Introduction to Playwriting
THEA 199 – Section 03
Fall 2013
Tuesday and Thursday: 2:40 – 4:15

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Office Hours by Appointment

When I sit alone in a theatre and gaze into the dark space of its empty stage, I’m frequently seized by fear that this time I won’t manage to penetrate it, and I always hope that this fear will never desert me. Without an unending search for the key to the secret of creativity, there is no creation. It’s necessary always to begin again. And that is beautiful.
- Josef Svoboda

Right from the jump, ask yourself: ‘Why does this thing I’m writing have to be a play?’ The words ‘why,’ ‘have’ and ‘play’ are key. If you don’t have an answer then get out of town. No joke. The last thing American theatre needs is another lame play.
- Suzan-Lori Parks

What is this class all about?

This class is called Introduction to Playwriting. So, allow me to introduce you. Class, meet Playwriting. Playwriting, meet Class. Everyone say hello. If the student reading the syllabus could take a brief pause until everyone in the class has said hello (out loud) to Playwriting, that would be fantastic. Thank you.

This is a reading and writing workshop. Over the course of the semester you are going to examine and discuss plays of great variety. You will be working toward completion of a writing portfolio, due at the end of the semester, which will include a one-act play that you have written. We will read portions of your writing out loud in class and, in addition, you will learn how to hear and respond to your classmates’ work.

The most important thing to remember about this class is this: Theatre is PLAY. I will encourage you now and throughout the semester to discard what you think is “right” or what “makes a good play” and to investigate your unique voice, to dream, and to play with wild abandon. Everyone in this class is a playwright.

Class Expectations

1. Mandatory attendance. More than one absence will result in a failing grade. In the case of illness or emergency please contact me via email.
2. Complete all readings and assignments on time. Bring copies of plays and readings to reference during discussion. Bring printed copies of all writing exercises to every class. If we have extra time in class, we will continue to share these exercises.
3. Be passionate, generous, and supportive in this writing workshop. Respect the work of your peers and expect the same in return. Work together to foster a safe environment to play and practice your craft.
4. No laptops, cell phones, iPads, or other devices. Bring a notebook and pen/pencil to every class for in-class writing and note-taking.

Assignments and Reflections

You must complete all assignments on time. I do not accept late work. If there is an emergency, contact me via email ASAP.

In addition to the assignments and reading, I would like you to submit a brief reflection of all assigned plays. These are your impulse, knee-jerk responses to the work. What shocked you? How did it make you feel? What was new and exciting about the work? What was strong about the work? What wasn’t? Was there something that you just couldn’t picture onstage? How did the language operate? How did time function? I encourage you to write these reflections immediately after you read the plays. As the semester progresses, I hope you will instinctively use terms and ideas that we discuss in class, but there is no right or wrong. These reflections are opportunities for you to gather your thoughts before our group discussion.

Please submit these to me via email by 8am on the day of the discussion. Approx. 500 words.

Portfolio

By the end of the semester, you will be required to submit a portfolio to me of all your work throughout the semester. This will include:

1. A One-Act Play
2. All Writing Prompts, Assignments, and Reflections
3. Two Performance Reviews (Subject to Instructor’s Approval)

I will discuss each of these with you in further detail.

Here is a list of possible events to review for your portfolio. I would like at least one of your reviews to be a Wesleyan University Theatre Department production.

- Mabou Mines’ DollHouse (CFA Hall), September 23 at 4:15pm
- Who’s Hungry? (CFA Theater), September 27, 28
- Ping (CFA Hall), October 28 at 4:15pm
- The Seagull (CFA Theater), November 13-16
- The Shipment (CFA Hall), November 25 at 4:15pm

You must schedule one meeting with me before Fall Break to discuss the goals for your One Act Play. You will cast and rehearse a short selection from your One Act, and the semester will conclude in a reading of your piece, date TBD.

Grading Policy

Your grade is based on the following:

30% Participation
30% Weekly Assignments
30% Final Portfolio
10% Reflections
Your grade will not be based on how “good” or “bad” your writing is, but rather on your commitment to craft, growth as a writer, and level of engagement in the class.

Disability Resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

Required Plays

Far Away, Caryl Churchill
How I Learned to Drive, Paula Vogel
Sixty Miles to Silver Lake, Dan LeFranc
The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams
Blasted, Sarah Kane
God’s Ear, Jenny Schwartz
Blackbird, David Harrower
Eurydice, Sarah Ruhl
Funnyhouse of a Negro, Adrienne Kennedy
Happy Days, Samuel Beckett
Fefu and Her Friends, Maria Irene Fornes
The Last Days of Judas Iscariot, Stephen Adly Guirgis (TBD – I will provide copies)

I will bring copies of addition theory and other readings to class. Don’t worry about purchasing anything that is not on the above list.

Class Schedule

**This schedule is subject to change.

WEEK 1
Tuesday, September 3

In Class:
Syllabus Overview
Microdramas, Wolfgang Bauer
Impossible Play exercise

Assignments:
Visit to a Small Planet, Eleanor Fuchs
Critical Response Technique, Liz Lerman
Far Away, Caryl Churchill
Theatre Background

Thursday, September 5

In Class:
Discuss Fuchs, Lerman, and *Far Away*
Theatre Background
*36 Assumptions*, Jose Rivera

**Assignments:**
*36 Assumptions* Prompt

**WEEK 2**
**Tuesday, September 10**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: *36 Assumptions* Prompt
Plot Forms

**Assignments:**
*How I Learned to Drive*, Paula Vogel
*The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, Stephen Adly Guirgis (TBD)

**Thursday, September 12**
**Possible trip to Yale for Stephen Adly Guirgis masterclass. If so, we will alter the schedule accordingly.**

**In Class:**
Discuss *How I Learned to Drive*
Aristotle's *Poetics*

**Assignments:**
Time Play exercise
*Sixty Miles to Silver Lake*, Dan LeFranc

**WEEK 3**
**Tuesday, September 17**

**In Class:**
Discuss *Sixty Miles to Silver Lake*
Writing workshop: Time Plays

**Assignments:**
*Poetics* Writing Prompt

**Thursday, September 19**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: *Poetics* Prompt

**Assignments:**
*The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams (multiple versions?) and the introduction
*Killer's Head*, Sam Shepard

**WEEK 4**
**Tuesday, September 24**

**In Class:**
Discuss *The Glass Menagerie* and introduction
Assignments:
Realism Prompt or Killer’s Head Prompt

Thursday, September 26

In Class:
Writing Workshop: Realism/Killer’s Head Prompt

Assignments:
Blasted, Sarah Kane
Excerpt from Love Me, Or Kill Me

WEEK 5
Tuesday, October 1

In Class:
Discuss Blasteds and Love Me, Or Kill Me

Assignments:
“A Room That Talks” Prompt

Thursday, October 3

In Class:
Writing Workshop: “A Room That Talks” Prompt

Assignments:
God’s Ear, Jenny Schwartz
Blackbird, David Harrower

WEEK 6
Tuesday, October 8

In Class:
Discuss God’s Ear and Blackbird

Assignments:
Language Prompt

Thursday, October 10

In Class:
Writing Workshop: Language Prompt

Assignments:
Eurydice, Sarah Ruhl
Greek Myth?

WEEK 7
Tuesday, October 15

In Class:
Discuss *Eurydice*

**Assignments:**
Adaptation Prompt

**Thursday, October 17**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: Adaptation Prompt
Discuss One Act

**Assignments:**
One Act Pages

**WEEK 8**
**Tuesday, October 22**

*NO CLASS – FALL BREAK*

**Thursday, October 24**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act

**Assignments:**
*Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Adrienne Kennedy
One Act Pages

**WEEK 9**
**Tuesday, November 29**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act

**Thursday, November 31**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act

**Assignments:**
*Happy Days*, Samuel Beckett

**WEEK 10**
**Tuesday, November 5**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act

**Thursday, November 7**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act
Assignments:
*Fefu and Her Friends*, Maria Irene Fornes

**WEEK 11**
**Tuesday, November 12**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act

**Thursday, November 14**

**In Class:**
Writing Workshop: One Act

**WEEK 12**
**Tuesday, November 19**

**In Class:**
One Act Presentations, TBD

**Thursday, November 21**

**In Class:**
One Act Presentations, TBD
Final Portfolio Due