Literature itself is always an outbreak of some kind, a turning away from the social pressures and issues so that the writer can mull things over in a meditational space that might reorganize not only the issues, but, potentially speaking, society itself.

- Garrett Hongo, poet and memoirist

I see this as a dual purpose class: primarily an intensive writing workshop in which you will generate autobiographical sketches/essays/stories, as well as a reading seminar featuring work from a wide range of contemporary Asian American writers.

Some of the many notions we will consider may be: What exactly is ‘Asian American’ autobiography/memoir? Are there salient experiences, subjects, and tropes that define the literature? And how do these notations arise from the interaction – both resistant and assimilative – with a predominantly non-Asian context, and, in turn, seek to recreate that context?

We’ll be working/experimenting with various modes of self-telling, including but not limited to the lyric essay, the epistolary form, fictional scenarios, and possibly even sketches/graphic/photographic imagery.

It is expected that you’ll come to the class fully prepared to speak about the work presented, both peer work and readings in the text. We’re here to help one another develop as writers and readers, and so I expect that your workshop discussions and written commentary will be offered in the highest spirit of artistic and intellectual inquiry, respect, and honesty.

Process:

We will begin each workshop with a discussion of the assigned story/stories from the anthology and handouts that I will copy and bring in the previous week. One or two students will help lead the discussion.
We will then share our weekly writing exercises/assignments aloud, followed by a discussion of the designated student stories (I will pass around a signup sheet for the quarter). These students will bring hardcopies of their stories to class the week before they will be workshopped. Obviously, it is critical that this pre-distribution occurs, so that workshop members have sufficient time to read, mark, and comment on the stories.

Every student in the class will bring a printed (not handwritten) response to each of the stories under discussion in that workshop. These should be approximately 1 page long; although you will give your comments to the writer at the end of class, I will periodically collect the responses and hand them on later. They must be brought to class that day. Sending them on later is not acceptable.

Details:

All written work will be in 12-pt font, double-spaced, with full margins and page numbers, and title on the first page.

Telephones should be put away before you enter the classroom. Please do not use your computers in class. We will be working from hard copies, and if you want to take notes, just write them down. Bring paper and pen, as we may do some in-class exercises.

Please do not eat in class. Drinks are ok. Note that there will be a mid-class break for a snack/use of restroom.

Required Texts:

*Handouts from Under Western Eyes: Personal Essays from Asian America, edited by Garrett Hongo*

*Various handouts of memoir and fiction by Asian-, South Asian-, South East Asian-American writers and others*

Grading will be based upon the following:

**Writing assignments (30%)**

Weekly short exercises (250-500 words), both assigned and in response to the readings

Two 5-7 page autobiographical pieces; this should be considered material which will be the basis for the final project
Class participation (40%)

Regular attendance (as we will be meeting once a week, attendance is important and absences will affect your grade. Please be punctual.
Active participation in the discussion on the assigned reading
Write 2-3 paragraph critiques of fellow students’ stories.

Final project (30%)

A stand-alone memoir, based primarily on the two pieces presented to workshop during the quarter, 10-15 pages.