

To Whom It May Concern:

I took Jennifer Shook's Interpretation of Literature class at the University of Iowa during my sophomore year. When I signed up for the course to fill one of my general education requirements I didn't expect it to become one of my favorite classes. I am an art major and at the time was dying to move past my general requirements to my major courses. That feeling of wanting to speed through went away the minute I met Jennifer the first week. She was so excited. She was full of passion and her love for literature was obvious.

Throughout the course she made everything we did seem important and worthwhile. It was never an exercise or busy work but rather thoughtful writing or discussion about something meaningful. I had never been exposed to such thoughtful discussion about literature before taking Jennifer's course. I remember feeling so comfortable speaking in class and noticing that the other students did as well. This is not always the case in many discussion-based classes. In my opinion, how comfortable the students are speaking up in class says a lot about the instructor. It is no small feat to create an environment that makes other people feel like they can participate. This generosity and assumption that everyone had something valuable to contribute brought out the best in us. I saw my friends who were taking the course and myself become fully engaged, learning to speak and write without our usual hesitations. This kind of empowerment only happens when you have a *really* great instructor.

In addition to the wonderful environment, the content of Jennifer's class was amazing. We read all kinds of things including novels, poetry, short stories, memoirs, and comics. I remember reading Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* for the first time in her course and being completely blown away. I also remember having such exciting conversations with Jennifer after class about a book we read called *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine. These are just two examples of so many wonderful things we read throughout the semester. She exposed us to so many different things and seemed to always be focused on the larger goal, making the world of great literature seem accessible to us. Her course was like a ticket or an invitation into so much more. To me this is not only unique to find in a course but a real gift.

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