

Level: undergraduate intro course
Focus: play analysis
System: semester
Class size: 20-30

Utica College

THE 115: Intro to Theatre

Spring 2020

Credit Hours: 3

Prerequisites: none

Class Meeting Times: MWF 11:30am-12:20pm

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Office Hours: MF 12:30-2:30pm

In high school, plays are typically read as literature. The study of plays through literary analysis—treating them as though they were books—provides many useful tools for understanding plays as a reader or an audience member. But what if you are part of the team that puts a play onstage? Being a theatre-maker implies a different relationship to a play than a reader or audience member has, and requires different skills and tools. While a literary critic may comb a script for themes and symbols, an actor may look for motivation and given circumstances. A literary critic might ask how the playwright's life informed the work, while a fellow playwright might instead analyze how they structured the play for presentation onstage. In this course, we will look at plays from a number of different angles, emphasizing what each different type of theatre-maker must look for when approaching a script for production.

The course is divided into a number of units, each focused on reading through the lens of a different member of a production company. Along the way, we will look at scripts from a number of respected playwrights within a variety of traditions. These scripts have been chosen to provide you with a broad view of the kinds of playwrights and dramatic forms you may expect to encounter as a future theatre-maker or audience member. Upon finishing this course, you will have been exposed to a broad spectrum of both theatrical styles and production roles, so that you can identify and pursue your own particular interests in theatre beyond this course.

This class fulfills the “Fine, Visual and Performing Arts” aspect of Core Goal 6, and teaches to the following learning objectives:

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of key aspects (broad overview) of the history, context and theory of the art form they are studying.
2. Students will apply the theory they have learned to an assignment that allows them to experience that art form in a practical way.
3. Students will evaluate a work of professional art on the basis of what they have learned about that art form.

Required Reading:

Course Reader:

- Brecht, Bertolt. *The Good Person of Szechwan*, John Willett, trans. New York: Penguin Books, 2008. 1-115.
- Chin, Frank. *The Year of the Dragon*. In *The Chickencoop Chinaman; and, The Year of the Dragon: Two Plays*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981. 67-142.
- Fuchs, Elinor. "EF's Visit to a Small Planet: Some Questions to Ask a Play," in *Theater* 34.2 (2004), 4-9.
- Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Project Gutenberg, 2008.
- Ionesco, Eugene. *Rhinoceros*. In *Rhinoceros and Other Plays*, Derek Prouse, trans. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1960. 3-107.
- Ives, David. *Philip Glass Buys a Loaf of Bread*. In *All in the Timing: Fourteen Plays*. New York and Toronto: Vintage Books, 1995. Unpaginated.
- Parks, Suzan-Lori. *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*. In *The America Play and Other Works*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995. 99-131.
- . "Elements of Style." In *The America Play and Other Works*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995. 6-18.
- Raznovich, Diana. *MaTRIX, Inc.*, Victoria Martinez and Lidia Ramirez, trans. In *Defiant Acts: Four Plays by Diana Raznovich*, Diana Taylor and Victoria Martinez, eds. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002. 99-127.
- Shakespeare, William. Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*. OpenSourceShakespeare: George Mason University, 2003.
- Shepard, Sam. *True West*. In *Sam Shepard: Seven Plays*. New York: Dial Press, 2005. 1-59.
- Sophocles. *Antigone*. In *Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays*, Robert Fagles, trans. New York: Penguin Books, 1982. 55-128, 395-405.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*. In *Gertrude Stein: Writings, 1932-1946*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998. 575-608.
- Valdez, Luis. *Zoot Suit*. In *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*. Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1992. 21-94.
- Wilson, August. *The Piano Lesson*. New York: Plume, 1990.
- Zimmerman, Mary. *Metamorphoses: A Play*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2002.

All readings available electronically through ENGAGE.

Required Viewing:

Utica College Department of Performing & Fine Arts: *Ghost Stories at Yotsuya*. February 27-29 at 7:30pm, and March 1 at 2:00pm. Strebel Auditorium, Utica College campus. Student tickets: \$5.
Buy tickets online at <https://uticatickets.universitytickets.com/w/default.aspx> or at the door.

Syracuse Stage: *Once*. April 15-May 3, at Syracuse Stage in Syracuse, NY. Times and ticket prices vary; check website for specifics.
Buy tickets online at <https://www.syracusestage.org/showinfo.php?id=94> . Free busses from the UC campus will be available for the matinee performance on Sunday, April 19. Busses leave from the front of Strebel at noon.

Grade Breakdown and Assignments:

The grade breakdown for this course is as follows:

25% Projects (5 projects at 5% each)
20% Play Reviews (2 reviews at 10% each)
15% Reading Quizzes (1 quiz per week at 1% each)
5% Crew Service
35% Attendance and Participation

Descriptions of each of the above components are given below.

Projects:

There are no big exams in this course—instead, you will demonstrate your mastery of the concepts we cover in class through completing a short written project at the end of each unit. These projects are designed to allow you to creatively apply the concepts and forms of analysis we learn for each production role.

The prompts for each of the projects are detailed below. Every project will be graded based on:

- coherence of concept (all parts of your project relate to one another)
- demonstrated connection to the play script
- demonstrated knowledge of concepts discussed in class
- clear communication of your thoughts in writing
- spelling and grammar

All projects are to be turned in electronically through ENGAGE. Some projects may call for you to physically write on or mark up a script. In this case, you should either scan your marked-up script pages back into the computer or take clear photographs of them, and then submit the pages as .pdf or .jpg image files. Please note that I cannot properly count your work in the electronic gradebook—which is linked to ENGAGE—unless you submit it through ENGAGE. ***Submissions made in hard copy, via email, or through sharing a google doc CANNOT BE COUNTED!*** So please, be a good caretaker of your own grade and do not do this.

The prompts:

Play Treatment

(playwriting unit, due at the end of Week 5)

Write a short treatment for a play you might like to write someday, focusing specifically on how you would *structure* the play. This need not be in essay form, simply write one paragraph addressing each of the following elements:

- 1) *Space*: Where will your play be set? Will it jump from location to location or all take place in one area? Do you want the stage set up in a specific way? Explain why you made each choice.
- 2) *Time*: When is your play? How long a time does it span (a second? A lifetime? Something in between?)? Will time move forward, as in real life? Backward? Jump around through

flashbacks? Explain why you made each choice.

- 3) *Action*: How many acts are in your play? Will you structure the action realistically, through cause-and-effect? Model it after a musical score (if so, what type of music)? Make it feel like a dream or a Picasso painting? Explain how you will achieve the effect you've chosen.

Directing Concept

(directing unit, due at the end of Week 8)

Choose your favorite of the plays we have read so far and answer (in writing) the following questions:

- 1) What do you like about it?
- 2) Which of its themes speak most strongly to you?
- 3) What do you think is the central message of the play?

Next, imagine you are going to direct a production of this play and you want the audience to leave with a strong impression of the things you just wrote about. Answer the next set of questions and explain how each decision would support your concept.

- 1) When and where will you set the play (you need not comply with the playwright's statements on this)? Why then, and why there?
- 2) How would you stage the play (proscenium? In the round? L-configuration?)? Why?
- 3) What kind of "mood" would you ask your designers to create (gloomy? Spacious? Energetic? Moving from one mood to another as the scenes progress?)? How does this support your themes/message/concept?

Design Pitch

(design unit, due at the end of Week 12)

Choose one of the plays we have read so far, and choose a design role for yourself (set, costume, lighting, sound, or props). Then, write a short pitch (1-2 pages) detailing a design concept for that element which you think would work well for the play. Justify your concept using relevant references to or quotes from the script.

EX 1: "Romeo and Juliet are arguing about whether or not morning has arrived in Act III, scene v, so my lighting in that scene will shift from purples and blues to pinks and oranges, to mimic the rising sun."

EX 2: "The feeling of being trapped is the central theme in this play, as is clearly spelled out in the title *Raised in Captivity*. In order to reflect this, my set will be small and cramped, with audience pressing in on every side like zoo visitors looking at a caged animal."

Character Analysis

(acting unit, due at the end of Week 15)

Pick any of the plays we have read so far this semester, cast yourself as one of the major characters, and do the following:

1. Highlight the script:

- a) Use one color to highlight everything that other characters say about your character.
 - b) Use a different color to highlight everything your character says about her/himself
 - c) Use a third color to highlight any stage directions you feel give clues about the nature of your character.
 - d) You may write notes in the margins if you wish, though this is not required.
2. Write a paragraph (or two) summarizing what you have learned about the character through this process, citing specific lines you've highlighted in the script. Who is your character? What traits define them? What do they want and how do they change over time (if at all)?

You will be turning in both the marked-up script and your paragraph(s).

Production Bible

(stage management unit, due finals week)

Choose one scene from *True West* and create a production bible for the film's version of that scene. We will be watching the whole film in class, and there is a link on ENGAGE to a Youtube playlist of the full film so you can re-watch it on your own time as necessary. Since there is no written portion to this project, your production bible will be graded based on:

- proper use of stage management format, terminology and symbols
- clarity and accuracy of blocking diagrams
- correct placement and clarity of technical cues

Play Reviews:

You will be asked to attend two plays this semester: the Utica College Spring production, *Ghost Stories at Yotsuya*, and a professional production, *Once*, at Syracuse Stage (details for both are under “Required Viewing,” above). Since you are not required to purchase any reading for this class, you should consider the cost of tickets equivalent to the money you would usually spend on buying books for a course. Upon seeing each play, you will adopt the role of a theatre critic and write a review of the type one might see in a newspaper. We will be reading some actual theatrical reviews in advance of the first play review assignment to prepare for this. Like an actual theatre critic, you must give your opinions about the play and back them up with concrete examples from the production. Unlike an actual theatre critic, your review must touch on *all* of the following elements, rather than just a few:

- the quality of the script
- the effectiveness of the directing concept
- the quality of the set design
- the quality of the costume design
- the quality of the lighting design
- the quality of the sound design
- the quality of the props design
- the quality of the acting

Your grade for these reviews will be based on:

- the presence of evidence proving that you actually saw the play
- the use of relevant examples to support your opinions
- correct attribution of elements of production to the right people (i.e. not using costume design to

- critique acting, not giving the playwright credit for the sound design, etc.)
- spelling and grammar

As with the projects, your play reviews must be submitted through ENGAGE (not in hard copy, not via email, and not as google doc shares).

Reading Quizzes:

Every Friday, you will complete a reading quiz on ENGAGE concerning the reading for that week. These quizzes are short, simple, and unambiguous: if you did the reading you will pass them; there are no trick questions or obscure details. Quizzes are multiple choice, auto-graded by ENGAGE, and automatically factored into your online gradebook. You will have time to complete quizzes in class, but you may also complete them outside of class if you wish.

Crew Service:

One of the learning objectives for the arts core goal is that you participate in the art in a practical, hands-on way. For this class, that means that 5% of your grade will be earned serving on the cast or crew for a theatrical production here at Utica College. As I will be attending all plays on campus this semester, if you are cast in a show I will see you onstage and you will get the 5% automatically. If you would rather work behind-the-scenes, you must do at least 3 hours of crew service on a show this semester. There are a number of options, including building, painting, lighting, costuming, and running crew. Sign-up sheets will be posted on the bulletin board outside of Strebel Auditorium. You will get the 5% when our work-study crew reports your completion of 3 hours of backstage work to me at the end of the show.

Attendance and Participation:

Students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions. The attendance policies are as follows:

Each day will earn points out of 5 as follows:

- 1 point for showing up to class
- 1 point for being on time
- 1 point for being present the entire class period (i.e. not leaving early or ducking out in the middle)
- 1 point for speaking up in class
- 1 point for adding insight, stimulating critical discussion, lifting up a classmate, or otherwise going above and beyond with your comments

Excused absences: Excused absences will be issued in the case of illness, accident, or extenuating circumstance (ex: a relative's wedding, an away game, etc.) provided that the absence is cleared with me *by e-mail in advance*. Excused absences *will not be issued retroactively*, nor is an absence considered excused until I e-mail back with my approval. Excused absences earn 3 points for the missed day.

Unexcused absences: Any time you miss class without an e-mail from me excusing the absence is considered an unexcused absence. Each student will get one free (no grade penalty) unexcused absence per semester. Each successive unexcused absence will earn zero points for the day.

Respectful engagement: The free and critical exchange of ideas is largely what a university education is all about, and there is no topic that is off-limits in this class. Because the content of the readings in this class can be sensitive or triggering, it is vital that we approach all class discussions with respect for one another. If you disagree with something a classmate says in discussion, feel free to say so; but respectfully. While it is perfectly acceptable to disagree with ideas expressed by your classmates—and to refute those ideas with your own points—you must always direct your criticisms toward the points made and not toward the speaker. There is a difference between a disagreement and a personal attack, and personal attacks or insults toward a classmate will not be tolerated. Nor will derogatory remarks or slurs aimed at a larger social group (i.e. a particular race, gender, religion, etc.). It is important that you do participate in class discussion and engage with your classmates, but equally important that you do so in a manner that fosters respectful dialogue.

Undergraduate Grading Scale			
A	94 – 100	C	74 – 76.99
A-	90 – 93.99	C-	70 – 73.99
B+	87 – 89.99	D+	67 – 69.99
B	84 – 86.99	D	60 - 66.99
B-	80 – 83.99	F	0 - 59.99
C+	77 - 79.99		

Policies:

Late Work:

I accept late work. Each student may take one no-questions-asked two-day grace period to turn in an assignment of their choice during the semester. If more than two days have passed, or you have already used your freebie, and you need a further extension, please come see me during office hours so we can work out an alternate deadline appropriate to your situation. That said, however, deadlines exist so that your work will be spread out and not wind up snowballing into the world's biggest stress-fest at the end of the semester, so it is in your own best interests to meet them. And of course, any work not turned in by the end of the semester will earn a zero and negatively impact your grade.

Academic Honesty:

Academic honesty is necessary for the free exchange of ideas and Utica College expects academic honesty from all students.

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional use of other people's ideas, words, and/or factual information without crediting the source. Cheating refers to both the giving and the receiving of unauthorized assistance in the taking of examinations or in the creation of assigned and/or graded class work.

Utica College faculty are authorized to assign a wide range of academic penalties for incidents of academic dishonesty. Depending on the nature of the offense, the penalty may include a reduced grade for the particular assignment or course, or a grade of F for the course.

Incidents of academic dishonesty are reported to the Vice President for Academic Affairs who will refer any repeat offense, or any particularly egregious first offence, to the Academic Standards Committee, which may recommend a more severe penalty than that imposed by the faculty member.

Academic honesty and plagiarism prevention are topics that I take very seriously. Students are warned to review the Utica College academic honesty policy:

<http://www.utica.edu/academic/facultyinfo/honestypolicy.cfm>

If I find an instance of plagiarism, the student will receive a zero on the assignment in question and be reported to the Provost, who may impose further penalties.

Emergency Preparedness:

Students are advised to review the campus safety information and procedures available at <http://www.utica.edu/finance/environment/safety/>, particularly the sections on lockdown and shelter-in-place procedures. In addition, any student with safety-related special circumstances to report (EpiPen, evacuation assistance, etc.) should come to office hours early in the semester to create an emergency plan with me. All students should be aware of the locations of the first aid kit and fire extinguisher nearest to the classroom. I am Red Cross certified in first aid and CPR. If you have any emergency training or certifications, please let us know!

In the event of inclement weather class will be cancelled. If Utica College cancels classes, a snowstorm or other weather emergency prevents me from getting to campus, or in the case of my own illness, I will post an announcement to the coursepage informing the class of the cancellation.

Students with Disabilities:

I am committed to creating a supportive learning environment for students with disabilities. Any student who has need of special accommodations in this class due to a documented disability should speak with me as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of class (my office hours are at the top of this syllabus). You should also contact the **Director of the Office of Learning Services (315-792-3032)** in order to determine eligibility for services and to receive an accommodation letter. We will work with you to help you in your efforts to master the course content in an effective and appropriate way.

I am equally committed to safeguarding my students' mental health. If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed and this class is contributing to your having unacceptable levels of stress, please come talk to me during office hours, so we can work out an alternate plan for your coursework that will enable you to be both healthy and productive. Also, don't be afraid to take advantage of the resources available through the on-campus **Counseling Center (315-792-3094)**:

<https://www.utica.edu/student/development/counseling/> .

Schedule:

Intro

(Week 1)

- Welcome to the course! (syllabus, concept, and course expectations)
- Re-conceptualizing the script: from book to blueprint
 - READING:
 - Elanor Fuchs, “A Visit to a Small Planet”
 - William Shakespeare, prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*
 - in-class viewing: three stagings of the prologue
 - Shakespeare in Love*
 - Romeo + Juliet*
 - The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*

Unit One: Thinking Like a Playwright: Space, Time, and Dramatic Structure

(Weeks 2-4)

- Week 2: Traditional structures of space, time, and action
 - READING:
 - Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll House*
- Week 3: Re-structuring space, time, and action
 - In-class viewing:
 - Jason Robert Brown, *The Last Five Years*
- Week 4: Musical structuring
 - READING:
 - Suzan-Lori Parks, “Elements of Style”
 - Suzan-Lori Parks, *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*
 - discuss and begin Project 1: Play Treatment (due at the end of week 5)

Unit Two: Thinking Like a Director: Message, Visuals, and Shaping Audience Experience

(Weeks 5-7)

- Week 5: Grounding in time, space, and history
 - READING:
 - August Wilson, *The Piano Lesson*
 - PLAY TREATMENT DUE**
- Week 6: Imaginative and alternative stagings
 - READING:
 - Mary Zimmerman, *Metamorphoses*
 - in-class viewing: stagings
 - Youtube clips: different productions of *Metamorphoses*
 - Dionysus in '69*
- Week 7: Malleable meanings

- READING:
 - Sophocles, *Antigone*
- in-class viewing:
 - “Antigones” slideshow
- discuss and begin Project 2: Directing Concept (due end of Week 8)
- PLAY REVIEW FOR *GHOST STORIES AT YOTSUYA* DUE**

Unit Three: Thinking Like a Designer: Shapes, Colors, Mood, Atmosphere, and Period
(Weeks 8-11)

- Week 8: The period piece
 - READING:
 - Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit*
 - DIRECTING CONCEPT DUE**
- Week 9: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK
- Week 10: Farce!
 - READING:
 - Diana Raznovich, *MaTRIX, Inc.*
- Week 11: Doing the impossible
 - READING:
 - Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*
 - discuss and begin Project 3: Design Pitch (due end of Week 12)

Unit Four: Thinking Like an Actor: Given Circumstances, Objectives, Obstacles, and Actions

(Weeks 12-14)

- Week 12: Psychological Realism
 - READING:
 - Frank Chin, *The Year of the Dragon*
- **DESIGN PITCH DUE**
- Week 13: Allegory and alienation
 - READING:
 - Bertolt Brecht, *The Good Person of Szechwan*
- Week 14: Experimental
 - READING:
 - Gertrude Stein, *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*
 - discuss and begin Project 4: Character Analysis (due end of Week 14)

Unit Five: Thinking like a Stage Manager: Details, details, details!

(Weeks 15-16)

- Week 15: The production bible
 - READING:
 - Sam Shepard, *True West*
 - in-class viewing:

- film: Steppenwolf Theater's *True West*
- CHARACTER ANALYSIS DUE**
- Week 16: Course Wrap-Up
 - discuss and begin Project 5: Production Bible
 - course review

PRODUCTION BIBLE AND PLAY REVIEW FOR *ONCE* DUE BY 4:00PM ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, THE DAY OF OUR SCHEDULED FINAL (there will be no sit-down final exam)