

Freshman Seminar Autumn 2006  
Professor Michelle Herman

### **Life Into Art: How A Writer—and A Writers' Work—Is Made**

This short intensive course will introduce students to the way fiction writers and poets take the material of their lives and begin to shape it into art. We will make use of this year's College of Arts and Sciences' Freshman Common Book, Tobias Wolff's novel *Old School*, which is partly based on Wolff's own experiences as a teenager, and Wolff's memoir, *This Boy's Life*. We'll also read samples of memoir, fiction, and poetry by writers who teach at OSU, who will visit the class and talk about their own writing processes, and answer questions about their work and their lives as we examine the synthesis and transformation that take place as literature is made. Student will learn to begin to think like writers themselves, and will experiment with taking the rich material of their own lives beginning to shape it into art.

Required texts:

-Tobias Wolff's *Old School*, a novel (which will be given to all incoming Arts and Sciences and Explorations freshmen at orientation in summer 2006)\*

-Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life*, a memoir

-A coursepack and/or online packet of short pieces by such writers as Erin McGraw, Lee K. Abbott, Kathy Fagan, and Andrew Hudgins

This 2-credit-hour course will meet on Friday afternoons for two hours weekly (3-5 PM) for the first seven weeks of the quarter, culminating in a Q&A session with visiting writer Tobias Wolff on Friday, November 3. There will be other events outside of class hours that students will be encouraged to attend (a public reading by Wolff on Thursday evening, November 2; a campus screening of the film version of "This Boy's Life," date TBA).

Friday September 22 3-5 PM Introduction to course; in-class writing experiments

Friday September 29 3-5 PM Discussion of assigned readings; visit from author of readings

Friday October 6 3-5 PM Writing experiments shared and discussed

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\* Students throughout the University are welcome to register for this course, and are invited to contact Professor Herman at [herman.2@osu.edu](mailto:herman.2@osu.edu) if they'd like to receive a common of the ASC common book.

Friday October 13 3-5 PM Discussion of assigned readings; visit from author of readings

Friday October 20 3-5 PM Writing experiments shared and discussed

Friday October 27 3-5 PM Discussion of assigned readings; visit from author of readings

Friday November 3 3-5 PM Professor Herman interviews Tobias Wolff in the Wexner Center Film and Video Room and takes questions

For the remainder of the quarter, Professor Herman will conduct private conference with students.

Professor Herman's office is in 165 Denney (292-5767; e-mail: [herman.2@osu.edu](mailto:herman.2@osu.edu)).

**Your presence at every session is expected. If you cannot attend, I expect you to let me know by e-mail or phone, and to have an excellent reason for your absence (i.e., dire illness, not a sudden pressing need to take a three-day weekend).**

In addition to your physical presence, you will be expected to be an active participant in the class, which will function very much like the more advanced creative writing "workshops" you'll have an opportunity to take later on; thus you will not only be expected to do all the reading assignments and come to class prepared to talk about what you've read, but to offer comments about the writing of your classmates. Everyone will be given the opportunity to ask questions of the visiting writers, and everyone should be prepared to do so.

Grading (the class will be letter-graded)

Participation: 50%

Written work: 50%

Written assignments:

- written questions for each visiting writer (3 questions per visitor)
- three short creative writing assignments (2-3 pp. each) plus in-class writing

*All written work must be your own (what would be the point of taking this course otherwise?) and it is assumed that everyone participating in this course will be eager to try his or her hand at the writing exercises assigned. Please be aware that in accordance with university rules, cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.*

Please note that the Office for Disability Services, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. Contact the Office for Disability Services at 292-3307.

**Michelle Herman** is the recipient of Ohio State's highest honor for teaching, the University Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award, and the author of four books: the novels *Dog* (2005) and *Missing* (1990), the memoir *The Middle of Everything* (2005), and a collection of short fiction, *A New and Glorious Life* (1998). Her stories, novellas, and personal essays have appeared in many periodicals, including literary journals such as the *North American Review* and *Story Quarterly*, and mainstream publications such as *O, the Oprah Magazine*, and have been anthologized in such collections as *Stumbling and Raging: Politically Inspired Stories* and *Jewish-American Fiction: A Century of Stories*. Her many awards and honors include a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Fellowship, a James Michener Fellowship, and numerous individual artist's fellowships from the Ohio Arts Council and the Greater Columbus Arts Council. Educated at Brooklyn College and the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, she has taught at OSU for eighteen years and is a former director of the Creative Writing Program. The undergraduate courses she regularly teaches include English 265 (The Writing of Fiction I) and 565 (The Writing of Fiction II), English 568 (The Writing of Creative Nonfiction II), an honors seminar in creative writing (English H591.01), and a course in literary publishing that is open to undergraduates and graduate students alike (English 662). She is also Coordinator of the College of Arts and Science's Freshman Book Program, and with poet and OSU Professor Kathy Fagan, edits Ohio State's nationally recognized literary magazine, *The Journal*. She is at work now on both a new novel and a collection of personal essays.