**Playwriting 1 TAPS0100**

Tuesday 1:00PM - 3:50PM

Instructor: Katie Ka Vang

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Office hours: By appointment only

**Overview**

This class is an introductory playwriting class and will focus on fundamentals of playwriting. What is a play? Why do we do it? What does a play consist of? How closely do we want to stick to those conventions? When is it helpful? When does it hinder? What story do you want to tell? How can the “voices” in our heads be of use to us? Through writing exercises, reading excerpts of plays, viewing videos and performances, students will write theatre pieces. They will be exposed to playwrights mostly from the past three centuries, as well as essays and articles that contribute to the understanding of “theatre making”. The class will culminate in final projects.

**Grading & Attendance Policy**

Students will be graded on their participation, assignments, and attendance-timeliness. I do not start class until everyone is there. Students must complete every assignment in order to get credit for the class. Students who need to be absent for class should let the instructor know ahead of time. Missing more than two class periods will prevent students from receiving credit for the class. The class is pass/ fail. In order to pass with distinction you will need to see at least 5 theatrical productions and write a 2 page creative response for each.

**Texts and materials** (things may be added accordingly throughout semester if I or any student(s) stumble upon resources that might aid you in your process)

Plays:

*In The Blood* by Suzan Lori Parks

*A Lie of The Mind* by Sam Shepherd

*Yellowman* by Dael Orlandersmith

*In The Red and Brown Water* by Tarell Alvin McCraney

*Fefu and Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes

*blu* by Virgina Grise

*Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca

Essays:

*Elements of Style* by Suzan Lori Parks

*How I Learned Theater* by Peggy Shaw

*The School of Dead* from *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* by Helene Cixous

Movie/ videos:

*Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by Kristina Wong

*Writing A Stupid Play* - Young Jean Lee Interview

**Readings and Performances**

All texts and materials will be available online, unless noted otherwise. Instructor may also make individual recommendations, which students are expected to read/ view as well. Students are encouraged to recommend plays they think will be useful to their peers. There may be some events outside of class, such as performances or video screenings that the instructor will ask students to attend. Attending these events and participating in discussions may deepen students understanding of performance and the writing process.

**Assignments**

Please make all your work reader friendly. Typed in 12 point font. All assignments must be saved as **word.doc** or **word.docx** only. All assignments should have a cover page, with student’s name and professor’s name, name of the assignment, date and page numbers at the bottom.

We will be loosely using Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process to give feedback. The Critical Response Process takes place after a presentation of artistic work. Work can be short or long, large or small, and at any stage in its development. It is much more elaborate than this and varies on how big the body of work; however we will use a summarized version of it through four steps:

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.

**Schedule**

**Jan 28** Introduction

**Feb 4**

* Inventory List
* Why do theater? The live experience?
* Writing exercise
* **Assignment name: Monologue**
  + Guidelines:
    - ANY topic or subject
    - Not to exceed one page double space
    - Bring in a printed copy

**Feb 11**

* *A Lie of the Mind*
* Share monologues
* Writing exercise
* **Assignment name: Dialogue/ and conflict**
  + Guidelines
    - At least three pages
    - Start with two characters, Person A and Person B (feel free to give them names)
    - Person A wants something from Person B; Person B has it, but refuses to give it over
    - Decide what happens at the end. Did Person A get what they wanted from Person B?

**Feb 18**

**Holiday, no class**

**Feb 25**

* *Elements of Style* and *In The Blood*
* Share Dialogues
* Writing exercise
* **Assignment name: Treasure Box**
  + **Guidelines**
    - Between now and our next class find a box.
    - Pay attention around you, while you are walking about your day(s)/daze, collect random things you find. You should not spend any money- these should all be random things, which intrigue you.
    - Collect at least six items and bring them in to our next class.

**March 4**

* *How I learned Theater*
* Show and tell your Treasure Box
* Writing exercise
* **Assignment name: GLIZELGLUMP:** this exercise focuses on essential plotting and outlining a full story.
  + Prompts:
    - At least two pages
    - Play begins with “Glizelglump woke up at dawn.”
    - Play ends with “Glizelglump went to bed at midnight.”
    - The above, can be dialogue or stage directions, and must be evident to the audience
    - Play CANNOT be written in narrative (storytelling) style

**March 11:**

* *Yellowman*
* Share Glizelglump work
* Writing exercise
* Video *- Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* - “Sometimes, knowing your character so well can allow stories/conflits/plots to emerge”
* Assignment: Outline of your final piece
  + Prompts:
    - At least one page
    - The outline must have one paragraph description of the world and whatever characters you know will be in it.
    - The number of scenes you envision will take to tell this story
    - Title the scenes and give a brief description of what will happen, who’s in it, what the dialogue will be about ,etc.

**March 18:**

* *The School of Dead*
* Turn in Outlines
* Writing exercise (short one)
* Possible one on one meetings

**March 25: Spring break**

**April 1**

FROM HERE TILL THE END OF THE LAST CLASS EVERYONE SHOULD BRING IN AT LEAST ONE SCENE FROM THEIR FINAL PLAY TO WORKSHOP EVERY WEEK.

* *Fefu and Friends*
* Workshop scenes (everyone should have at least one scene to workshop)
* Writing exercise:

**April 8:**

* Video: Writing A Stupid Play - Young Jean Lee Interview
* Workshop scenes (everyone should have at least one scene to workshop)
* Writing exercises

**April 15:**

* *Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca
* Workshop scenes (everyone should have at least one scene to workshop)
* Writing exercises

**April 22:**

* *blu* by Virgina Grise
* Workshop scenes (everyone should have at least one scene to workshop)
* Writing exercises
* Draw names for readings

**April 29: Playlab**

**May 6: Playlab- Last class**

**Other stuff/ helpful things to know**

1. Creative Response papers in this class are considered one of the following:

* a scene, a monologue, stage directions, a poem, a short story, lyrics to a song, etc. (**if you have an idea please talk to me about it- I’m open)**
* they should include one specific detail of the play/production,
* and must be at least 2 pages in length, 11 inch font, double spaced.

2. Cell phones, texting, social media is not permitted while in class. Students are expected to turn off electronic devices other than laptops which should only be used for in class writing exercises, unless otherwise told.

3.Standard play structure for this class will be done in the following structure: (unless you talk to me otherwise)

**YOUR CHARACTER A’s NAME:**

Your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text *(she lights up a cigarette)*

**YOUR CHARACTER B’S NAME:**

your text your text your text your text your

**YOUR CHRACTER C’S NAME:**

text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your *(he exhales)* text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text your text

**Playwriting Vocabulary List**

**(Borrowed from A Playwriting Handbook, Center Stage)**

CHARACTER: who the actor pretends to be. (Characters want things. They have goals and objectives.)

DIALOGUE: a conversation between two or more characters.

CONFLICT: obstacles that get in the way of a character achieving what he or she wants. What the characters struggle against.

SCENE: a single situation or unit of dialogue in a play.

STAGE DIRECTIONS: messages from the playwright to the actors, technicians, and others in the theater telling them what to do and how to do it.

SETTING: time and place of a scene.

BIOGRAPHY: a character’s life story that a playwright creates.

MONOLOGUE: a long speech one character gives on stage.

DRAMATIC ACTION: an explanation of what the characters are trying to do.

BEAT: asmallersectionofascene,dividedwhereashiftinemotionortopicoccurs.

PLOT: the structure of a play

EXPOSITION: the beginning part of a plot that provides important background information.

RISING ACTION: the middle part of a plot, consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict.

CLIMAX: the turning point in a plot.

FALLING ACTION: the series of events following the climax of a plot. DENOUEMENT: the final resolution of the conflict in a plot.