Black Women Writing: Short Stories
Rosenbach Online Course
July 15, August 12, September 16, October 14 | 6:30–8:30 p.m.
Led by Trapeta B. Mayson & Yolanda Wisher

Course Description & Schedule

This course will explore the work of five Black women writers from the 19th century to the present-day who have made the short story form their own. We’ll begin with “The Two Offers” (1859) by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, considered the first short story published by an African American in the United States. From there we’ll dive into selections from five short story collections including The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories (1899) by Alice Dunbar Nelson, whose multidimensional legacy as a writer, educator, and activist will be featured in a groundbreaking Rosenbach exhibition this fall. We’ll encounter “lost” Harlem Renaissance stories by Zora Neale Hurston—flamboyant folklorist, anthropologist and playwright—in Hitting A Straight Lick With a Crooked Stick, just released this year. We’ll read Gorilla, My Love, a book of fifteen first-person stories written between 1960 and 1970 by Toni Cade Bambara, a filmmaker, cultural worker, and professor who spent her last years in Philadelphia. Moving into the 21st century, we’ll check out The Thing Around Your Neck (2009) by award-winning Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie whose TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” has been viewed more than 22 million times. We’ll finish with Blue Talk and Love (2015) by Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, a Harlem native and Bryn Mawr College professor who pens the voices of today’s young Black women using techniques drawn from hip hop and magical realism. In each session we’ll candidly discuss how these writers have reimagined the world in all its beauty, ugliness, and mystery with Black women and people at the center and helm, choosing the adventure and directing the lens. In each meeting, participants will be guided through brief and playful writing exercises focused on world-building and character creation. Each participant will have the option to develop these in-class writings into their own short story.

Class 1: Wednesday, July 15

Class 2: Wednesday, August 12
Reading due: Selected stories from The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories by Alice Dunbar Nelson and Hitting A Straight Lick With a Crooked Stick by Zora Neale Hurston.

Class 3: Wednesday, September 16
Reading due: Gorilla, My Love by Toni Cade Bambara and The Thing Around Your Neck by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Class 4: Wednesday, October 14
Reading due: Blue Talk and Love by Mecca Jamilah Sullivan.
Optional writing due: short story
About the Instructors

Trapeta B. Mayson is the 2020-2021 Philadelphia Poet Laureate. She is a recipient of a Pew Fellowship in Literature, Leeway Transformation Award, Leeway Art and Change Grant and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Grants. Her work was also nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize. Mayson is a Cave Canem and Callaloo Fellow and a 2019 Aspen Words Emerging Writers Fellow with the Aspen Institute. She is the author of *She Was Once Herself* and *Mocha Melodies*. Mayson also released two music and poetry projects, *SCAT* and *This Is How We Get Through*, in collaboration with internationally acclaimed jazz guitarist, Monnette Sudler. Her other publications include submissions in *The American Poetry Review, Epiphany Literary Journal, Aesthetica Magazine, Margie: The American Journal of Poetry* among others. Mayson is a native of Liberia. She is a graduate of Temple University, Bryn Mawr Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research and Villanova University School of Business. Currently working in the social services field, Mayson is a member of several local organizations where she uses the arts to mobilize, build community and create change. trapetamayson.com / trapetamayson@gmail.com

Yolanda Wisher is the author of *Monk Eats an Afro* (Hanging Loose Press, 2014). Wisher was named the inaugural Poet Laureate of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania in 1999 and the third Poet Laureate of Philadelphia in 2016. A Pew and Cave Canem Fellow, she was a Writer in Residence at Hedgebrook and Aspen Words and the 2017-2018 CPCW Fellow in Poetics and Poetic Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. A former high school English teacher, she has been active in Philadelphia's artistic and cultural sphere for two decades. Wisher founded and directed a Germantown neighborhood poetry festival, worked as Director of Art Education for Philadelphia Mural Arts, and has spearheaded numerous community-driven programs with partners such as The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Historic Germantown, and the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture. Wisher currently works as the Curator of Spoken Word at Philadelphia Contemporary and regularly performs a unique blend of poetry and song with her band The Afroeaters. yolandawisher.com / yolandawisher@gmail.com