



The Novel Writing Project 2020

Your novel, from first word to last and on to market

Teaching Artist: **Peter Geye**

Sessions

Winter/Spring Term: 12 Thursdays: January 23–April 30, 2020; 6–9 p.m. (no class January 30, February 13, or April 16)

Summer meetings: Saturdays: June 13, July 11, August 22; 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Fall/Winter Term: 12 Thursdays: September 17–December 17; 6–9 p.m. (no class November 26)

One year is plenty of time to write a novel. That's the first lesson of this year-long course. The hundred other lessons that follow will take into account everything from how to begin to how to end, and what to do with your novel once you've finished.

Over the course of the next calendar year, we'll write seriously, we'll read like scholars, we'll meet best-selling authors, luminaries in publishing, and distinguished booksellers and local literary agents. But most importantly, we'll develop the resources and relationships to move ahead with a writing life once the course is finished.

Our work in this first session will range over several topics. To begin, we'll focus on how fiction and its various elements work in concert. We'll also consider the architecture of our projects and begin to work immediately on putting plans into place. The main focus of the course will be workshop-based, but we'll also read and study a series of novels. The authors of all of these assigned readings will join us for in-class discussions. The purpose of these visits is to introduce students to enduring works of fiction and the people who wrote them.

Our schedule of visiting authors is better than any reading series in town, and we get them all to ourselves. I hope that you'll take advantage of the opportunity to ask thoughtful questions and listen attentively to the answers. It would be criminal for you not to attend each visit. These visits will be largely informal, and include ample opportunity for interaction. However, please do not ever use these meetings as a chance to pitch your own work.

Throughout the year, participants will read and learn from **several recent novels**, including:



The Wildlands by Abby Geni

The Rending and the Nest by Kaethe Schwehn

That Kind of Mother by Rumaan Alam

Visiting authors or publishing professionals will include Chris Cander, Shannon Gibney, Linda LeGarde Grover, and others to be announced throughout the year.

Chris Cander is the author of *The Weight of a Piano* (Knopf), *Whisper Hollow*, and *11 Stories*. Although she focuses most of her efforts on novel-writing, Chris also writes children's books and screenplays. For the past seven years, she has been a writer-in-residence for Houston-based [Writers in the Schools](#) (WITS), which engages children in the pleasure and power of reading and writing. In addition, she serves on the [Inprint](#) advisory board and stewards several [Little Free Libraries](#) in her community. Chris well knows that the pen is mightier than the sword, but she's willing to wield one of those, too. A former fitness competitor and model, [she currently holds a 3rd dan in taekwondo](#) and is a certified [ICSU Women's Defensive Tactics Instructor](#). Chris is a member of the [American Society of Journalists and Authors](#), [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#), the [Author's Guild](#), the [Writers' League of Texas](#), [PEN](#), and [MENSA](#). She lives with her [husband](#) and children in Houston, Texas.

Shannon Gibney is a writer, educator, activist, and the author of *See No Color* (Carolrhoda Lab, 2015), a young adult novel that won the 2016 Minnesota Book Award in Young Peoples' Literature. Gibney is faculty in English at Minneapolis College, where she teaches writing. A Bush Artist and McKnight Writing Fellow, her critically-acclaimed new novel, *Dream Country*, is about more than five generations of an African descended family, crisscrossing the Atlantic both voluntarily and involuntarily (Dutton, 2018). In October 2019, University of Minnesota Press will release *What God is Honored Here?: Writings by Indigenous Women and Women of Color on Miscarriage and Infant Loss*, which she co-edited with writer Kao Kalia Yang.

Linda LeGarde Grover is professor of American Indian studies at the University of Minnesota Duluth and a member of the Bois Forte Band of Ojibwe. Her novel *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (Minnesota, 2014) received the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers Fiction Award as well as the Native Writers Circle of the Americas First Book Award. *The Dance Boots*, a book of stories, received the Flannery O'Connor Award and the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize, and her poetry



collection *The Sky Watched: Poems of Ojibwe Lives* received the Red Mountain Press Editor's Award and the 2017 Northeastern Minnesota Book Award for Poetry.

Onigamiising: Seasons of an Ojibwe Year (Minnesota, 2017) won the 2018 Minnesota Book Award for Memoir and Creative Nonfiction and the Northeastern Minnesota Book Award.

Workshop

The purpose of the workshop is to help the students understand their own work better. To this end, we will read, comment upon, and thoroughly discuss each submitted piece.

It is my hope the novel excerpts we're presented with will be relatively polished and sophisticated. This is not to say you ought to be showing us work that has already been published or that you've presented to a workshop previously. On the contrary, I hope we'll see work that is new and exciting. But it should also be well-written and carefully presented. Each workshop will last between 45-60 minutes.

What can you expect from the teaching artist?

- I will not focus on line edits, though I will offer occasional suggestions.
- I will comment on the larger successes or failures of a piece with respect to matters such as the story's architecture, its point of view, its emotional weight and balance.
- I will also focus heavily on characterization and setting and dialogue, and how these fundamental elements are (or are not) working in concert.

What do I expect from you work wise?

- Submissions should be between 30-50 pages.
- Submissions should include page numbers, a title, and the author's name.
- Submissions should be single-sided.
- I expect that we'll commence with the first pages from everyone's novel. Subsequent workshops will hopefully be sequential. However, if it is your belief that other pages are more urgent, you should workshop those. If you do, please include a summary of the intervening pages.
- Each student is responsible for emailing me their manuscript 24 hours previous to the class meeting one week before their scheduled workshop. It is the responsibility of each student to print the week's manuscripts. If you do not own a printer, please make sure you have access to one. Also, please make sure your electronic manuscripts are either written in Word, or are compatible with it.
- Over the course of the year, each student will have four workshops, two in each term.



What should you expect from each other?

- Each manuscript should be thoughtfully marked. This might include compliments or suggestions, it might include questions or larger concerns, but regardless of the nature of your comments, **I expect professionalism and respect at all times.** This workshop is no place for snarkiness or bullying or rudeness, and none will be tolerated.
- Write a letter to the author, as well. This should be a one page, typed response.
- I also expect, or at least hope, that you will make relationships in this class that will be helpful outside of The Loft. Find trustworthy readers, form groups and meet outside of class, create a community.
- Please do not use the workshop to air personal grievances or monopolize the time of others. Students who disrupt or distract or dominate class time are no fun, please be respectful in this and in all ways.
- Students who are defensive are almost unbearable. Please don't be one of them. Everyone will be given a chance at the end of their workshop to ask questions or request clarification. Use this time wisely.
- This last is the golden rule of workshops: You get what you give.

Teaching Artist Consultations

Each student will be asked to meet individually with me regularly during the year. Meetings will be scheduled as follows: one meeting during the winter/spring term, one meeting at the beginning of summer, one at the end of summer, and one at the conclusion of the novel writing project, when we'll discuss your final manuscript. The purposes for these meetings will be wide-ranging, but their primary function is to discuss the work as it's in progress, ways in which to manage time, larger concerns regarding the writing life, and what to do with your novel when the year is complete. Each meeting will be approximately one hour.

At the end of the project, students will be expected to submit their final and complete manuscript. I will read each submission (up to 300 pages) and provide a written critique (1-2 typewritten pages). I will meet individually with each of you to present my critique and answer what questions remain.

Final manuscripts will be due on the last day of the class in the fall/winter session. If you finish prior to then, please submit them early. I will be reading 12 novels at the end of this year, and any jump I can get on completing them will be much appreciated. Final manuscript consultations will be completed by February 28, 2021.



Students will be asked to give a final, public reading from an excerpt of their novel at The Loft, in the Target Performance Hall, on January 14, 2021. Each reading will be 5-7 minutes long. Consider this a celebration!

PLEASE NOTE: final manuscripts must be properly formatted and bound. Single-sided, double-spaced manuscripts ONLY. Pages must be numbered. Only manuscripts turned in to me on or before the last day of class will be read for the final consultation. That is to say, it is the responsibility of the student to finish their manuscript by the final class meeting. If a student fails to complete it, I will only read what has been submitted on the final day of class.

Please also note, enrolling in this course does not ensure publication of your novel. And though I will work with you feverishly to complete your book and find a home for it, I will not be offering special access to my agent or editors. Please don't ask.

Designated Workspace at The Loft

During the times of year when we're not meeting regularly, The Loft has reserved our classroom as a community workspace for you during the same hours that we'd regularly have class. I hope that you'll use it to gather and write and encourage each other.

The Course Schedule

January 23:

- Introductions
- Expectations/Syllabus Review
- Your "Dust Jacket"
- The Map

February 6:

- The "Fictive Dream"
- The First Twenty Pages

February 20:

- Character, Setting, and Story
- Visiting Author

February 27:

- Workshop _____



- Workshop _____

March 5:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

March 12:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

March 19:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

March 26:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

April 2:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

April 9:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

April 23:

- Workshop _____
- Workshop _____

April 30:

- Act One and the Art of Making Progress

Looking ahead:

Summer Saturdays: June 13, July 11, August 22; 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Fall/Winter session: September 17 – December 17, no class November 26

Final manuscripts due December 17

Thursday, January 14, 2021 (7 p.m.) – public reading at The Loft Performance Hall in Open Book