of texts each class. You will find the names and authors below within the class schedule. **All excerpts will be provided both digitally on Canvas and via handouts during class to be read the week before its correlating group discussion.** For example: we are discussing short stories by Leah Johnson and Jason Reynolds on Week 2. The readings for both will be given to you at the end of class and it will be on CANVAS by Thursday evening of week one! You're welcome (and encouraged—they're all great!) to find the full books and read them whole, but it is not required for this class.

### FULL TEXTS

You will only be required to read two full novels for this course. They are ***Last Night at the Telegraph Club* by Malindo Lo** and ***King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callendar**. Students should have finished reading half by October 10th and reach the end of both books by November 21st, the date a craft response for one (your choice) of these two books will be due. It is also the date we will examine both texts closely together as a class.

Note: these are the only two books you must acquire on your own via purchase or the library. If you have trouble doing this, please let me know.

### CLASS MATERIALS:

a notebook/your notes  
(laptops allowed during generative class work-time also)\*  
writing utensils  
your copy of the readings being discussed

**ALL EXCERPTED, SHORT STORIES, AND HANDOUTS CAN BE FOUND ON OUR COURSE CANVAS IN “ASSIGNMENTS” and “DISCUSSIONS.”**

### course policies and assessments

Students are graded on attendance, engagement, creativity, and stretch. We will use our Workshop Guidelines as a barometer to experience the students’ work against the students’ own standards. The students are also graded each week according to their participation in reading discussions and in the process itself—but not graded according to the “best” or “worst” story of the week. For this course, leave Chat GPT and the like alone. Plagiarism = automatic 0%. 😞

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS: Work turned in late without an approved extension will affect your grade.** Late Assignment Days are built-in grace periods for a limited number of course assignments. You have three (3) late days to use during the semester: for up to three assignments, you are allowed to submit up to twenty-four (24) hours late. To use your late days, submit your assignment after the deadline. You do not need to ask permission to use your late day(s), nor provide any explanation.

### course requirements and assignments

#### **In-Class Reading Responses / Prompts - 25%**

Students will respond to assigned readings at the beginning of each class via guided prompts in both writing and discussion. Please note that resources and prompts that may be used during this aspect of class will be available in our class resource folder by EOD but in-class responses are improved by being present for the in-class exercises. You just gotta be here. But you can re-review the above Late Assignment Day policy above for those days that it can’t be avoided.

#### **Class Participation – 25%**

This course requires your full participation. **READINGS:** Complete all assigned readings before class, respond on Canvas, and come to class on time, prepared with comments and questions. In addition, complete in-class writing exercises. There is less homework after class if you complete writing exercises during the allotted time given in class. Class participation will be evaluated by the overall quality of your contributions, which includes attendance and listening as well as speaking **from your own perspective** (please reach out to me directly if you have any accessibility needs that make this difficult). You are expected to contribute to a classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and creativity.

**PLEASE BE AWARE:** An excused absence will only be granted in the case of an accommodation or extraordinary circumstance. We show up for ourselves and each other here. **Any absence must be previously arranged or supported with a note by email.** For every unexcused absence, I will lower the participation portion of your grade by one letter grade, e.g., from an A to a B, and so on. I take attendance during the first 10 minutes of class. A late arrival of more than ten minutes will count as an absence.

## Writing Assignments - 25%

Includes: Inciting Incident + Stakes Exercise, Form & Culture Exercise, Project Pitch, Selected Craft Response one-pager, Final Project Rough Draft, and Final Project Revised Piece, Editorial letters for each classmate

## Final Project - 25%

Scene, chapter, or a short story draft of 2,500 words + brief

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS\*

### part one: craft (pro-tip - always look a week ahead)

For all assigned readings you must: 1) Finish reading before class, 2) Respond to it in your own way in Discussions on Canvas, 3) Complete that response with an open-ended question, and 4) Come prepared to discuss/engage with what you've read.

**Week 1:** August 29th | Inciting Incidents & Emotional Stakes | Why write YA? Why workshop? Why should we care?

*Introductions: Includes review of the syllabus, discussion of class structure, overview of class texts, and community agreements. Students will engage with various inciting incidents from texts that will be explored throughout the semester as an intro to each novel's premise. | In-Class Opening Prompt from *When We Make It* - Elisabet Velasquez*

**Week 2:** September 5th | Origin Stories / Community & World-Building / Neighborhoods / Codes / Form as Function

Assigned Readings Discussed:

*A Recording of Carole Before It All Goes* - Jason Reynolds

*Corner Booth* - Leah Johnson

\*In-class reading - *(Me) Moth* - Amber McBride

**Week 3:** September 12th | Horror / Darkness Inspired by Real Life / Extended Metaphor

Assigned Readings Discussed:

Selections from *Pet* - Akwaekwe Emezi

Selections from *White Smoke* - Tiffany Jackson

Due: Signed Syllabus Acknowledgement

**Week 4:** September 19th | Grief / Loss / Redemption

Collective Exercise: How to Raise the Stakes aka How do we make the reader care?

Assigned Readings Discussed:

Selections from *Early Departures* - Justin R. Reynolds

Selections from *Wondrous Journeys in Strange Lands* - Sonia Nimr

Due: Proposed Inciting Incident

**Week 5:** September 26th | Cultural Context / Generational Shifts / Gender Tropes

Assigned Readings Discussed:

Selections from *How You Grow Wings*

Selections from *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* - Erika L. Sanchez

\*In Class Reading: *Girls that Never Die* - Safia Elhillo & *Daylight* - Roya Marsh

Assignment: Form & Culture Exercise

FALL TERM BREAK - NO CLASS OCT 3

Week 6: Oct 10th | First Love / Young Romance / Heartbreak

Assigned Readings Discussed:

Selections from *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them* - Junauda Petrus

Selections from *If You Could Be Mine* - Sara Farizan

Due: Form & Culture Exercise

part two: workshop

Week 7: October 17th | Final Project Overview & The Workshop: What are your tools? What can we make with this? How will we help each other?

*Utilizing tools that the class has explored in weeks 6-7, students will attempt drafting an inciting event on the spot during our opening free-write. No rules.*

*Students will, then, collectively walk through an exercise to become familiar with the workshopping guidelines. In addition, students will receive detailed instructions for completing their final class projects revisions and ways to use the future feedback to revise their projects*

*To close class, students will practice how to workshop using the drafts created during today's opening exercise in real time. Students will be giving and receiving constructive feedback, learning how to incorporating notes, and walking through the process of developing editorial notes for fellow writers*

Due: Final Project Pitches (shared in class) + Rough Drafts (submitted on Canvas before class)

Assignment: Instructor will distribute workshop order in Canvas or Google Drive where students should read each classmate's draft and prepare feedback and editorial letters to be submitted during class on the dates each group is workshopped.

Week 8: Oct 24th

In Class: WORKSHOP  
GROUP ONE

Due: Group 1 Feedback

Week 9: Oct 31st

In Class: WORKSHOP  
GROUP TWO

Due: Group 2 Feedback

Week 10: Nov 7th

In Class: WORKSHOP  
GROUP THREE

Due: Group 3 Feedback

Assignment: Craft  
Response One-Pager

*In Weeks 8-10, students will participate in workshopping work created during today's opening exercise in real time. Students will be giving and receiving constructive feedback, learning how to incorporate notes, and walking through the process of developing editorial notes for fellow writers. Workshop feedback must be turned in before class as well as shared with each writer during class at the end of their time.*

**Week 11:** Nov 14th - Final Project Virtual and On-Campus 1-on-1 Conferences

*This week, each student will get a block of time during normal class hours to conference with the instructor about specific final project concerns, questions, and sticking points. **Students should come prepared with take-aways from their in-class workshop feedback and any \*specific\* questions about their piece.***

**Week 12:** November 21st | Censorship, Book Bans, & Recognized Texts Case Study | a deep dive into 2020 and 2021's NBA winners of YA lit

**Full Book Readings Discussed:**

*Last Night at the Telegraph Club* - Malinda Lo

*King and the Dragonflies* - Kacen Callendar

**Guests:** Andrew Karre, Senior Editor at Dutton YA, an imprint of Penguin Random House

**Due:** One-page craft response to either *Last Night....* Or *King of the....*

**Assignment:** Prepped Questions for Guest Authors Elisabet and Junauda

**Week 13:** Nov 26th | Entry, Evocation and Endings

In-Class Publishing Exercises: Author Profiles, Points of Entry Pro-tips, and the Writer's Life

**Guest Authors:** Elisabet Velasquez, author of *When We Make It* & Junauda Petrus, author of *The Stars & the Blackness Between Them*

**\*Assignment Reminder–Final Projects are due next week!\***

**Week 14:** Dec 5th | End of Semester Reading (just us!) & Last Day of Class

*Students will present selections from polished drafts created during/by the end of class*

**Due:** Final Project Revised Drafts digitally and (printed) in class

*\*course syllabus schedule subject to change*

## covid-19 & illness agreement / notice

### MASKING AND WELLNESS

As you may have heard, cases are creeping up again in our area (and elsewhere). I would like us to mask while class is in session, with the exception of when individuals are speaking or presenting. But! On the first day, we will discuss sustainable practices that feel best to us as a group and you can let me know directly if you are against masking for whatever reason, 1-on-1. Please note that masks are *highly encouraged* in this class, and are available at CPCW. **If you have been exposed to COVID-19 or are experiencing symptoms of illness, firstly, please do not come to class. Stay Home.** Next, please contact me before class time so that we can make plans for you to Zoom into class. If you are too ill to Zoom into class, or if you have caregiving responsibilities that make it difficult for you to attend class in person or by Zoom or turn your work in on time, please contact me so we can work out a plan together to keep you up to speed.

**ABOVE ALL:** we take care of each other by being honest about our health and keeping each other safe. Our health comes first. Windows will remain cracked during class and I will always have an air purifier running. We also will be taking frequent breaks throughout class where I welcome you to also get fresh air and take a \*safe\* break from your mask away from others.

The best way to communicate with me is via my email noted at the top of this syllabus. However, I do not respond to email over the weekends and it can take me up to 24 hours. If you are ever emailing me about an emergency/to alert me of absence, I will make note via your email.

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## FIRST DAY NOTES

what if it all ends tonight

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Your name, printed)

- I have** accessibility needs that I need to share with the instructor in regards to something I have read in this syllabus or about my enrollment in this class.
- I do not have** accessibility needs to share with the instructor at this time.
- I do not wish to share** my accessibility needs at this time.

By signing the below line, I \_\_\_\_\_ (Your name, printed), confirm that I have read all sections of the above syllabus for *What If It All Ends Tonight: Nontraditional Writing for Young Adults*. It is also an agreement to ask questions when any new questions or concerns arise throughout the duration of the semester—even after signing. Questioning norms is encouraged here.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Your Signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Today's Date)