

Joel Peckham is a professor of American Literature and Creative Writing at Marshall University and the author of nine collections of poetry, including *Any Moonwalker Can Tell You*: new and selected poems from SFA Press and the spoken word LP, *Still Running: words and music* (available at all major streaming platforms). He has also published three collections of nonfiction, most recently *Gone The Sun* from Uncollected Press. In 2026, *Flight 932: The Marshall Plane Crash and the Story of an American Town*, coauthored with Rachael Peckham, will appear from the University Press of Kentucky.

Joel workshop descriptions

“Getting the Reader in the Car”—a workshop on writing brilliant opening paragraphs. Based on the title of a chapter from Steve Almond’s *Truth is the Arrow, Mercy the Bow*, this workshop will focus on answering the questions, what makes a great opening to a story, one that not only makes us want to read further, but gives us and the reader what we need to move forward. We will look at Almond has to say about it, and look at examples from other great authors before working through some exercises that will get us, and our stories, moving, before sharing our efforts with each other.

“Fictive Nonfiction”—the line between what’s true and real has never seemed so blurry and perhaps no more so than in the emerging genre of speculative nonfiction. What happens when the facts don’t quite reach the truth? In this session we will work on strategies for employing the imagination and mining the magic of this world in a way that stays true to the author’s emotional and psychological experience without the limitations of objective reality.

Kandi Workman bio

Kandi Workman is creative nonfiction writer and poet from the coalfields of southern West Virginia. Her creative work is a study of day to day life at the intersection of place, nature, Appalachian culture, and queerness. She is currently the Director of Strategic Development for the West Virginia Creative Network and an adjunct English instructor at West Virginia State University (WVSU). She received her undergraduate degrees in English Literature, Professional Writing, and Technical Writing from WVSU (2015) and an MFA in Creative Writing: Creative Nonfiction from WV Wesleyan College in 2023. She is the mother of three grown children and life-long resident of Boone County.

Kandi workman workshops

Exploring Violence and Vulnerability: In this session, participants will examine various works of nonfiction and poetry for the ways writers approach the topic of violence and discuss the vulnerability it requires for writers to approach such topics (naming the violence and the identifying moments of vulnerability). Participants will be given tools and writing prompts to explore writing about their own hard-to-talk about topics.

Examining Grief | Inciting Joy: In this session, participants will examine works of poets Ross Gay and Pablo Neruda for paralleling moments of grief and joy. Participants will then be guided through a series of writing and discussion prompts to identify personal challenges with grief that can complicate engaging in consistent creative expression and using that grief to write towards joy.

Sara Henning bio

Sara Henning is an award-winning teacher and poet. She is the author of the poetry collections *Burn* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2024), a Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Editor's Selection; *Terra Incognita* (Ohio University Press, 2022), winner of the 2021 Hollis Summers Poetry Prize; and *View from True North* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), winner of the 2017 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition Award and the 2019 High Plains Book Award. Most recently, *Hush! Secrets Women Keep About Mental Health*, edited with Karen Salyer McElmurray and Cat Pleska, is forthcoming from West Virginia University Press in 2028. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as *Kenyon Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Witness*, *Meridian*, and the *Cincinnati Review*. She is an assistant professor of creative writing at Marshall University, where she coordinates the A.E. Stringer Visiting Writers Series.

Sara Henning Workshop descriptions

***The Shimmer: The Transformative Power of Metaphor* (Sara Henning)** In *Ordinary Genius*, Kim Addonizio says that metaphor—speaking of one thing in terms of another—creates “a kind of energy field,” an effect she calls *the shimmer*. In this workshop, we will explore how poets can use metaphor (and other figurative associations) to translate the mysteries of life in ways which revise and shatter our expectations. In this generative workshop, we will test Addonizio's concept of *the shimmer* by analyzing craft-based strategies used by a diverse array of contemporary poets not only to construct figurative relationships, but to expand our understanding of the world. Then, we will experiment with creating *the shimmer* in our own poems. **While this workshop is poetry-themed, prose writers are welcome to join us*

The Moments That Make Us: Writing Grief, Joy, and Healing Through Poetry (Sara Henning)

Walt Whitman once wrote in his poem “Song of Myself,” “I am large, I contain multitudes.” The beauty of being alive is that we are all an anthology of moments—the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful, the transformative—living in one skin. In this generative workshop, we will explore such moments in the work of several poets, exploring grief, joy, and moments of healing. We will also try our hands at unearthing the moments that make us uniquely who we are on the page. **While this workshop is poetry-themed, prose writers are welcome to join us*

Marie Manilla bio

Marie Manilla grew up in Huntington, West Virginia. Her memoir, *This is A Game I Play*, will be published in Oct. 2026. Select essays in the memoir first appeared in *Word Riot*, *Cossack Review*, *Gargoyle*, and other journals. Her novel, *The Patron Saint of Ugly*, received the Weatherford Award and was the 2021 One Book, One West Virginia Common Read. *Shrapnel* won The Fred Bonnie Award for Best First Novel. Stories in her collection, *Still Life with Plums*, first appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Mississippi Review*, and other venues. Marie still lives in her hometown. Learn more at www.mariemanilla.com.

Keynote title

"Writing as an Act of Compassion"