

## EXPLORING CULTURE AND VALUES WITH MODERN SHORT ESSAYS

“The essay insists that our consciousness yields infinite complexity on upon close scrutiny.” Using as a source The Best American Essays of 2017, (Ed., Leslie Jamison, Houghton-Mifflin, available on Google Play and Amazon, \$9.99), this 5-week course examines culture, values and perspectives as seen in some of the best short non-fiction writings of our time. In the process, the class will take participants on a journey of self-discovery and an appreciation of the value of irony—“a pleasant challenging of the world, a sense of vivid contrasts and incongruities, with one’s perspective made intelligible only by being defined in each others’ terms.” (Jamison). Format: Each class will consist of a brief overview of a selected essay, readings from the work, and open-ended questions for discussion. The chosen essays are personal stories of universal significance, focusing on the themes shown below. Short companion essays available on online will be assigned before each class discussion to broaden understanding of the topic. Before the first class, participants are asked to read the introduction and to recall their own memories of personal essays and their impact. Come prepared to talk, listen, and reflect!

Class Date	Theme	Essay	Companion reading
February 23	Our primal fears	Snakebit, Alia Volz	Total Eclipse, Annie Dillard
March 2	Humor in adversity	If I Only Had a Leg, Greg Marshall	Attitude, Margaret Attwood
March 9	Sanctioning execution	Two Shallow Graves, Jason Arment	The Hanging, George Orwell
March 16	Our families, ourselves	Sparrow Needy, Kenneth McClane	Laugh, Kookaburra, David Sedaris
March 23	The will to endure	The Cost of Living, Emily Maloney	Some Practical Thoughts about Suicide, Tim Ferriss

**Leader:** Susan Matson (MS in education, Johns Hopkins) is a lifelong educator and teacher trainer. She has worked for the US Department of State as a teaching fellow and has taught on subjects as diverse as academic writing, The Modern American Documentary, and The Great American Short Story.

**Tuesdays:** 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. 5 weeks: February 23 through March 23

**Maximum:** 12