WRITING THE SELF IN THE CITY

IES Abroad Vienna

DESCRIPTION:
How do we inhabit and engage with place? How do we live in and make sense of the contemporary city? What is the relationship between navigating the external world and understanding our interior lives? How can we use these questions to write about ourselves and our place in the world? Focusing on the use of the city in works of Austrian fiction, non-fiction and poetry, students taking Writing the Self in the City will broaden their understanding of Vienna and Austrian Literature and work on their creative practice through exploration of the city, relevant readings, in-depth discussions, and stimulating coursework. By reading works from a diverse range of perspectives, genres, and literary styles, students will come to consider the city as a profound and layered subject matter to be powerfully utilised in their own writing. By focusing on a particular city-related theme per week and by taking regular trips to thematically relevant areas of Vienna, students will learn to value literature and creative writing as a means of understanding the contemporary world and their unique place in it.

CREDITS: 3

CONTACT HOURS: 45

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: Students will ideally have some experience of participating in a creative writing workshop.

ADDITIONAL COST: None.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:
While the instructor will present the key events/interpretations, the course is designed to encourage as much student participation as possible through seminar-style and workshop discussion. Excursions to different venues, outside and indoors, are an essential part of the course.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Short Written Assignments – 50%
- Portfolio Assignment 1 – 15 %
- Portfolio Assignment 2 – 15 %
- Class Contribution and Participation in Discussions – 20%

Short written assignments
Students will complete five written assignments throughout the semester, at 600 words each. These assignments are worth 10% each, for a combined total of 50%. The themes for the written assignments are as follows:

- **Short Assignment 1: First Impressions of the New City**
  Students will be tasked with writing a reflective piece of creative nonfiction that focuses on the aesthetics and atmospheres of Vienna city centre. In addition to conveying their initial sense of the city, they will also be expected to show in their work an ability to reflect on the early stages of adapting to a new environment
  and how it compares to home.
  Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of week two.
  Assignment deadline: Tuesday of week two.

- **Short Assignment 2: Navigating the Self While Navigating the City**
  Students will be tasked with writing a piece that blends interior experience with impressions of their time navigating the city. Their work will be expected to focus on the interactions that take place between the fluid interior worlds of the mind and the exterior world of the city they are becoming acquainted with.
  Assignment deadline: Tuesday of week three.

- **Short Assignment 3: The Music of the City**
  Students will be tasked with writing a piece that focuses on the city's soundscapes and the stories those sounds reveal. Students will be expected to visit different parts of the city and to keep an account of what sounds they encounter and to give their own impressions of what those sounds tell them about Vienna. Ideally, a concert will be attended as part of the course.
  Assignment deadline: Tuesday of week five.

- **Short Assignment 4: The City at Night**
  Students will be tasked with writing a piece that brings to life their experience of Vienna at night. The writing in these pieces will be expected to compare Vienna in daylight with Vienna after nightfall, with particular focus on the city's aesthetics and atmospheres.
  Assignment deadline: Tuesday of week seven.

- **Short Assignment 5: The American in the European City**
  Students will be tasked with reflecting on the cultural experience of living in a city in a different country to their own. These pieces will necessitate personal writing that reflects on their encounters with non-Americans in Vienna, cultural differences, and what they have learned about home from their time spent living in a new city.
  Assignment deadline: Tuesday of week ten.

Portfolio assignments
Students will also complete two portfolio assignments throughout the semester. The two assignments are worth 30 % of the overall grade. The first assignment should be 1,500 words. The final portfolio assignment should be at least 2,000 words. The topics for the portfolio assignments are as follows:

- **Assignment 1: Sketching the New City with Words**
  Students will be tasked with writing a personal essay in which they will be expected to display their ability to use language to capture their early experiences of living in and navigating their new city. Students will be assigned a particular location in Vienna to use as a geographical reference point for their assignment.
  Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of week four. **Assignment deadline:** Tuesday of week four.

- **Assignment 2: The City Outside and the City Within**
  Students will be tasked with writing a reflective piece in which they explore the personal journeys they have embarked on while living and studying in Vienna. In this piece, students will be expected to reflect on their overall perceptions of living in Europe, any personal changes they may have identified during the semester, and how they believe they will remember Vienna and Europe, both in the near and distant future.
  Assignment check-in with each student: Friday of week eleven. **Assignment deadline:** Tuesday of week twelve.

Assessment of papers and presentations will be based upon:

- **Structure:** presents a coherent argument that addresses the question from start to finish; structure is clear and organised; writing is clear and error-free; creative set-up of the portfolio, originality.
- **Content:** offers evidence of relevant reading and research; demonstrates a capacity to apply learning to situations
- **Evidence of Critical Thought:** demonstrates a capacity to critically evaluate arguments and theories; can offer a well-presented counterargument
- **Creativity:** makes an original contribution to the topic; presents material in an interesting or unique way that is particularly useful to the reader

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify the diverse ways a range of Austrian authors have written aspects of the city by reading and analysing works of non-fiction, fiction, and poetry
- Compare and contrast historical and contemporary perspectives to construct a comprehensive narrative of the city
- Compare what is special in texts by Austrian/Viennese writers to texts by other European and international writers
- Apply thematic and stylistic choices in their own written work that reflect a deeper understanding of the role place plays

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

IES Abroad Vienna requires attendance at all class sessions. Attendance is taken every class. Students must attend at least 60% of their class sessions to qualify for a passing grade, regardless of whether their absences have been excused or not. In-person attendance in class is expected unless otherwise noted in the syllabus.

An excursion to Mauthausen Memorial is mandatory in this class.

Students should communicate absences as soon as possible to their professors. For excused absences, students must refer to process described in the attendance policy. Please refer to the IES Abroad Vienna Attendance Policy for a more precise overview of all attendance requirements at IES Abroad Vienna as well as an overview of possible grade penalties for absences.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

At IES Abroad Vienna, we hold ourselves to the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty undermines the principles of trust and fairness essential to a thriving learning community. As such, plagiarism and cheating are considered serious violations of our code of conduct, and students found engaging in such activities will face swift and severe consequences, ranging from a failing grade on an assignment, to an academic review and possible expulsion from the program.

USE OF AI:

AI can be used for research only in the classroom. No use of AI for creative writing.

CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments and Readings
Week 1	• ***The City as a Literary Device*** In this class, we will consider the city not just as a geographical location in our work, but as a fluid and significant force of literary life and character. Aided by readings that focus specifically on the significant and compelling role cities can play in literature, discussions will focus on the early perceptions the students have of the city of Vienna and how we might give verbal shape to those perceptions in our writing.	• Excerpts of *Malina*, Ingeborg Bachmann Walking tour through Viennas 3rd district where Ingeborg Bachmann lived
Week 2	• ***How We See and Write the New City*** This class will focus on how we perceive, make sense of and articulate the contemporary city. By reading excerpts from thematically relevant novels, students will become acquainted with the diverse ways in which young Austrian authors have used Vienna as a focal point in their fictions and, in doing so, develop ways of approaching the writing of the modern city in their own work.	• Sally Rooney, *Normal People* • Christina Maria Landerl, *Verlass die Stadt (Leave the City)* • Anna-Elisabeth Mayer, *Fliegengewicht* **Short assignment #1 due**
Week 3	• ***Psychogeography and the City*** This class will reflect on the interior psychological experiences navigating a city can inspire. With discussions focusing on theories of psychogeography and thematically relevant readings, students will foster a deeper understanding of how to write about the psychology of inhabiting and moving through the space of the new city.	**Excursion to Hrdlicka Memorial and Judenplatz** **Albertina Museum** **Short assignment #2 due**

Week 4	• ***The City Then and the City Now*** This class will use historical perspectives to put contemporary Vienna into nuanced contexts. In addition to engaging with thematically relevant readings, students will embark on a field trip to historically relevant areas of the city and discuss the many ways in which the city's distant and recent history can contribute to their writing.	• Maja Haderlap, *Angel of Oblivion* The novel tells the story of a family from the Slovenian minority in Austria. The first-person narrator starts off with her childhood memories of rural life, in a community anchored in the past. All the locals are scarred by WWII. Her grandfather, we find out, was a partisan fighting the Nazis from forest hideouts. Her grandmother was arrested and survived the concentration camp Ravensbrück. **Portfolio assignment #1 due**
Week 5	• ***Soundscapes of the Contemporary City*** This class will consist of reflecting on the sensory experience of the city, with particular attention paid to the sounds of the city and what they reveal about it. Aided by readings from sensory-focused texts, discussions will centre on sound – both natural and man-made – and the ways they can be interpreted and accommodated in creative writing.	• Thomas Stangl, *Ihre Musik (Her Music)* • Ingeborg Bachmann, *The Good God of Manhattan (Radio Play)* **Short assignment #3 due**
Week 6	• ***The Hidden City*** This class will focus on the areas of a city that are not always immediately visible. In addition to engaging with thematically relevant texts, students will take a field trip to lesser-known areas of Vienna and learn the value of looking for new stories in hidden places.	• John Irving, *Setting free the Bears* His debut novel, involves two young men, Vienna's Schönbrunn Zoo, and a plan to release the animals. It also explores Austria's Nazi past and postwar history. • Andrea Grill, *Das Schöne und das Notwendige (The Beautiful and the Necessary)* This contemporary novel is set in a zoo, where two young men with migration background steal a particular feral cat from the zoo. Visit to the zoo in Schönbrunn

Week 7	• ***The Hauntology of the City*** This class will reflect on the past's persistence in the present and the role it plays in how we inhabit and experience the city. By acknowledging aspects of the city where the line between the past and present is sometimes blurred, students will discover that a more nuanced comprehension of the city's lesser-considered features can inspire their writing in new and compelling ways.	• This class will focus on debrieving and discussion of the excursion to Mauthausen Memorial • Ruth Weiss, *White is all colors (Poetry)* • Ruth Weiss, *The Snake Sez Yesssss (Poetry)* • Elfriede Gerstl, *New York and Return (Poetry)* • Elfriede Gerstl, *Advice for a Writer (Poetry)* Guest speaker: An invited guest will provide insights on the psychology of Holocaust traumata How to write about atrocities committed by human beings without being exploitative and voyeuristic? **Short assignment #4 due**
Week 8	• ***The People of the City*** This class will consist of discussing the contemporary city's demographics and how it shapes our view of the city. Discussions will centre on the interactions students have had with permanent residents of Vienna, what those interactions have taught them about the city, and how they might work these learnings into their writing.	• Ilse Aichinger, *Bad Words* Guest speakers: Viennese writer Katharina Riese (born 1946) Viennese novelist Anna-Elisabeth Mayer (born 1977)
Week 9	• ***The Nocturnal City*** This class will consider the experiential differences between navigating a city during the day and navigating it at night. By engaging with readings that specifically focus on experiencing a city after nightfall, students will learn how to consider and write with nuance about the transformation a city undergoes at night.	• Visit to Bellaria Movie Theater Note: Ilse Aichinger loved to go to the movies, sometimes she saw several per day

Week 10	• ***Memories of the City***	• Mark Twain, The Awful German Language (1880) — a humorous essay on the difficulties of German, useful for understanding Twain's engagement with the language rather than Vienna specifically. • Marlen Haushofer, Die Mansarde (The Attic) **Short assignment #5 due**
Week 11	• ***The U.S. City vs. the European City*** This class will encourage students to reflect on the differences and similarities with home that they have encountered during their time in Vienna. Students will learn to extract and weave into their written work meanings from the differences and similarities they have identified during their stay in Europe.	Excursion to Donauinsel • Oriana Fallaci, The Useless Sex • Oriana Fallaci, Selected Interviews Perspective of an Italien writer and journalist who lived in the U.S. for the last two decades of her life
Week 12	• ***The City Within*** This concluding class will consist of discussions that centre on new perspectives on how we inhabit space and what they tell us about ourselves. Students will be given the opportunity to give voice to their experience of living in Vienna and how writing at length about it over the semester has contributed to these perspectives and their growth as writers.	**Portfolio assignment #2 due**

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Hrdlicka Memorial, Judenplatz.
- Albertina Museum
- Walking Tour
- Visit to Bellaria Movie Theatre
- Visit to the Zoo in Schönbrunn
- Mauthausen Memorial (day-trip)
- Donauinsel (Danube Island)

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Maja Haderlap, The Angel of Oblivion
- Ingeborg Bachmann, Malina
- Ingeborg Bachmann, Der gute Gott von Manhattan
- Thomas Stangl, Ihre Musik
- Sally Rooney, Normal People
- John Irving, Setting Free the Bears
- Andrea Grill, Das Schöne und das Notwendige
- Maja Haderlap, Distant Transit (Poems)
- Marlen Haushofer, Die Mansarde (The Attic)
- Mark Twain, The Awful German Language (1880)
- Ilse Aichinger, Bad Words
- Ruth Weiss, White is all colors (Poetry)
- Ruth Weiss, The Snake Sez Yesssss (Poetry)
- Elfriede Gerstl, New York and Return (Poetry)
- Elfriede Gerstl, Advice for a Writer (Poetry)
- Christina Maria Landerl, Verlass die Stadt (Leave the City)
- Anna-Elisabeth Mayer, Fliegengewicht (Featherweight)
- Oriana Fallaci, The Useless Sex