

Weber State University
THEA 3505/ENGL 3350: Playwriting
Spring 2019
MWF 11:30-12:20, VBC 211

Instructor:

Dr. Jenny Kokai

Office: VBC 305

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

Email:

Goals and Questions: To introduce ourselves to the art of playwriting and the creation of scripts for dramatic production. In this class we will not focus on play analysis, but on the discovery and development of our own voices. We will ask ourselves: what forms of drama am I attracted to, do I like to see? What stories do I have that I am burning to tell? What characters do I have waiting to get set down on the page? There is no “right” way to write plays, so we will explore a variety of methods to help students find what techniques work for them.

Objectives:

- Students will understand the basic components and terminology associated with a play.
- Students will develop habits that promote daily writing, discipline, and creativity.
- Students will learn how to give constructive feedback using the Lerman Method.
- Students will produce original writing.
- Students will revise and refine work based upon feedback from peers and instructor.

Theatre Area Objectives:

1. Have writing skills and ability to use research tools (library, internet, etc.).
2. Have a practical, working knowledge of how to produce a play on stage, including all related performance, script, design, and technical considerations.
3. Have the ability to critically evaluate what they and others have created.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. Have experience with individual and collaborative processes needed to produce and understand theatre.

Attendance: 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.

Texts:

- All readings are available on Canvas Files. Students will need to purchase a notebook or binder.

Recommended Texts: These books are NOT assigned (although we will have readings from them in our course pack), instead they are books that I have found useful or that I have enjoyed greatly. They may help you as a writer as well, or you may find your own guidebooks.

- Ball, David. Backwards and Forwards. Southern Illinois University Press; 1st edition (July 7, 1983).
- Barry, Lynda. Syllabus. Drawn and Quarterly; Second Printing edition (October 21, 2014)
- Cameron, Julia. The Artist's Way. United States of America, Jeremy P Tarcher/Putnam: (2002).
- Egri, Lajos. The Art of Dramatic Writing. New York, Touchstone Books (1960).
- Lamott, Anne. Bird by Bird. United States, First Anchor Books: (1995).
- Niggli, Josefina. New Pointers on Playwriting. Boston, The Writer, Inc. (1967).
- Plimpton, George. Playwrights at Work. New York, The Modern Library: (2000).
- Turco, Lewis. Dialogue. Cincinnati, Ohio, Writer's Digest Books, (1989).

Assignments: All reading assignments are due for the day they are listed.

- Almost every single class will consist of doing writing exercises, sharing these exercises, and deciding where to take the exercises. Thus, the exercises begun in class **NEED TO BE FINISHED AT HOME** if they are not completed with in class time.
- If bringing in work to be read, please make one copy for each character in the play so that the play can be best read by your classmates. Please also bring a copy for me with your name on each page.
- Students are expected to keep a journal/notebook/binder in which they use Barry's daily grid exercise. Every single day (seven days a week) students need to sit down and complete the grid. I will be periodically and randomly collecting these notebooks to check that this is being done (**BRING YOUR NOTEBOOK TO EVERY CLASS**), but I will not be grading for content. In fact, I won't even read it. Ever. The important thing is that the exercise is done every day. I will be making my own book available for students to see as well (let's keep each other honest).
- The "long" assignments for this class will be the completion of two ten-minute plays. These plays will build on the work done in classes.

Technology: We will be doing a lot of writing in class. You are welcome to bring your laptop if you prefer to write on it. You are also welcome to bring headphones and listen to music while you are writing. However, you may not access the internet during class. If you decide to use Facebook, chat, or check email (which I know is very tempting) you'll be low tech from then on—pencil and paper. Well, I guess you can have a pen. But you'll need to bring it yourself. Cell phones are strictly verboten, and should be turned silent at the beginning of class.

Grade Breakdown:

Participation and class writing assignments- 30%

Journal- 10%

First 10 minute play- 20%

Second 10 minute play- 20%

Final Play Revision- 20%

Participation: In this class we will be following the Liz Lerman Critical Response process given below. It takes some practice, but successful participation will mean embracing the model and offering feedback generously to your classmates. Participation also means you have done the assigned reading before class and come ready to discuss the material.

(from <http://danceexchange.org/projects/critical-response-process/>)

1. Statements of Meaning: Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.

2. Artist as Questioner: The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
3. Neutral Questions: Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, “Why was it so dark?” is not a neutral question. “What ideas guided your choices about lighting?” is.
4. Opinion Time: Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is “I have an opinion about _____, would you like to hear it?” The artist has the option to decline opinions for any reason.

How assignments will be graded: For the most part, assignments will be graded on effort. Do you embrace the challenge and do you attempt to meet it? I will not be giving grades based on how “good” I think a play is. I do want to see growth throughout the semester. I want to see you trying new things, working on areas you find difficult or problematic, and setting challenges for yourself. I want to see you try each of the writing assignments to the best of your ability, no matter how strange or silly they might seem. We will generally share our exercises in each class and discuss them. You can’t really get a sense if your playwriting works unless it’s performed. If you think offering these up is going to be very difficult, this might not be the right style of writing for you.

You will receive progress statements through Canvas on 2/3, 3/3, and 3/31 so that you are comfortable that you know how your progress in the class is being viewed.

Weekly Assignments:

note: Readings are on Canvas. Do not duplicate or share.

Week One:

Jan 7: Introductions

Hand out syllabus, go over expectations, introductions

9: What do I, a new playwright, have to say?

read: “The Basic Tools” Pages 11-24 in The Artist’s Way (on canvas)

11: What Makes a Playwright?

read: “Lillian Hellman” in Playwrights at Work (on canvas)

Week Two:

Jan 14: Credos and defining yourself as an artist

16: What Makes a Playwright?

due: google “interview playwright” and skim interviews with folks until you find us someone interesting. Print out the interview and bring it to class to share. I suppose you could also interview an actual professional playwright if you know one. ☺

18: No Class- Take yourself on an artist’s date during class. Report back by Sunday on our Canvas discussion board on what you did and what you observed plus any excellent ideas you had.

Week Three: Characters

Jan 21: No Class- MLK Jr. Day

23: Meet Debra. Debra will eat only flat food.

read: The Bone Structure (on canvas)

25: Meet Fred. Fred is terrified of socks.

Week Four: Dialogue

28: “Everyone in Mametville speaks the same!”

read: Dialogue (on canvas)

due: (this is due Friday) eavesdrop on three different conversations. Write down what the people say, word for word. Type up and bring Jan 3rd class.

30: “Forsooth, people don’t speak in iambs no more”

1: “So, um, you know. And then that happened. And Debra was like ‘Duh’ and then I was like, ‘no duh’”

Due: Bring your overheard conversations to class to share

Week Five: Actions

Feb 4: Attack of the garden gnomes!

6: Debra slaps Fred when he takes her Kraft cheese slice.

8: Fred purposefully shrinks Debra’s favorite wool sweater.

Week Six: Plots

Feb 11: Paul loves Debra. Debra loves Fred. These are the Days of Our Lives.

read: Chapters 1, 2, and 3 from Backwards and Forwards (on canvas).

13: Paul is going blind because Fred is slowly poisoning him. (no meeting in person, class will be held on Canvas)

15: A gnome sits on a stage. Nothing happens. Life is meaningless. (no meeting in person, class will be held on Canvas)

Week Seven:

Feb 18: NO CLASS- President’s Day

Readings of First Plays:

Feb 20:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Feb 22: Readings of First Plays

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Week Eight:

Feb 25:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Feb 27:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mar 1:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Over the break please read: “Crappy First Drafts” (taking the good and leaving the bad behind)
read: “First Drafts” and “Perfectionism”(21-32) in Bird by Bird (canvas)

Week Nine:

Mar 4: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

6: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

8: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

Week Ten: Premises

Mar 11: It is bad to slap people. (Premises)

Read: "Premise" (pgs. 1-32) in Art of Dramatic Writing (on canvas)

Mar 13: Kraft cheese slices aren't real food.

Mar 15: Gnomes are an abomination.

Week Eleven: Structures

Mar 18: A to B to C to D

Mar 20: A, 152, E, Donut

Mar 22: Backwards and Forwards

Week Twelve: Exposition

Mar 25: "As you know, Debra, Kraft Cheese Slices are Orange and come wrapped in plastic packaging"

read: "Exposition" (pgs. 48-56) in New Pointers on Playwriting (canvas)

27: "Listen Fred, it doesn't matter that you once were poor and were raised on a Chimpanzee farm. There are some things that are simply not acceptable, even for somebody who only has 2 dollars and eleven cents in his bank account"

read: "Harold Pinter" in Playwrights at Work (canvas)

29: (Paul slowly picks up the pieces of a shattered gnome)

Week Thirteen: Waiting For That Darn Muse

Apr 1: Ideation

3: Field trip!

5: Guest artist Rachel Bublitz

Week Fourteen: Readings of Second Plays

Apr 8: Guest artist Rachel Bublitz

10:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

12:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Week Fifteen:

Apr 15: Readings of Second Plays

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

17: Readings of Second Plays

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

19: Readings of Second Plays

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Week Sixteen:

Apr 22: Revisions and Next Steps

read: "How do you know when you're done?" (93-95) in *Bird by Bird* (e-reserves)

FINAL: Your revised ten minute play is due during our final time Tuesday Apr 25th @ 1 PM.

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." 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.

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." As a note, I am not willing to censor your fellow students and their writing. Each student has an individual voice and it is very likely topics and language will come up that may be offensive to some.

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 via Canvas. Look for announcements through Weber email and on our Canvas page.