

# SELFHOOD AND ITS STORIES

Mark Freeman  
508 667-9227

Fall, 2022  
[mfreeman@holycross.edu](mailto:mfreeman@holycross.edu)

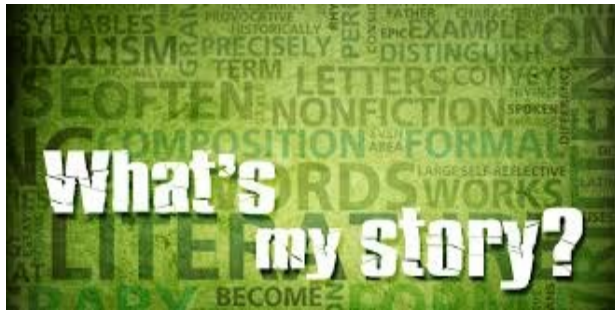
Office hours: MW 10-12; and by appointment



Cluster description:

## ***Get a Life: Stories of the Self***

*Who are you? Are you happy? How do you define a good life? How do you want to be remembered? When music, social media or memoir speak to you, what do you hear? What does home or belonging mean to you? The stories we hear and tell are crucial to how we define ourselves. Narratives reflect and reinforce notions of self. Questions of community and moral obligation can solidify or challenge our understanding of self. While we do not aim to establish rightness or wrongness in the art of developing one's self, we ask students – and ourselves – to reflect on the intersections of self and society, the role of social justice, the pursuit of a life well-lived, and the ongoing process of creating one's self through stories written, read, and heard. Through giving voice to variables such as race/ethnicity, social economic status, religion, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation, we explore how lived experiences shape the process of identity formation. Looking both inward and outward, we ask: Who are we? What do we owe one another? How do we get a life that is meaningful to us? How will we be remembered?*



### Seminar description:

*What is the self? How is our sense of self related to the stories we tell about ourselves? Can one tell a true life story? Or are the stories of our lives better regarded as “fictions,” spun out of the narrative imagination? Drawing on readings from psychology, literature, and philosophy as well as selected autobiographies and memoirs, this course will examine the process by which people create and tell the stories of their lives. Topics include the nature of memory, the place of language and culture in shaping the self, the difference between life as lived and life as told, and the role of life stories in the creation of personal identity. Alongside our exploration of these topics, we will also explore, and create, our own life stories and will therefore need to ask: Who am I? How did I become who I am? How should I live my life?*

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Conway, Jill. *The Road from Coorain*

Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*

Keller, Helen. *The Story of My Life*

Roth, Philip, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*

Slater, Lauren. *Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir*

Tolstoy, Leo. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

## OUTLINE OF COURSE TOPICS AND READINGS

8/31      **Introduction(s): The Challenge of Truth**

9/2      Freeman, “After a fall”

\_\_\_\_\_, “The presence of what is missing”

\_\_\_\_\_, “Rethinking the fictive, reclaiming the real”

\_\_\_\_\_, “From absence to presence” (optional)

### What kinds of beings are we?

9/7      Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: Part One*

9/8      **Writer’s Workshop Open House, 3-4:30, Dinand 217**

9/9      Harris, selections from *Free Will*

### What are the sources of moral selfhood?

9/14      Levi, selections from *The Drowned and the Saved*

9/16      Freeman, “Moral lateness”

9/18      **stART on the Street festival on Park Avenue (fun!)**

### How does the self become itself?

9/21      Keller, *The Story of My Life*

9/22      **LibFest on the Kimball Quad, 11:30-1:30**

9/23      Freeman, “In the name of the self”

9/24      **Open House at Prior Performing Arts Center**

## **Whose words do we speak and write?**

- 9/28 Meet with Jacob Mauldwin, First-Year Librarian (in class)  
Watch [\*The Miracle Worker\*](#) (film on HK's early years)
- 9/30 Keller, selections from *The World I Live In* (on Zoom)

## **How “original” are we?**

- 10/5 **Freeman**, “Worded images, imaged words” (on Zoom)  
\_\_\_\_\_, “The space of selfhood”
- 10/7 Fixed time essay exploration

**10/12 & 14 October break!**

## **What are “the facts” of one’s life?**

- 10/19 Roth, *The Facts*
- 10/21 Freeman, “Fact and fiction”

## **What kind of story should be told?**

- 10/26 Conway, *The Road from Coorain*
- 10/28 (cont.)

## **How does one become who one truly is?**

- 11/2 Freeman, “Who to become”
- 11/4 \_\_\_\_\_, “Discerning the history inscribed within”

## What is “the good life”?

11/9 Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*

11/11 Freeman, “The good life”

## What is a “true story”?

11/16 Slater, *Lying*

11/18 (cont.)

**11/23 & 25 Thanksgiving break!**

## How do I speak the truth of my life?

11/30 Karr, selections from *The Art of Memoir*

12/2 (cont.)

## What’s my story?

12/7 & 9 Mini-memoir class symposium!

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- A “Looking Inward” journal, consisting of weekly entries (typed, single-spaced, no more than a page), to be submitted each Friday. The journal is an opportunity for you to reflect, on paper, about what you are reading *and*, as appropriate, how it relates to the life you live and have lived throughout the course of your 17-19 (?) years. This does not mean that it’s merely an opportunity to offer opinions about the reading. Rather, it’s an opportunity for you to really take on the ideas at hand, to interrogate them—and to have them interrogate you. As for how your journal entries will be evaluated, I will simply be giving you a grade of “check plus,” “check,” or “check

minus” (along, of course, with some more substantial feedback). The first one can address the readings, your first week at HC, and/or anything else you’d like to write about, and you can submit it on Monday, the 5<sup>th</sup>. *Please do so in the form of a single continuous document on Google Drive (which you will share with me). In other words, you will return to the document each week, adding a new entry.* The journal will be worth ~15%.

- A “fixed time” essay exploration on October 7<sup>th</sup>. Details will provided in due time. (~20%)
- A take-home essay exploration assigned on October 28<sup>th</sup>, due on November 7<sup>th</sup>. (~25%)
- A 12-15 page “mini-memoir” (typed, double-spaced), and the reading of an excerpt from it the final week of class. The first draft of your mini-memoir will be due December 2<sup>nd</sup>; the final version, December 16<sup>th</sup>. (~30%)
- Active engagement in class, participation in class discussion, and preparation of one interesting, significant, provocative question for each class session (that you’re prepared to share) (~10%). My main message to you here is that I am much more interested in quality than quantity. You needn’t volunteer an idea every time I ask a question. And please don’t worry if you see yourself as a more “reserved” student when it comes to offering your own perspective on things (though that might change!); there’s room in this class for everybody. More than anything, I need you to *be there*—not just physically but mentally and, at times, spiritually, with your whole being.

### **AN IMPORTANT NOTE:**

I consider this to be a working syllabus. This means at least two things: that I’ll be sticking to it whenever that’s appropriate and veering from it whenever it seems necessary. If this semester is at all like past semesters, it also means that I may need to give you a revised syllabus sometime during the semester. None of this means that the course is destined to be chaotic! But there will likely be a fair amount of “improv” in this course, on my part as well as on the part of students. This means that we need to go where our thinking leads. . .

## **REGARDING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

Here is what I want to say, in the simplest of terms: *the work you do for this course must be your own*. This doesn't mean that you can't draw on others' work or be influenced by it. What it means is that the product you create must reflect *your* efforts, *your* efforts, *your* imagination. It will also involve a moral promise on your part—a promise that you must uphold and enact as you go about your work. Please familiarize yourself with the College's [Academic Integrity Policy](#). You are responsible for knowing the policy and abiding by it. Academic integrity is not only about honesty, however. It is about preparedness for class, intellectual commitment, openness to new ideas, the capacity to listen to others, and much more. Let's work together to create the best possible learning environment.

## **REGARDING ATTENDANCE AND EXCUSED ABSENCES:**

We expect you to attend class regularly and to fulfill all obligations of the course as outlined on this syllabus and discussed during class. Also, please read and abide by the College's [Student Attendance at Class and Excused Absence Policy](#).

## **SOME IMPORTANT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

### **Regarding Accessibility Resources and Requests for Reasonable**

**Accommodations:** For the College policy, please check out [Requests for Reasonable Accommodations](#). For information regarding accessibility resources, you can do so through the [Office of Accessibility Services](#) as a link.

### **Textbook Affordability:**

It is expected that you will have textbooks and other required class materials in order to achieve academic success. If you are unable to purchase course materials, please go to the [Financial Aid Office website](#) to contact a staff member, who will be happy to provide you with information and assistance. There are several options available for providing course materials to students at no or low cost, and we'll be glad to help in whatever way we can.

## **Holy Cross Academic Resources:**

[Academic Services and Learning Resources](#)

[Center for Writing](#)

[Writer's Workshop](#)

[Class Deans](#)

[Library](#)

## **Holy Cross Student Support Resources:**

[Counseling Center](#)

[Office of the College Chaplains](#)

[Health Services](#)

A comprehensive list of on-campus and online wellness resources is available [here](#).

Other sources of support include:

[Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)

[Office of Multicultural Education](#)

## **Regarding confidentiality and mandatory reporting:**

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as your professor. It is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep the information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, any information that you disclose that addresses sexual misconduct or relates to a prior suicide attempt or an intention to attempt suicide requires my sharing that information with those on campus who are able to provide you with necessary resources.

Following the College's Sexual Misconduct Policy, I will share information about sexual misconduct with the College's Office of Title IX Initiatives. If you would like to talk to Title IX directly, they can be reached at 508-793-3336 or via [email](#). For more information, please visit the [Sexual Respect and Title IX](#) website. If you would like to discuss the matter confidentially, you can contact the [Chaplains' Office](#), 508-793-2448; [Counseling Center](#), 508-793-3363; and/or [Health Services](#), 508-793-2276. Following the College's Suicide Protocol, if you disclose a prior suicide attempt or an intention or plan to attempt suicide, we will share that information with the Chair of our student CARE Team, who will engage in appropriate outreach.