

English Department

Editor:
Pete Byrne

Faculty Advisor:
Dustin Parsons

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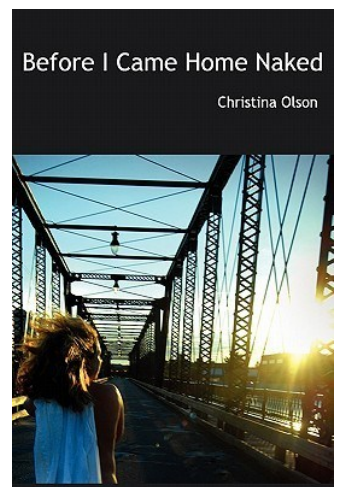
Christina Olson

For the second round of the Visiting Writers Series this semester, students were treated to a special surprise. The visiting poet, Christina Olson, is actually a SUNY Fredonia Alum. Olson grew up in Buffalo where, as it states on her own website, “she failed to see what was so great about chicken wings.” Christina received her B.S. in Communication here before moving on to receive an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Minnesota State University Mankato. Now, years later, she has returned not as a student, but as a professional in the writing world.

During Olson’s craft talk, she focused heavily on the discussion of using “found material” in poetry. Found poetry involves taking existing texts and re-framing them, refashioning them, and altering them to present them as poems. In Olson’s

case, the goal is to alter the existing text as little as possible in the process of rearranging them. Her example for students was a poem she had written made up entirely of Kanye West tweets. In this case, it is important to only make changes in spacing, lines, or to make small grammatical changes. She is able to keep the voice of Kanye and make it seem as though he is much more profound than he is in reality.

At her reading, Olson read aloud from her book, *Before I Came Home Naked*. Many of the recurring images in Olson’s book include alcohol, cigarettes, and death. She revealed however, that many of the poems are actually love poems for friends, teachers, and loved ones. One that is especially interesting for Fredonia students is the poem titled, *On Reading Your First Book*. Un-



derneath the title is written, “for Aimee, with all respect.” The Aimee she is referring to is Professor Nezhukumathil. It was a wonderful experience to hear from one of Fredonia’s alum at Visiting Writers. We can only expect that this will happen again in the coming years with another one of our very own.

Inside the Underground Railroad



Dr. Sandra Liggins

“I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves.”

-Harriet Tubman



Students will encounter Geysers in Yellowstone's Northern Range.

This summer, Dr. Sandra Liggins from the English Department in collaboration with Dr. Jennifer Hildebrand of the History Department will be teaching a 3 credit travel course titled, *Traveling the Underground Railroad in the Niagara Region*. Students will be reading bits of fiction and nonfiction related to the Underground Railroad, but much of the learning will take place as they travel to key locations and landmarks of the Underground Railroad around Western New York and Ontario, Canada.

Yellowstone

A six-credit program is taking place that whisks students away to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. Activities in the course will include watching wildlife in Yellowstone's Northern Range where students will see

The travel agenda includes stops at locations such as the Michigan Street Baptist Church in Buffalo, the Buxton Settlement in Canada, and the Dawn Settlement. The Dawn settlement was founded in part by Josiah Henson, who may have been the model for Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. At each stop, discussions will be held about key players in the UGRR movement, myths regarding the UGRR and how they are presented.

geysers, mudpots and hot springs. There will be day hikes highlighting the park's biodiversity and microclimates. One major pit stop will be the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone.

Although this course fea-

The course will also feature insight from Dr. Sandra Liggins. A difficult part of structuring the course for her was deciding where to bring the students. Many of the stations along the UGRR were barns, churches, and houses. The class needed to have locations that were distinct and could spark real discussion about the Railroad between students and with individuals they will encounter. In addition, Liggins will discuss the irony of having slavery in what was designed to be a “free” nation. *Traveling the Underground Railroad* should serve as a unique experience for the students involved this summer.

tures an exhilarating backdrop, the real purpose of the course is to educate and involve students in political disputes about environmental issues, public lands, and public resources. The tours of the park

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Yellowstone Cont...



Students will meet with local ranchers on Buffalo Fields.

will actually be ranger guided. Questions can be asked regarding the park's natural history and geology.

The course will take students off the park grounds as well. Students will sit down with actual stakeholders in the environmental issues being discussed.

There will be meetings with local ranchers, Buffalo Field Campaign members and other local residents. Certain hot button issues, that may be unknown to those who live in upstate New York, such as fire ecology will be discussed.

This is an English course as well as a Biology course as it is being taught by both Dr. Christina Jarvis of the English Department and Dr. William Brown of the Biology Department. All assignments will be dual graded by both professors, with Jarvis evaluating the quality of the writing and Brown the accuracy of the content.

From The Writers Ring



Writers Ring is organizing a potential visit from Poet, Taylor Mali.

The Writers Ring has been setting into motion a major collaborative event with Fredonia's own Ethos Composers. This event will feature Fredonia writers and musicians together to create and perform for the student body musically backed and interpreted poems and other works. This extensive joint effort will not only be a wonder-

ful showcase for the talent of our school's students but also a testament to the co-operation between groups. Writers Ring is also planning open mic nights for this semester. We invite any and all to participate and share their works be they written, musical or otherwise. We are also organizing a possible visit by Poet Taylor Mali

for next year. We believe that Mr. Mali's visit to SUNY Fredonia will be an enriching experience for all who attend. Writers Ring meets every Monday from 6pm to 7pm in the Fenton Reading Room.

Sincerely,

Writers Ring

Patrick Somerville

Adventure stories fascinate Patrick Somerville. He began his March 22nd craft talk and reading by discussing a story where characters could walk through a portal to different worlds. As a child, Somerville enjoyed reading obscure and off beat adventure stories. Although he first made it big with dramatic novels, he soon realized he should be writing what he loved to read. Adventure stories.

The Universe in Miniature in Miniature, the short story collection that he read from, is a far cry from his 2009 novel, *The Cradle*. Somerville explained that with his short story collection, he really wanted to let his imagination loose. What a better way to do that than with the unrestricting

nature of a short story collection. His book includes stories about everything from incompetent aliens to giant smoke monsters to a secret wall of biscuits.

The final story in Somerville's book pulls all of the stories together. This final story is titled *The Machine of Understanding Other People*. When asked if he had intended all of the stories to intertwine from the beginning he revealed that this was absolutely not the case. He had the idea for his final story after all of the other stories was written. Childhood adventure tales and especially the portal that transports people to other worlds inspired him. Somerville admitted to somewhat lifting that concept and

creating a helmet that allows users to understand what it is like to be another person.

Somerville was able to create a fascinating book of fantasy stories that are full of adventure and also characters that are worth caring about. His helmet in the final story really illustrates how this short story collection is really a novel with the theme of empathy. It was a privilege to hear Somerville read from his novel. It will be interesting to see if Somerville continues writing in the style of *The Universe in Miniature in Miniature* or if he reverts to the more serious style of *The Cradle*.

Contact Us



Editor:
Peter Byrne
byrn4194@fredonia.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Dustin Parsons

If you would like to contribute articles to this newsletter, or you have stories that you would like to have featured, please feel free to contact either this year's faculty advisor or this semester's editor.

The editor for Spring of 2012 is Peter Byrne. The Faculty Advisor is Dustin Parsons. We are interested in knowing what the English Department wants to see in this publication.