

SCRIPT ANALYSIS

COURSE #TH201

DEPT. OF ENGLISH, COMMUNICATIONS & THEATRE ARTS

SPRING 2012

INSTRUCTOR: Jonathan Shandell
Email: shandelj@arcadia.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

There's no other way to say it: reading plays is difficult. To read a play in print is to encounter a work of art in unfinished and incomplete form. Visual artistry, physical presence and live audience dynamics are reduced to flat, static words on a page. In this course, we will explore and practice with various techniques for reading and analyzing scripts: techniques designed to help theater artists discover more fully the dynamic potential of theatrical texts as blueprints for live performance. We will explore dramatic worlds holistically, analyze scripts structurally in terms of the arrangement and sequence of events, investigate conventional play genre labels (tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy), and examine the ideas of key theorists in Western theater history (Aristotle and Bertold Brecht), to discover many different perspectives from which plays may be analyzed. Class discussions, online discussions and writing assignments will provide opportunities to develop and refine our skills with reading and understanding play texts.

As a designated Writing (W) course in Arcadia's curriculum, this course will involve a significant amount of writing. Writing assignments will be both formal (academic) and informal in nature—allowing students to become literate in the various platforms for written analysis of a play text. The formal (academic) essay assignments will allow students to employ the course's analytical models with more depth and rigor than class discussions will allow. Some assignments will have a required submission of a draft and rewritten versions. Informal writings will be short responses to readings and discussions, which each student will post to their personal class blog. Class time will be given to writing instruction and essay development.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Gain expertise in various techniques for reading, analyzing and comprehending plays—not simply as literary texts, but as blueprints for theatrical production.
- Build familiarity with the key concepts of play analysis, dramatic structure, theatrical genre and dramatic theory.
- Develop knowledge of major works of dramatic theory, and learn to use these theories as tools for analyzing dramatic texts.
- Develop critical writing skills in both formal (academic) and informal (popular/artistic) styles of writing about plays.
- Develop critical and analytical skills through class and online discussions.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at Arcadia bookstore):

- Readings marked (NAD) on the course schedule are contained in *The Norton Anthology of Drama, Shorter Edition*, ed. Gainor et al. (W.W. Norton, 2010).
- Calderón de la Barca, Pedro, *Life is a Dream*, trans. Helen Edmundson (NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2010).
- Wilder, Thornton. *Our Town* (New York: Harper Perennials, 2003).
- Readings, marked (BB) on the Course Schedule will be available on Blackboard.

ATTENDANCE: Please read carefully!

As a student enrolled in the course, you are agreeing to abide by the policy explained here, including the consequences listed below for excessive absence and late arrival. Course grades are not just a reflection of each student's knowledge acquired or success with writing. They also reflect each student's investment in the work we do together all semester during class meetings—work which cannot be completed outside of class meetings. During class discussions, students learn from the teacher and, more importantly, from one another. Your presence enables your own learning, and enriches the learning of your colleagues. Your absence has direct impact on the quality of learning in the class; the attendance policy is one means of quantifying that impact.

Attendance policy:

1. Students are required to attend every class meeting, barring major illness or family emergency. (In such cases, please provide documentation to the instructor.)
2. In the event that absence becomes unavoidable, students are required in each instance to contact the instructor in advance (if possible) or as soon after the course meeting as possible.
3. In the event of an absence, it is each student's responsibility to keep up with course by contacting the instructor for handouts, announcements and changes to the course schedule, getting notes from a classmate and, if needed, schedule a meeting with the instructor to discuss any concerns about readings or assignments.
4. Students are required to be on time for every class meeting. Every three (3) late arrivals will be counted as one (1) absence.
5. Absences will impact your final course grade in the following manner:
 - a. 1-2 absences: no adjustment to course average
 - b. 3 absences: course grade adjusted one step down (eg. A- becomes B+)
 - c. 4 absences: course grade adjusted two steps down (eg. A- becomes B)
 - d. 5 absences: course grade adjusted three steps down (eg. A- becomes B-)
 - e. 6 absences: course grade adjusted four steps down (eg. A- becomes C+).
 - f. 7 absences: course grade adjusted five steps down (eg. A- becomes C).
 - g. 8+ absences: course grade becomes F

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING:

- **Attendance and participation (20%):** As a student enrolled in the course, you should be ready each day to discuss the assigned readings and the questions or problems raised by those texts, and to be an active participant in our class dialogue. Each of us brings something different and valuable to the table—because of our diverse academic, artistic, cultural and experiential backgrounds. The more perspectives included in our common inquiry, the richer our examination will be. Your thoughtful contributions to our class discussions, whatever they may be, will enrich our common inquiry in unique and irreplaceable ways.
- **Writing Assignments:**
 - **Your Blog: 10%** *Each student will maintain their own blog through Blackboard. There will be assigned postings over the course of the semester. Beyond those assigned postings, you are encouraged to develop your blog in any way you see fit, provided it connects in some way to our course work. Blog postings will not be “graded,” but will be read and checked by the instructor to assure timely completion and seriousness of intent. If you complete all blog assignments on time, and do nothing else on your blog, you will receive an A- for this portion of your grade. Students who complete all requirements and make additional contributions in some distinct way will get an A.*
 - Essay #1: 10%
 - Essay #2: 20%
 - Essay #3: 15%
 - Essay #4: 25%
- Assignments will be evaluated on a scale of A-F based on the thoroughness and thoughtfulness displayed in the finished product. See the separate handout “Jonathan’s Writing Guidelines” for further explanation on expectations and grading policies for essays.
- In order to pass and receive credit for this course, a student **must complete and submit all four (4) assigned essays, including all assigned drafts.** Any student who does not submit all the assigned writing work will not pass. It is not permissible to “take an F” on one essay by skipping an assignment and still receive credit for passing the class, no matter what a student’s calculated average might be.

COURSE SCHEDULE: *This schedule is subject to change throughout the semester. All changes will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard. It is each student's responsibility to keep apprised of changes to the course schedule.*

UNIT #1: ANALYTICAL STRATEGIES		
Tuesday	Jan 17	Susan Glaspell, <i>Trifles</i> (NAD 941-51 or BB)
Thursday	Jan 19	“EF’s Visit to a Small Planet” (BB) Essay #1 assigned
Tuesday	Jan 24	Given Circumstances: Thomas, 38-62
Thursday	Jan 26	Essay #1 draft due (no additional reading)
Tuesday	Jan 31	Action Analysis, part 1: Thomas 1-14 Georgia Douglas Johnson, <i>Plumes</i> (BB)
Thursday	Feb 2	Action Analysis, part 2: Thomas, 14-25;
Tuesday	Feb 7	Caryl Churchill, <i>A Number</i> (NAD 1601-20)
Thursday	Feb 9	Revised essay #1 due (no additional reading)
Tuesday	Feb 14	August Strindberg, <i>Miss Julie</i> (NAD 681-709)
Thursday	Feb 16	Structure: Thomas 141-150 Essay #2 assigned
Tuesday	Feb 21	Larry Loebell, <i>Girl Science</i> (BB)
Thursday	Feb 23	<i>Girl Science</i> , continued Essay #2 draft due
Thurs.-Sun.	Feb 21-24	Attend a performance of <i>Girl Science</i> – required!
UNIT #2: READING THEATRICAL GENRE		
Tuesday	Feb 28	Tragedy: Aristotle, selections from <i>The Poetics</i> (BB)
Thursday	Mar 1	Aristotle, continued (additional reading TBD)
Tuesday	Mar 6	Euripides, <i>The Bacchae</i> (NAD 174-214)
Thursday	Mar 8	Arthur Miller, “Tragedy and the Common Man” (BB) Essay #2 revisions due
<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>March 13</i>	<u>Spring Break!</u>
<i>Thursday</i>	<i>March 15</i>	

Tuesday	Mar 20	Comedy: Reading TBD (will be posted on BB)
Thursday	Mar 22	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> Read Act 1 (NAD 778-93)
Tuesday	Mar 27	Oscar Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (NAD 778-821)
Thursday	Mar 29	<u>Tragicomedy:</u> “Tragicomedy,” from <i>Drama: The Major Genres</i> (BB) Essay #3 assigned
Tuesday	Apr 3	Pedro Calderón de la Barca, <i>Life is a Dream</i>
UNIT #3: OTHER STUFF		
Thursday	Apr 5	No additional reading Essay #3 due
Tuesday	April 10	Style: Thomas 287-300 Tony Kushner, <i>Angels in America, Part I</i> Read Act 1 (NAD 1498-1521)
Thursday	April 12	Tony Kushner, <i>Angels in America, Part I</i> (NAD 1498-1561)
Tuesday	Apr 17	Bertold Brecht, essays from <i>Brecht on Theatre</i> (BB) Bertold Brecht, <i>The Good Person of Setzuan</i> Read Prologue–scene 3 (NAD 1010-30)
Thursday	April 19	Bertold Brecht, <i>The Good Person of Setzuan</i> (NAD 1010-62) Essay #4 assigned
Tuesday	April 24	Thornton Wilder, <i>Our Town</i>
Thursday	April 26	<i>Our Town</i> , continued
Thursday	May 3	Essay #4 due at 4:00 PM on Blackboard