



Poetry, Novel, Children's Picture Book, and Memoir Writing Project FAQs for 2020

How much do I need to have spent writing already? If you're considering one of the year-long writing projects, you ought to have spent countless hours working on your craft. Though there's no clear definition of what "countless hours" means, the best qualified candidates will likely have written many short stories, poems, picture books, or creative nonfiction pieces, given writing a novel, poetry collection, picture book, or memoir serious consideration and/or effort, and of course have spent years of their life reading. HOWEVER, there are those rare exceptions of writers who have not spent years honing their craft who would still be a good fit for this endeavor. If you have questions about your ability, please contact the teaching artist or The Loft for advice.

How much commitment is required? By far the most important quality of the prospective student is this: How hard are you willing to work? If the answer to this question is: As hard as I have to in order to finish a collection of poetry, a novel, several picture books, or a memoir in the next year, then you're probably a good candidate.

How will the variances in abilities in the class be accounted for? What if I'm by far the best or worst writer to sign up, won't that put me at an advantage or disadvantage? As in any writing workshop environment, there are going to be students who are further advanced or more naturally gifted than others. This is inevitable. But one of the great gifts of the workshop environment is that there's room for everyone. In fact, having writers with a range of skill and experience actually *enhances* the workshop by making it more dynamic. Don't worry about being the best or worst writer. Everyone will be treated with the same respect and given the same attention as everyone else.

How much time should I plan on spending on this course? Most everyone taking this course will be balancing many aspects of life. Work, family, hobbies, travel...everyone's busy. And the prospect of enrolling in such a time consuming course can naturally seem daunting. I wish I could say how much time will be required of the student, but people write and read at much different levels and speeds. Here's roughly what you can expect in terms of page production, first as writing, then as reading.

- ***Writing*** In order to complete work, students should be willing to commit to writing many pages—roughly 300 pages for a novel, roughly 250 pages for a memoir, roughly 48-75 pages for a poetry collection. This means students should expect to write about ten to fifteen pages



of their novel or memoir per week, so that in 30 weeks, the student will have a first draft, one that can be revised and edited over the last 20 weeks of the year. Poetry collections average about 1-3 poems, or pages, per week. For picture book writers, generally speaking, students will be supported in drafting, revising, and polishing 3-5 picture book manuscripts by the end of the year, resulting in a submission-ready body of work. Picture book manuscripts are a short form, so our word count might be slimmer than those of writers in the other projects, but keep in mind that most picture book manuscripts require many, many revisions. You will rework your stories again and again, to make them the best they can be, and you will grow as a writer in the process.

- *Reading* We'll be reading about 4 novels or memoirs over the course of the first half of the course; or 5 collections of poetry, if in the Poetry Project. Most of the novels are relatively short, and any can be read before the class starts. On top of the novels/memoirs/(or) poetry collections we'll read, we'll also be reading each other's work. For picture book writers, we'll be reading dozens of picture books each week. The books we use as mentor texts during class will be available for students to peruse, and then students will be responsible for acquiring the books they wish to study further at home. Student will be given reading-as-a-writer assignments as well as writing prompts and revision exercises each week. We don't have a required book list, but you can expect to spend time at the library each week. **On average, you'll be asked to read between 2 and 5 hours per week over the course of the Poetry, Novel, Picture Book, or Memoir Writing Project.**

What if I've already written a poetry collection, picture book, novel or memoir, and would like to have it workshopped? Will this class still work for me? Yes.

Though not necessary, having part or all of a collection, novel, or memoir completed at the time the program commences is fine. There will be plenty of opportunity to learn from your classmates, visiting writers and publishing professionals, and the teaching artists.

I write genre fiction, is The Novel Writing Project still a good fit for me? Again, yes. Though most of our reading will focus on literary fiction, we'll discuss other genres as well.

This sounds like a major commitment. Will The Loft or the teaching artist ensure publication of my poetry collection, picture book, novel, or memoir at the end of it? It is an enormous commitment, and it shouldn't be entered lightly. But there's no



such thing as a guarantee in this business, and so of course neither The Loft nor the teaching artist will ensure publication. We will, however, commit to arming you with the knowledge of how to navigate the publishing world once your project is complete. We will also commit to a dogged curriculum in the craft of writing. If you commit in turn, when you are finished with this course, you will be world's wiser in the art and craft of writing, and ready to take your collection, novel, or memoir to market.

Who's teaching these programs, and what credentials do they have?

Gretchen Marquette (Poetry Writing Project) earned her MFA in poetry from Hamline University, where she served as the assistant poetry editor for *Water~Stone Review*. Her work has appeared in *Harper's*, *Tin House*, *Poetry*, the *Paris Review*, and other places. Her first book, *May Day*, was released by Graywolf Press in 2016, and was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award. Gretchen has twice served as a first reader for The National Poetry Series, screening over a thousand manuscripts and selecting a small number to be passed on to final judges. She lives in the Powderhorn neighborhood in South Minneapolis, and teaches at various colleges and universities in the Twin Cities.

Peter Geye (Novel Writing Project) is a dedicated and excited teacher and writer. He has an MFA from the University of New Orleans and a PhD from Western Michigan University, where he taught creative writing and was editor of *Third Coast*. He's a regular book reviewer for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He has published three novels, most recently a book called *Wintering* that came out with Knopf in 2016. His new novel is forthcoming from Knopf in 2020.

Nicole Helget (Memoir/Creative Nonfiction Writing Project) is the author of a memoir, *The Summer of Ordinary Ways* (Borealis Books), two novels, *The Turtle Catcher* and *Stillwater* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), and three middle-grade novels, *Horse Camp*, co-authored with Nate LeBoutillier (Egmont), *Wonder at the Edge of the World*, and the forthcoming *Fern's Grove* (Little, Brown and Company). Helget was selected as a Barnes and Nobles "Discover Great New Writers" and "Featured Authors," and has starred reviews from *Booklist* and *Publisher's Weekly*. Her work has earned the Tamarack Award and Speakeasy Prize, as well as Midwest Selections Pick, several Minnesota Book Award nominations, and two Minnesota State Arts



Board grants. Featured reviews have appeared in People magazine and “Weekend Edition” on National Public Radio. She works and lives in St. Peter, MN, with her family.

Molly Beth Griffin (Picture Book Writing Project) is a graduate of Hamline University's MFA Program in Writing for Children and Young Adults. She is the author of two picture books, *Loon Baby* and *Rhoda's Rock Hunt*, the young-adult novel *Silhouette of a Sparrow*, and two poetry chapbooks, *Under Our Feet* and *All the Hollow Places*. She has also authored a series of eight beginning readers called *School Sidekicks*. Two more picture books are forthcoming in 2020 and 2021. Her debut YA novel was a finalist for the Minnesota Book Award, the Lambda Literary Award, and ForeWord's Book of the Year, and was featured on ALA's Rainbow List and on the Amelia Bloomer List of Feminist Literature. *Rhoda's Rock Hunt* won a Northeast Minnesota Book Award and a Jeanette Fair Book Award, and was a Star of the North nominee. Molly was the recipient of the 2014 McKnight Artist Fellowship in Children's Literature as well as two MSAB Artist Initiative Grants. Molly teaches writing for children at the Loft, critiques manuscripts, and hosts a monthly Picture Book Salon. She lives in South Minneapolis with her partner and their two young children. For more information please see www.mollybethgriffin.com.