

THEA 103: Text Analysis
California State University - Long Beach
Course Outline/Syllabus - Fall 2020

Course Description & Objectives

THEA 103 will examine theatre as a storytelling form and a process by which ideas are explored and emotions are revealed through dramatic action. It will cover the history of playwriting and the evolution of its structures and forms, using specific works as a starting point for an analysis of the different ingredients that make up a play. In addition, the course will look at the chosen plays as reflections of the times in which they were written, exploring theater as a kind of history both intimate and broad.

Using the practice of text analysis, students will learn to communicate effectively using core storytelling terms and concepts like plot, character, spectacle, mood, tone and theme, and to describe how these concepts - working in tandem with one another - can create specific responses from an audience.

Through a close reading of the assigned plays, students will discover the many ways in which these concepts can be translated from text to physical action on stage, and learn to evaluate the written word for this potential - not as a final product, but as a blueprint for a visual and aural spectacle to come.

By the end of the class, students will be able to use the analytic tools they have acquired to justify their opinions, beliefs and ideas about the works we have read and to develop their own unique visions for productions of those plays.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation

Students will be required to attend lectures via Zoom, twice a week. Students' attendance will determine 20% of their grade. They must attend all class sessions unless they have an excused absence as per Theatre Arts policy.

Participation will be measured through our Beachboard Discussion page. Each week, students will be required to respond directly to the discussion question posed, as well as to offer at least one follow-up response to their fellow students' answers.

Required Texts

Twilight: Los Angeles, by Anna Deveare Smith, ISBN: 9780385473767

Six Characters In Search Of An Author, by Luigi Pirandello, ISBN: 9780451526885

Our Town, by Thornton Wilder, ISBN: 9780060512637

The Mousetrap, by Agatha Christie, ISBN: 9780573702440

The Nether, by Jen Haley, ISBN: 9780810130630
Detroit '67, by Dominique Morrisseau, ISBN: 9781783190003
Vietgone, by Qui Nguyen, ISBN: 9780573706479
Trouble in Mind, by Alice Childress, ISBN: 9780810127517
For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, by Ntozake Shange, ISBN: 9780684843261
In the Red and Brown Water, by Tarell Alvin McCraney, ISBN: 9780822226765
Much Ado about Nothing, by William Shakespeare, ISBN: 9780812969177
Oedipus El Rey, by Luis Alfaro, ISBN: 9781350155404

Additional texts will be made available on our Beach Board

Course Schedule

The course is organized by week. Each week, we will meet twice via Zoom, Mondays and Wednesdays from 11am to 12:20pm.

week	topic	reading
Week 1 Mtgs: 8/24, 8/26	The Building Blocks of a play	Selections from <i>Poetics</i> , by Aristotle
Week 2 Mtgs: 8/31, 9/2	Plot: Causality & Conflict	<i>Detroit '67</i> , by Dominique Morrisseau
Week 3 No class 9/7 Mtg: 9/9	Character: Intentions and Actions	<i>Oedipus El Rey</i> , by Luis Alfaro
Week 4 Mtgs: 9/14, 9/16	Internal & External Conflict	<i>Six Characters In Search Of An Author</i> , by Luigi Pirandello
Week 5 Mtgs: 9/21, 9/23	Set and Setting	<i>Our Town</i> , by Thornton Wilder Assignment 1 due: 9/25
Week 6 Mtgs: 9/28, 9/30	World-building	<i>The Nether</i> , By Jennifer Haley
Week 7 Mtgs: 10/5, 10/7	Mood and Tone	<i>In The Red & Brown Water</i> , by Tarell McCraney
Week 8	Spectacle	<i>The Mousetrap</i> , by

Mtgs: 10/12, 10/14		Agatha Christie
Week 9 Mtgs: 10/19, 10/21	Comedy	<i>Vietgone</i> , by Qui Nguyen
Week 10 Mtgs: 10/26, 10/28	Shakespeare	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> , by William Shakespeare
Week 11 Mtgs: 11/2, 11/4	Politics in contemporary theatre	Selections from Brecht, Peter Brook Assignment 2 due: 11/6
Week 12 Mtg: 11/9 No class: 11/11	Meta-theatre	<i>Trouble In Mind</i> , by Alice Childress
Week 13 Mtgs: 11/16, 11/18	Solo performance	<i>Twilight: Los Angeles</i> , by Anna Deveare Smith
Week 14 Mtg: 11/23 No class: 11/25	Non Western theatre	TBD
Week 15 Mtgs: 11/30, 12/2	Musical Theatre	TBD
Week 16 Mtgs: 12/7, 12/9	Experimental Theatre	<i>For Colored Girls...</i> , by Ntozake Shange
Week 17 Exams Week		Assignment 3 due: 12/16

To see a more detailed outline, go to the Content page on the class's Beachboard

Assignments

Weekly Assignments

Weekly assignments will usually be in the form of a short reflection or a short, low-stakes quiz on that week's subject. The assignment will need to be completed by the end of the day on the Saturday concluding that week. For instance, the assignment for Week 1 will need to be completed by 11:59pm on Saturday, 8/29.

Long-term Assignments

1. Research Paper (due 9/25)

Choose a play and write a research paper of no less than 1000 words. Your research should be directed in one of two areas:

-You may explore the historical context of the play's writing. What was happening in the world around the playwright when they wrote this play? What was going on in their personal life that might have influenced the content of the play they were writing? There are echoes of real-world events in even the most fantastical stories. Your job is to find those influences and show how they connect to the events and ideas within the play.

- You may instead choose to focus on a production history for the play. You should include analysis of at least three different productions of the play. *To note: your focus should be on theatrical productions, not adaptations to other mediums like film or TV.* Attention should be paid to choices made with regard to casting (an expansion or reduction of roles, interesting choices in doubling; different casting with regard to gender and race); to sets and setting, and to the language. You will be considering these choices and writing about how they may have expanded on your understanding of the play's themes or subtracted from the potential power of the text.

2. Adaptation (due: 11/6)

Devise your own adaptation, translating a film, TV series, video game, book, poem, song, theme park ride, etc., to the theatrical form. Your submission will be in two parts. You will first present your idea in a short essay of no less than 500 words. In this essay, you should be prepared to address the following topics and questions:

How will the piece's story need to be changed in order to work within the structure of a play?
How will the adaptation utilize theatre's unique sense of spectacle?
How can the live audience be utilized?

You will then meet with me via Zoom or phone for a follow-up conversation between November 10-13. This conversation will take about 10 minutes.

3. Study guide (due: 12/16)

Choose a play to create a study guide for. Your study guide should consist of five distinct parts and follow the example of the study guides provided as well as the skills you've developed on previous assignments. Sections should include a timeline of historical events surrounding the play's creation; a chart of the play's plot or character arc; a glossary of terms from the play; expanded research on one or more of the play's topics; and a selection of thematically relevant pieces from other artistic disciplines (studio art, music, poetry).

Grade Outline

Category	Percentage of Total Grade
Attendance at Zoom lectures	<i>20%</i>
Participation in Discussion Forums	<i>20%</i>
Weekly Assignments	<i>25%</i>
Research Paper assignment	<i>10%</i>
Adaptation assignment	<i>10%</i>
Study Guide assignment	<i>15%</i>

Students will receive grades no later than one week after the assignment's due date.

Written assignments will be evaluated based on the student's ability to present a clearly organized and complete argument with sufficient supporting detail and effective language to support that argument.