
THEA 4362 01

PLAYWRITING

CRN: 22966 Spring 2018
TR 12:30 PM – 1:50 PM / PAC 240

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Office Hours: by appointment

Anything you put in a play -- any speech -- has got to do one of two things: either define character or push the action of the play along.

— Edward Albee

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

Catalogue Description

A study of the elements of playwriting through writing exercises designed to enhance the understanding of structure, style, character and dialogue. **Writing Enhanced.** Credit 3.

Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to the craft of playwriting and focuses on writing the dynamic 10-minute play. Throughout the semester, you will hone skills for an understanding of key playwriting concerns, including: the dramatic question, structure and resolution, believable characters, tension and release, convincing dialogue, etc. You will workshop each other's plays and writing throughout the semester and are expected to engage in open and honest dialogue about strengths and weaknesses in the writing.

Because the course is writing enhanced, over 50% of your final course grade will result from your own, original writing

Course Goals:

In this course, you will be able to:

- Articulate themes, techniques, and traditions in playwriting as a genre.
- Actively reflect on your own work and offer input on your peers' work through workshop and in-class exercises.
- Demonstrate a working understanding of basic playwriting techniques through in-class writing and play development.
- Produce a portfolio with a substantial amount of original writing.

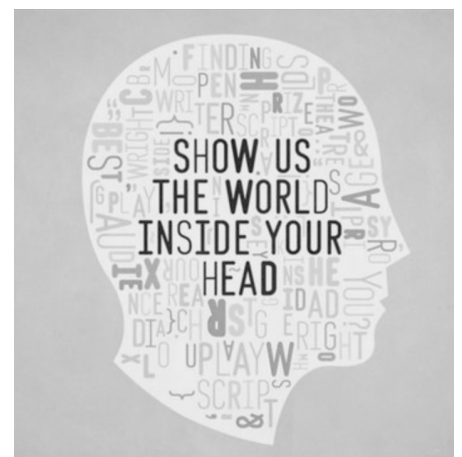
Classroom Must-Haves

You must have notebook, pencils, pens, and you can also bring your laptop, but only have it open when I allow.

Classroom Etiquette

We are talking through personal writing in this class, and so we will discuss how to be respectful, engaging, and honest in our discussions. Openness and calmness are key.

We are working to develop a class dynamic built on respect and communication. Cell phones stay off (not vibrate, OFF). No texting, IM-ing, or reading texts or IMs.



Texts

We will be reading a number of 10 minute plays as a group, copies of which you will get in class, which will also be on Blackboard for reference.

Recommended Reading

- David Ball, *Backwards and Forwards*
- Glenn Alterman, *Writing the Ten Minute Play*
- *Take Ten II: More Ten-Minute Plays*

Grade Breakdown	Points
Participation/In-class work	200
Writing Prompts (10 total)	100
10-min Play (for submitting)	150
10-min Play Workshop	150
10-min Adaptation Play	100
10-min Adaptation Play Small Group Workshop	100
One-on-One Meeting with Vicky	50
Public End of Semester Event	50
Portfolio (2 nd 10-Min Play, Prompts, 9 Assumptions)	100
1000 TOTAL	

GRADING SCALE	
900-1000 pts	— A
800-899 pts	— B
700-799 pts	— C
600-699 pts	— D
599 and below	— F

Bonus Points

The following receive bonus points, which will be added to your final course grade:

4 points for attending each of the five UTC spring productions = 20 points max (show me ticket stubs)

Participation/In-class Work (200 pts): This is a workshop-based class. Meaning first you have to be present, obviously, to do your in-class prompts, discuss plays and topics, and assess your writing/peer writing. Also, you must talk. Again, this is workshop, which requires discussion of topics, techniques, and strategies when approaching your own work or that of others. Some in-class writing is group work or before writing before prompts are given.

I expect you to leave any negativity or low energy you might be feeling at the door. Even a single day with a bad attitude or a reticence to participate in class could hinder your learning process, and to that of the others in the class.

You will receive TWO participation grades, worth 100 points each, throughout the semester as progress on how you are doing in class. You will be assessed on the following scale: 100 for exceptional class work, 95 for good work, 85 for mediocre work, 70 for low energy or bad attitude, 50 or less for sleeping, negativity, hostility, etc.

Writing Prompts (100 pts, 10 pts each): Most days you will have to write in class on given prompts and writing elements demonstrated in class. Your writing will sometimes be shared or workshopped. You will then type prompt response and bring typed version next class period. Example: Writing prompt #5 in class T 2/14 MUST be typed and brought to class Thursday 2/16.

10-Minute Play, for submitting (150 pts): You will write an original dynamic 10-minute play based on techniques developed in class. You will write the play with the idea of submitting your play to one of a couple 10-minute play competitions. You will get a detailed assignment sheet in class.

10-Minute Play Workshop (150 pts): There will be a formal, full class workshop of the 10-minutes plays. You will get a detailed assignment sheet in class.

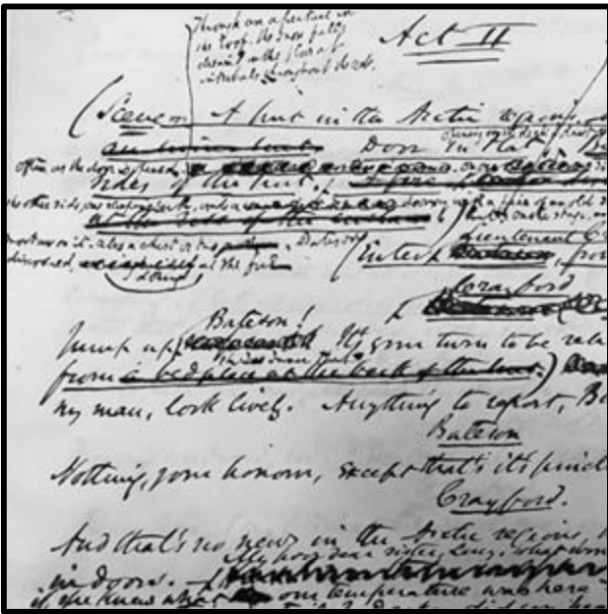
10-Minute Adaptation Play (100 pts): You will adapt a piece of text to create a short play. You will get a detailed assignment sheet in class.

10-Minute Adaptation Play Small Group Workshop (100 pts): There will be a shorter, group workshops of the adaptation plays. You will get a detailed assignment sheet in class.

One-on-One Meeting (50 pts): You must meet with Vicky AFTER your play is workshopped and BEFORE you revise.

End of Semester Event (50 pts): We will entertain the public somehow at the end of the semester.

Portfolio (100 pts): Based on the work you have done over the semester, you will put together a portfolio with revised ten-minute plays, revised writing prompts, and your personal 9 Assumptions. You will get a detailed assignment sheet in class.



CLASSROOM POLICIES

Attendance Policy: By university policy for classes that meet two times each week, you may not be penalized for up to 2 absences, nor may you be penalized for any absence due to pre-approved religious observance.

- After 2 absences, you will be penalized 1/3 letter grade from your final course grade for **each** additional absence, unless there is written communication (email with specific dates, times, and reason) from the Dean of Students Office. Example: 5 absences turns a B into a C+.

Classroom Conduct: Food and candy are not permitted in the classroom. Beverages are permitted as long as they are in spill-proof containers. Please turn off cell phones and refrain from texting during class.

Office: I will have a sign-up sheet on my office door for appointments (for class and/or advising). If you have

questions or concerns, please come talk with me; that's what office hours are for. If you want to talk about projects or need advising, just sign-up for an office appointment.

Weekly Schedule (including Topics and Assignments)

Week 1

R 1/18 Introduction to course, syllabus, assignments, calendar. Strong Plays and Assumptions about Playwriting. Writing Day One

Week 2 What Makes a Play a Play?

T 1/23 Suzan-Lori Parks. Ideas about plays. Starting Techniques and where the work comes from.
DUE: A Play to share that you value from a *writing perspective*
R 1/25 *Ferris Wheel*, Writing prompt #1: two strangers meet (write in class, typed due T 1/31)

Week 3 STRUCTURE

T 1/30 *Trying to Find Chinatown* // Writing prompt #2: Monologue Memory from prompt #1
R 2/1 *The Flying Wolimskies Return* // Writing prompt #3: Usual Issues, Unusual Space

Week 4 CHARACTER

- T 2/6 *Duet for Bear and Dog* // Writing prompt #4: Turning inhuman human
 R 2/8 ****No Class** but SPY DAY** // Writing Prompt #5 Real overheard conversation into dialogue
 DUE: Email Vicky Sketch/Outline of 10-min play

Week 5 DRAMATIC ACTION

- T 2/13 *Wedding Duet, It's Not You*: Relationships are tough // Writing prompt #6: Love Stinks!
 R 2/15 *Act Without Words I* and *Stage Directions*: Defining Action // Writing prompt #7: No words

Week 6 LANGUAGE

- T 2/20 *Pops* // Monologues // Writing prompt #7: Monologue—Pop Culture Drives the Arc
 R 2/22 Workshop some Writing Prompts (you MUST have your prompts) // Prepping Plays for Workshop

Week 7 KCACTF

- T 2/27 Prepping Plays for Workshop
 R 3/1 **Meet up to trade plays** // DUE: ALL Plays for Workshop, copies for WHOLE CLASS

Week 8 10-MIN PLAY WORKSHOPS

- T 3/6 4 Workshops of 10-min Plays
 R 3/8 4 Workshops of 10-min Plays ****Sign up for Vicky's office hours! It is 5% of your grade!**
*****Spring Break 3/12-3/16*****

Week 9 10-MIN PLAY WORKSHOPS

- T 3/20 4 Workshops of 10-min Plays
 R 3/22 In-class revision exercises of 10-min Plays

Week 10 DEATH COMES AROUND

- T 3/28 *Reverse Transcription*: Meta commentary // Writing prompt #8: Break the 4th Wall
 R 3/30 *Saying Yes*: Unreal Violence

Week 11 IMPOSSIBLE THINGS

- T 4/3 The Unreal, Mythical, Fantastic // Writing prompt #9: 6 Impossible Things
 R 4/5 Shakespeare Gets Revisions

Week 12 OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES

- T 4/10 Aesop: Adaptations and Stories we know // Writing prompt #10: Fracturing the Fables
 R 4/12 *Antigone's Red*: Rethinking Adaptations

Week 13 SMALL GROUP WORKSHOP

- T 4/17 Adaptions work
 R 4/19 Small Group Workshop: Adaptations // DUE: Drafts of Adaptation Play

Week 14 SMALL GROUP WORKSHOP

- T 4/24 Small Group Workshop: Adaptations
 R 4/26 TBD

Week 15 READING ALOUD

- T 5/1 Final In-class Reflection
 R 5/3 No Class: Juries
FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE no later than TUESDAY, MAY 8th by 5pm.

IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP TRACK OF DUE DATES AND MEETINGS

The instructor reserves the right to change or alter the calendar to meet the individual and unique needs of the course. You are responsible for noting any and all changes to the syllabus.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. Any students found cheating on exams, or plagiarizing papers will FAIL the course.

Classroom Environment

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and peers with respect and dignity. Section 5.2.22 in the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines classroom disturbances as any activity which proves distracting to the learning environment including but not limited to the use of cell phones or text messaging; the reading of materials (newspapers, magazines, texts) not assigned to the class; the use of profanity or abusive behavior toward the instructor or other students; having off-topic conversations which disturb or disrupt the learning environment; the use of computers and/or other electronic devices (Ipods, MP3 players, etc.) during classroom instruction, therefore, as a result, under no circumstances are cell phones or any other electronic devices to be used or seen during classroom instruction or examination. Even the visible presence of such a device during an examination will result in a zero on that examination. All such devices should be turned off or put in a silent mode and not be taken out during class. **Violations of the code of conduct will not be tolerated. Failure to comply with this policy will result in expulsion from the classroom and may at the instructor's discretion result in the student(s) being referred for disciplinary action to the Dean of Students.** Any assignments missed because of disciplinary action cannot be submitted for a grade.

Students with Disabilities Policy:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>

Religious Holy Days

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Visitors in the Classroom

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.