

Marriage Stories
Osher Lifelong Learning, Fall 2023
4 Wednesday meetings, October 2023, 2-4 PM
Hilary Roberts, Instructor
Syllabus

Course Description

Comic Henny Youngman famously joked that the secret of a happy marriage remains a secret. That may be true, but marriage is an enduring social construct sanctioned by law, custom, and belief. In many cultures landing a spouse is an alluring rite of passage into adulthood. Whether we personally view the institution of marriage as satisfying or stressful, lifelong or episodic, fueled by love or lust, entered into for security or opportunity, one truth we can agree on is that writers find in marriage fertile subject matter for storytelling.

In this course we'll discuss marital issues that esteemed authors' stories breathe life into: loyalty, growth, money, sex, procreation, tolerance, conflict, power, disappointment, aging, infidelity, affirmation, divorce, and more. Besides discovering these literary artists' perspectives on marriage, we'll discuss the elements of their stories, focusing where relevant on narrative point of view, character, setting, cultural context, story arc, humor, themes, imagery, and resolution.

Each week's reading selections include one standard-length short story and one micro-fiction story. As always, we'll look to literature to nourish our longing to understand what's essential about life.

File copies of all class readings are available to download from the OLLI online portal, so members have the opportunity to read the stories ahead of our group discussions.

Schedule of readings:

- Oct. 4: "Someone Else Besides You" by Viet Thanh Nguyen
"If At The Wedding" by Lydia Davis
- Oct. 11: "The Arrangers of Marriage" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche
"You Are Exactly Where You Belong" by Joanna Novak
- Oct. 18: "The News From Spain" by Joan Wickersham
"Cat In The Rain" by Ernest Hemingway
- Oct. 25: "Where We Are Now" by Ethan Canin
"Bigfoot Stole My Wife" by Ron Carlson

Instructor

Hilary Roberts is an editor, writer, hiker, and educator who has taught at UC Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, and Contra Costa College. She holds an M.A. from University of Michigan, where she pursued an interest in linguistics and its application to understanding literary style. She completed a Ph.D. at U.C. Berkeley, where she studied English and American literature, the history and structure of the English language, narrative theory, and cognitive science in its inception. Her current academic interests include modern and contemporary literature, creative expression across literary genres, and global issues and human rights. As a developmental editor, she has worked with novelists, poets, business professionals and hundreds of teenagers writing college application personal statements, helping individuals say what they mean in the clearest and most engaging way. She has been an instructor at Osher Lifelong Learning at UC Berkeley since 2018 and this year is also presenting a course at OLLI Santa Clara University.