

STUDENT READINGS, LITERARY JOURNALS, GARDENS, TAILGATES, ETC.



“**THE STUDENT READING SERIES ARE FUN.** Especially when it’s outside at [a colleague’s house]. It’s impressive that they’re completely student-done. The cool thing about that is people are motivated enough to bring in outside readers that they’re fans of, to encourage other people to become fans of them. It’s the same principle that governs doing DIY shows for bands when you’re in high school. It’s a very community thing, people want to have a good time and they can rally around books. . . . Broken English [an expose of student work, which takes place at a local bar] is a shit-show, but it’s really useful. [Laughing] You really do learn what flies and what doesn’t, what bores people and what doesn’t. In that way, [the readings] are extremely helpful. Especially not being faculty-moderated at all. And everybody’s so supportive. Even when people bomb, everyone’s nice to them. I mean, everybody comes, everybody’s supportive. Even the M.A. and the Ph.D. students are very supportive of it, which I enjoy.”

- JIMMY

“**I REALLY LIKE BROKEN ENGLISH.** It’s interesting because you go in your first semester as an MFA and you do your reading, and you do another one your third year. So it’s really interesting to see yourself grow as a writer. It’s an opportunity to evaluate yourself as a writer and as a performer. Definitely as a first-year, I was really nervous. It’s also really cool because we [as fiction writers] get to hear the poets’ work, and vice versa. And some of the performances are really cool. It’s good that it’s at a bar, too. It’s more casual. It’s not at, like, the Bondurant Auditorium. [Laughing] People can get drinks, and hang out afterwards. I think it’s a good thing to bring us together. Like, ‘Let’s all go to this thing

because everybody's going to be there.' It really helps to create a writing community."

- LIZZIE

"**STUDENTS HERE REALLY CARE** about books and reading. And the fact that Broken English happens is just such a cool thing. There's something really amazing about the camaraderie of that experience. It's the most supportive audience you'll ever read for, and being able to do that my first semester of the program was such a significant part of this experience for me. Yeah, the student reading series, I think, are amazing. They're not officially affiliated with the program, and that's just really cool, you know. And to me, that embodies how I feel about this program in general. What actually happens within the institution is a very small part of what makes it really great. It's, like, this larger space surrounding it that I think is just so awesome. Maybe you can get that anywhere, but I'm really not sure that you can."

- MARTY

"**THAT LUNCH WITH DENIS JOHNSON WAS CRAZY.** Did I tell you the shit he was saying? I wrote something down that he said. . . . Here's my favorite Denis Johnson quote. I found it. You ready? . . . [The quotation has been elided in the interest of confidentiality.] . . . I don't think it was true, but it was awesome. [Laughing] It seemed like he was performing, you know, but it was an awesome performance."

- JIMMY

"**OUR LITERARY JOURNAL, YALOBUSHA REVIEW, I STARTED AS A FICTION READER** there, and now I'm managing editor. [Laughing] Thanks. I mean, a journal takes a lot of work, but it's a lot of fun, too. But, yes, reading for *YR* taught me a lot about the kind of stories that editors see a lot. It encouraged me to pursue weirder elements, and to tell the stories that you really want to tell. There were so many stories that were safe, and, you know, there was nothing wrong with them, but they weren't special. And so that was really helpful.

And just the common mistakes that people keep making. You kind of learn things to watch out for. I definitely think I've improved as a writer from being able to be involved with that. And if you're interested in working in publishing, it's a really cool opportunity."

- KATE

"**YR IS GREAT.** I love reading for YR. You can solicit poems from people whose work you really like, and they respond. It's like, you're here, and suddenly because your name is on a masthead, people take you seriously, and will give you poems. The fact that it's an online journal, I think — it's moving in a really cool direction. And people actually know about us, and respect us, and want to be published in our journal. And that's pretty awesome. It's crazy to me that everyone doesn't want to read for it." - MARTY

"**I'M A SOCIAL PERSON,** and I like to hang out with people. I know some writers like to have turmoil in their lives [Laughing], but I personally work best when I'm not crazy as hell. And I also just really like football tailgating. And, you know, I think if we're going to be in Oxford, Mississippi, we should participate in things that the city has to offer. And football tailgating is one of the things that has made the town famous. Even moving past all that, it's just a fun way for people to come out and hang out outside. It's also cool to be in the middle of the city where everybody else is just milling around. So I bought some tents. I usually bring some vodka or gin or whatever, and people bring their own alcohol. So we just hang out outside, have a Bloody Mary. People will show up at like 4 PM. No one ever goes to the games, really. [Laughing] We don't really have any allegiance to the football team. It's actually just an opportunity to have people come out on a Saturday and hang out outside and have a drink together." - LIZZIE

“I HAPPENED TO BE MOVING into a place, and I told my landlord I was into [gardening], and he said, ‘Cool, let’s till it up next weekend,’ even though I wasn’t moving in for another three months. So, we tilled it up, I started planting, kept it up for that first summer, and then I moved in. And it just keeps getting bigger and better, and so now I’m working with as many students as I can to help produce food. [Names several students who are involved in the project.] And once it starts producing here in the next month, I’m going to be selling it — or giving it away, depending — to fellow graduate students. When you can have farm fresh shit [Laughing], excuse me, farm fresh food, it’s pretty great. One thing that’s just great about it, too, is just people knowing that this exists. It surprises them, you know. Grandparents used to do this stuff, and then we just stopped. It seems so impossible to so many people, and all you have to do is have sun, soil, water, and seed. The know-how is really nothing. Because you can get that. What you need is patience. The plants want to survive. That is their prerogative. Much like a poem, or a story, or whatever else. It wants to continue, and survive, and all that good stuff.”

- ANDREW



