

TIN HOUSE SPRING 2024 SEMINAR

CHARACTER CRAFT IN YA FICTION **with Nova Ren Suma**

6 sessions on Sundays — April 21, May 5, May 19, June 2, June 16, June 30

11:00am-1:30pm Pacific

12:00pm-2:30pm Mountain

1:00pm-3:30pm Central

2:00pm-4:30pm Eastern

Description:

Teenage protagonists can be such fickle creatures. Sometimes they get away from us. Sometimes they stare back at us stone-faced and refuse to engage, let alone reveal their secrets. This online writing seminar taught by *New York Times* bestselling YA author Nova Ren Suma is for those who want to go beneath the surface and delve into writing riveting character-driven stories for the young adult space.

This generative fiction seminar will be held over six sessions in Zoom, meeting twice a month for three months. Each session is themed and aims to offer tools that will aid YA writers in embodying compelling and complex young characters and building organic plots that stem from these characters' wants, fears, histories, and needs. In-class exercises, spotlights on excerpted reading, and writing prompts will focus on elements of character craft such as voice, perspective, motivation, specificity, coming of age, and transformation. There will be multiple opportunities for volunteers to speak about process and share new work aloud with the group, creating a community during our time together.

Writers should come to the first session with a YA project and a character already in mind who you'd like to deepen and explore. You can be at any stage of the writing process—first-drafting or revising a novel, imagining the early bits of a story—so long as you're open to generating fresh scenes and possible new story avenues during our time together. All experience levels and all genres of YA and YA-crossover are welcome.

Zoom sessions will be recorded in case you need to miss a live class.

Schedule & Syllabus:

Session One: April 21 — VOICE

Bring to Session One: Character list-making assignment (details to be shared before class)

- Introduction; class logistics
- Opening words
- Worthy protagonists; embodying teenage characters; finding voice
- Character work; expanding on homework assignment
- In-class writing exercise: “Contradictions”
- *Homework:* Expand on “Contradictions” + optional reading PDF

Session Two: May 5 — PERSPECTIVE

- Opportunity for a few volunteers to share a page aloud from “Contradictions”
- The YA perspective; character interiority; unreliability
- Spotlight on excerpted reading (PDF provided; reading beforehand is optional)
- In-class writing exercise: “Origin Story”
- *Homework:* Expand on “Origin Story” + optional reading PDF

Session Three: May 19 — PLACE

- Opportunity for a few volunteers to share a page aloud from “Origin Story”
- Safe and unsafe places; home; the outer world
- Spotlight on excerpted reading (PDF provided; reading beforehand is optional)
- In-class writing exercise: “Safe/Unsafe Place”
- *Homework:* Expand on “Safe/Unsafe Place” + optional reading PDF

Session Four: June 2 — HEART

- Opportunity for a few volunteers to share a page aloud from “Safe/Unsafe Place”
- Character motivation; (dis)likability; story stakes and making it matter
- Spotlight on excerpted reading (PDF to be provided)
- In-class writing exercise: “The End of the World”
- *Homework:* Expand on “The End of the World” + optional reading PDF

Session Five: June 16 — PRECIPICE

- Opportunity for a few volunteers to share page aloud from “The End of the World”
- Character arcs; coming of age; the precipice of change
- Spotlight on excerpted reading (PDF to be provided)
- In-class writing exercise: “Crossroads”
- *Homework:* Expand on “Crossroads” + closing character list-making assignment

Session Six: June 30 — TRANSFORMATION

- Opportunity for a few volunteers to share page aloud from “Crossroads”
- Character transformation; ambiguity; satisfying story ends
- Closing character revelations discussion
- Q&A and last words

Details:

Writing exercises & prompts: Come prepared to write during each class session in Zoom; exercises will begin during class time and discussion of in-the-moment discoveries will be a part of the session. In the two weeks before the next session, you will have time to continue the prompt and expand and edit what you began in class. At the start of each session, there will be an opportunity for a few volunteers to share a page aloud from last session's prompt and hear constructive and immediate reactions in the chat. Sharing aloud is never mandatory, but is certainly welcome and encouraged.

Optional reading: Readings will be provided as PDFs for those who want to read the excerpts connected to each week's theme before we meet in Zoom. These readings will consist of brief YA novel excerpts or YA short stories. The reading will be used as fodder for inspiration and will somehow speak to that week's writing exercise. Doing the reading ahead of class is always optional, so if it doesn't fit into your schedule, never worry; there will be a spotlight on relevant details during class. There is no reading due for the first class session.

Feedback: Nova is not providing written feedback to work made in this class, but writers are always welcome to share aloud or discuss their process during our Zoom sessions. For any writers who choose to take part in an optional work exchange with peers, Nova can arrange informal small groups among those interested. However, these groups would be independent from the Zoom sessions and Nova will not take part. An email gathering interest about this will be sent out in the early days of the seminar.

Zoom recordings: All sessions will be recorded and the link provided by Tin House, so if you need to miss a session or would like to return to it for a rewatch, you can do so at a later date. After each Zoom session, Nova will email a handout with the prompts and/or exercises done in class to everyone enrolled, so you never miss a prompt.

This syllabus is a guide for the class and is subject to change.

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