

Weber State University
THEA 2330: Dramaturgy and Criticism
Spring 2017
Tuesday/Thursday 12:00-1:20 PM, VBC 211

Instructor:

Dr. Jenny Kokai

Office: VBC 305

Office hours: MW 12:30-1:30 and by appointment

Email:

Course Overview: This course is a practical examination of dramaturgy and theatrical criticism as it is practiced in the U.S. Dramaturgs are a vital, if often overlooked or misunderstood, part of a production team. Theatres in the United States are increasingly employing dramaturgs to help develop new plays, to help develop outreach programs with audiences, and to help cast and crew build a richer, more nuanced performance. This class will work to develop the skills students need to succeed as a dramaturg: critical thinking, research skills, communication skills, analytic and creative approaches to text and apply them specifically to the process of dramaturgy. At the end of the class students will have constructed a full dramaturgy protocol for a play of their choice. In addition, we will practice the necessary skills and approaches to writing solid theatrical criticism. How can you fairly critique a performance you see before you in a productive and helpful way?

Required Texts:

To purchase: [Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy](#) by Michael Mark Chemers

Theatre Program Outcomes:

These will be demonstrated by the practical exercises students do throughout the class. The students will build a portfolio through the class that serves as the proof of learning.

1. Have writing skills and ability to use research tools (library, internet, etc.).
5. Be able to present critical thinking through verbal and written presentations regarding the musical theatre. Specific areas of expertise will include major works, major figures (librettists, composers, lyricists, performers, directors, choreographers), theory, and history.
6. Have a practical, working knowledge of how to produce a play on stage, including all related performance, script, design, and technical considerations.
7. Have the ability to critically evaluate what they and others have created.

8. Develop necessary skills to be proficient in at least one area of theatre (performance, teaching, technical/design-costume, technical/design-scenery, technical/design-lighting, technical/design-sound, directing, theatre management, or playwriting), with the ability to identify, analyze and resolve specific problems pertaining to that area.
9. Understand the historical context of theatre, drama, and performance including plays, major figures, costumes, scenic innovations, and theoretical approaches, and how these relate to contemporary society and culture.
10. Have experience with individual and collaborative processes needed to produce and understand theatre.

Attendance Policy:

The Theatre area recognizes the importance of class participation and performance. To this end we enforce the following attendance policy: Tuesday/Thursday classes are allowed 2 absences, Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes are allowed 3 absences, however these absences may not be on a scheduled test day. Once the allowed absence limit has been reached the student's grade will drop incrementally for each additional absence.

Example: Mitzi, an "A" student, has missed 3 classes in a MWF theatre class. Today she is missing class and her grade will drop to an A-. If she misses the next class, her grade will drop to a B+. One more absence and she will have dropped a full letter grade to a B.

Tardies are as important an issue as absences. Therefore, 2 tardies equal 1 absence. Students should plan ahead and use absences and tardies wisely.

Reading Assignments:

Reading assignments should be completed regularly, and **prior to attending the class for which they are assigned**. This is a small, discussion based seminar and if you haven't done the reading it will be impossible for you to contribute to the discussion. Students who have not done the reading will be counted as absent for the class period, whether they are physically there or not.

Major Projects:

The major project for this class will be a completed dramaturgy protocol for a play of your choosing. The protocol will consist of the following items:

- **An articulation of "why this play now."**
- **A script analysis of the play.**
- **A production history of the play.**
- **Historical research on the play.**
- **A glossary of terms.**
- **An educational outreach packet for your play.**
- **A description of a lobby display you would construct for your play.**

As the semester goes on, what exactly these are and models for these will be discussed in class. Dramaturgy is also referred to as “Information Design.” Like scenic design or lighting design, you have a lot of freedom in how you decide to curate and present your information. Since you will pick the play you’re working on, each of your projects will end up looking different and I won’t be able to tell you exactly how to do it. Rather than find this frustrating, why not revel in the artistic freedom this gives you? The dates below are due dates for drafts of these things. You will be given a grade for every assignment. However, you will submit the finished protocol at the end of the semester. This will allow you time to revise sections if they need them. In turn, your grades can be raised to reflect the revisions.

New Play Dramaturgy Reflection Paper:

This should be a 3-4 page paper reflecting upon your experience working with a playwright on a new play. This paper should be typed, double spaced, with a standard font and font size. As yourself questions such as: What were my strengths working with a new playwright and what were my weaknesses? What problems did the playwright and I encounter and how did I try to overcome them? What was the audience response? Was it what I expected or different? What potential areas of conflict could arise and how would I handle them? Was the play better at the end as a result of my collaboration with the playwright?

Sunday in the Park with George Review: For this review you should identify the source you are writing for (is this a New York Times style review, a review for an academic journal, a review for a local audience) and tailor your response accordingly. You should carefully follow the ideas in [Ghost Light](#) pages 114-120. Be aware that critics need to consider word count. It is harder to edit a review down to a few thousand words and remain comprehensive. How concise, but clear, can you make your review?

In addition: There will be some minor assignments based upon the reading, points for these will be given in the general homework section.

Course Grade:

Dramaturgy Protocol:	Due Date:	Worth:
An articulation of “why this play now.”	Jan 31	5%
A script analysis of the play.	Feb 19	10%
A production history of the play.	Feb 21	10%
A glossary of terms.	Feb 28	10%
Historical research on the play.	Mar 12	15%
An educational outreach packet for your play.	Mar 21	15%
A design for a lobby display you would create for your play.	Mar 21	5%

Participation:		10%
Review of “Sunday in the Park”:	Apr 16	10%
New Play Dramaturgy Reflection Paper:	April 25	10%
	TOTAL:	100%

Grades within one half of a percentage point (i.e. an 89.5%, or a 79.5%, etc) will automatically be rounded up to the next highest point or letter value. Out of fairness to all of the students in the class, no other grades will be raised, and extra credit will not be offered.

Class Schedule:

Unit One: Dramaturgy in Context

Week One:

Jan 8: Introductions, overview

Jan 10: Dramaturgy through history

Due: Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 in Ghost Light (each student will be given 1-2 theorists to concentrate on and present to the group)

Week Two:

Jan 15: Case Study: Brecht v. Brecht

Due: Read Mother Courage (if you don't have a copy, I have several and you can borrow one from me, as far as I can tell it is NOT online)

Jan 17: No class- UTA

Week Three: Theory

Jan 22: Theory I

Due: Chapter 3, pgs. 39-47, this is dense reading. Allow time. Take notes. Come with questions.

Jan 24: Theory II

Due: Chapter 3, pgs. 47 (Marxism-65), this is also dense.

Unit Two: Existing Play Dramaturgy

Week Four:

Jan 29: Why this play now?

Due: choose the play you want to develop a dramaturgy protocol for. This should be a play you really love. Musical, straight play, kabuki, I don't care. Just love it, because you're marrying it for the semester. Bring the play to class.

Jan 31: Script analysis

Due: Chapter 4, pgs. 69-92, Draft of Why This Play Now

Week Five:

Feb 5: Form and Function

Due: Chapter 5 in Ghost Light

Feb 7: Production Histories and Historical Research/Terms

Due: Chapter 6, 108-113

Week Six:

Feb 12: Independent work on your play **(NO CLASS MEETING)**

Feb 14: Independent work on your play **(NO CLASS MEETING)**

Week Seven:

Feb 19: Working with Directors

Due: Ghost Light, pgs. 150-154

Due: Draft of Script analysis for your play

Feb 21: Working with Actors

Due: Ghost Light, pgs. 154-160

Due: Draft of Production History for your play

Week Eight: Audience Development

Feb 26: Educational Packets

Due: Chapter 9 Ghost Light

Feb 28: Lobby displays

Due: glossary of terms for your play

Week Nine:

Mar 5: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

Mar 7: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

Week Ten: Audience Development

Mar 12: Talkbacks

Due: Draft of Historical Research

Mar 14: Program Notes, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook (social media outreach)

Unit Three: Theatrical Criticism

Week Eleven:

Mar 19: The basics of reviewing

Due: Ghost Light 114-120

Mar 21: Good reviews/bad reviews

Due: Turn your previous research into an Educational Packet aimed at a specific grade (k-5, 6-8, 9-12). Sketch out ideas for what kind of lobby display you would build for your play. Into your protocol they go.

Week Twelve:

(note: these dates might move around depending upon guest availability)

Mar 26: Skype discussion with LMDA president Martine Kei Green-Rogers

Mar 28: Skype discussion with theatrical critic Eli Keel

Unit Four: New Play Dramaturgy

Week Twelve:

Apr 2: Working with playwrights

Due: Chapter 7, Ghost Light

Apr 4: meet in teams outside class with playwright

Week Thirteen:

Apr 9: meet in teams

Apr 11: meet in teams

Due: Have a draft list of questions you and the playwright want to ask the audience about the piece

Week Fourteen:

Apr 16: staged reading

Due: Sunday in the Park review

Apr 18: post mortem

FINAL: Your completed/revised dramaturgy protocol is due during our final time of Thursday, April 25th, 2:50 PM as well as your reflection paper on new play dramaturgy experience

Academic Dishonesty: As specified in PPM 6-22 IV D, cheating and plagiarism violate the Student Code. Plagiarism is “the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person’s or group’s ideas or work.” This means that “putting something into your own words” is plagiarism. Students found guilty of cheating or plagiarism are subject to failure of a specific assignment, or, in more serious cases, failure of the entire course. In this class collusion will also be considered plagiarism. Collusion is when you work with another student on homework, or exam preparation.

Core Beliefs: According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “[d]etermine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs.”

DEPARTMENT COURSE CONTENT POLICY: Some of the writings, lectures, discussions or presentations in this course may include material that some students may find offensive. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking. If you have a concern, please discuss it with me at your earliest convenience.

Disability Accommodation: PPM 3-34 notes: “When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the quarter [semester] in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.”

Emergency Closure: If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class through our Canvas page. Look for announcements on Weber email and our Canvas page.