

**Art of the Theatre**

**ENGL 232**

Spring, 2011

Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:35-3:45pm, Arena Theatre

**INSTRUCTOR:**

Christopher Shorr

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Office: Arena Theatre

Office Hours: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays 1-2:15PM and by appointment

(Although you are always welcome to drop by, I encourage you to call ahead to insure a spot if you know you want to see me during office hours. Office hours are subject to change. Check posting on office door for updates)

Phone: (610) 861-1489

**TEXTS:**

Ball, David. Backwards & Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983.

ISBN-10: 0809311100

Bruder, Melissa, Lee Michael Cohn, Madeleine Olnek, Nathaniel Pollack, Robert Previtio and Scott Zigler. A Practical Handbook for the Actor. New York: Vintage, 1986.

ISBN-10: 0394744128

Downs, William Missouri, Lou Anne Wright, and Erik Ramsey. Experiencing the Art of Theatre (Concise edition). Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2010.

George, William. "The Whitman Piece." Re-printed with permission of the playwright

Wilson, August. "Fences." New York: Plume/Penguin, 1986.

Xingjian, Gao. Escape And The Man Who Questions Death. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007.

*Additional texts to be assigned*

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the art of theatre. Since the focus is on theatre as an art form, rather than theatre as literature, we will look at various components that go into the production of a script for live performance. By the end of the course, each student should have an introductory understanding of:

1. Script analysis;
2. Playwriting;
3. Acting;
4. Design;
5. Directing.

### **CAUTIONS:**

1. It is essential that you attend all classes. Students are expected to participate in class activities and contribute to class discussions of topics. ***Less than active participation*** may have a negative effect on your grade. ***More than one absence*** may have a negative effect on your grade separate from the 10% of the grade designated for Active Participation/Improvement/Commitment.
2. All work must be presented or turned in on time. Missed work may only be made up under special circumstances at the discretion of the instructor.
3. Students are expected to work hard and think creatively. The more time and opportunity you have to work on a skill and/or assignment, the greater the expectation for excellence.
4. All work turned in must be typed or printed from a printer.
5. All students must be prepared to present work and in attendance the first day of the classes designated for an assignment. Additional days are just for spill-over. (In other words, don't plan on skipping the first day of Acting Presentations to buy yourself an extra day to work on your monologue!)
6. Students should expect to spend six to eight hours per week outside of class preparing for this class. Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encourage to contact the Learning Services Office as soon as possible to enhance the likelihood that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.
7. There is a zero tolerance policy on plagiarism—see “Academic Honesty,” below.
8. Read ahead on the syllabus to see what's coming up in order to avoid getting caught by surprise when a lot of reading, or other assigned work is due.

### **BLACKBOARD:**

<http://blackboard.moravian.edu>

You MUST enroll in this class on Blackboard. The access code is: eng232

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:**

Refer to the statement on academic honesty at Moravian College in the current Student Handbook (online at: [www.moravian.edu/studentLife/handbook/academic2.htm](http://www.moravian.edu/studentLife/handbook/academic2.htm))

Copies are available in the Academic Dean's file (acdean) on the Public (P:) Drive of the Moravian Intranet.

Keep copies of all written work submitted to the instructor, as well as notes, drafts and materials used in preparing assignments. If in doubt about appropriate collaboration, proper documentation and other honesty issues, ask the instructor.

If you lift a single sentence from a website for a play analysis, you will fail the assignment, and may fail the course. Students should not expect any leniency on this policy.

NOTE: Paraphrasing without citation is still plagiarism, as is stolen thought structure.

**When in doubt, cite it!**

## **GRADING**

### **FINAL GRADES WILL BE DETERMINED AS FOLLOWS:**

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 15% | 3 Play Analyses (combined)                  |
| 15% | Creative Project                            |
| 15% | Acting Assignment                           |
| 15% | “Production Concept” Assignment             |
| 10% | Performance Responses                       |
| 10% | Active Participation/Improvement/Commitment |
| 10% | Quizzes                                     |
| 10% | Final Exam                                  |

Lest there be confusion...

Excellent work will count as an “A.” Above Average work will count as a “B.” Average work will count as a “C.” Less than average work will count as a “D.” A poorly done assignment, or one that fails to adequately fulfill the requirements of the assignment will count as an “F.”

The criteria for grades include originality of thought, clarity of purpose, organization, creativity, evidence of critical thinking, quality of material, expression and mechanics. Grades may be monitored on Blackboard, but keep in mind that those grades are ONLY a running total of graded assignments and that your final grade includes absences, participation, and other components not included in the Blackboard running total.

**Please note:** Letter grades are based on percentages and do NOT get rounded up or down. There is a range of percentage points that corresponds to a particular letter grade. In blackboard, the instructor can choose to display grades as percentages or as letters. If I choose to display grades as percentages, it is so that students can see exactly how close they are to the next grade bracket. This may provide incentive to do better in order to push your grade up into a higher bracket, or to keep it from slipping down into a lower bracket. Do not mistake this as an invitation to argue for a high grade. A 79.99 is NOT a B-.

|                 |                              |
|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 90.00%+         | = A range (A- through A+)    |
| 80.00%-89.99%   | = B range (B- through B+)    |
| 70.00%-79.99%   | = C range (C- through C+)    |
| 60.00%-69.99%   | = D range (D- through D+)    |
| 59.99% or lower | = Failure to pass the course |

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTRA CREDIT—*to be counted against poor quiz grades***

1. One of the big challenges of theatre performance is to overcome your nervousness about standing up and speaking in front of an audience. From time to time, students will be called upon to deliver a short (between thirty seconds and one minute long) monologue. This is NOT the graded “acting assignment.” Doing this is OPTIONAL, and a student may always decline the opportunity. To get credit: deliver the monologue; take it seriously; and maintain poise)
2. Attend one of the multi-cultural poetry events on campus and write a 1-2 page paper on the question: Is publicly “performed” poetry theatre?
3. Attend a theatre performance that has not been assigned, and write a play response paper.

## **DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

### **QUIZZES:**

There will be a very brief quiz at the beginning of many classes. Quizzes will cover material from previous class sessions and/or assigned readings. Be sure to have read the assigned chapters, and gotten notes from a fellow student if you missed class.

### **PLAY ANALYSES:**

For each of the three plays assigned, students will write an analysis using the tools for reading plays provided in David Ball's Backwards & Forwards and answering a series of approximately 35 questions. Although information about these plays is readily available in the library and on the Internet, DO NOT USE RESEARCH for these assignments, and do not work in groups. You MAY use a dictionary and your Art of Theatre textbooks for clarification of terms. NOTE: A single sentence lifted from a website will be considered plagiarism (see "Academic Honesty"). Do the thinking for yourself. You need to be able to defend your ideas and choices, and will be asked to do so in class.

### **CREATIVE PROJECT:**

A student may propose any creative project that deals with one of the plays assigned. Students may work in groups on creative projects. Examples of creative projects include: musical composition; performance of a scene; writing a scene in the style of the playwright; or the presentation of a design. If you choose to design the set or costumes for one of the plays, for example, you would turn in: a two-page description of your design approach including **research** and **rationale**; and a model/rendering (detailed, color) of the set or collage (swatches, photos, clippings)/rendering (detailed, color) of the (principal) costumes. You would then present the design to the class and answer questions. Proposals for creative projects are due NO LATER THAN 3/29/11, however students are encouraged to seek approval for project ideas earlier than this, as revisions may be required.

### **ACTING ASSIGNMENT:**

Pick a one-minute monologue. It may be from one of the three assigned plays, or from another play of your choosing. (If you select a monologue from a play NOT assigned in class, you must have a thorough understanding of the whole play and include a synopsis.) Turn in: a two-page character analysis; a textual analysis which breaks the monologue into "beats" and identifies the character's overall objective and moment-to-moment motivations ("wants"); and perform the monologue in class, incorporating instructor feedback/coaching. NOTE: Your monologue selection must be approved by the instructor. You must turn in THREE possible selections, marked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> choice, NO LATER THAN 3/01/10. You are encouraged to seek monologue approval earlier than this.

### **"PRODUCTION CONCEPT" ASSIGNMENT:**

Imagine yourself to be a theatre director. You are going to work in pairs to develop and then "pitch" your vision of one of the three assigned plays. Turn in: a two-page description of your "production concept" with research and rationale; create a "concept board" with swatches, photos, clippings, sketches... anything to help convey your concept; use the board to help pitch the concept to the class and answer questions.

### **PERFORMANCE RESPONSES:**

Attend performances of "Frankly" (2/04/11), the Student Cabaret (2/24/11-2/27/11), and "The Whitman Piece" (4/07/11-4/10/11) and write a brief (1-2 page) reaction paper to each play that describes your emotional response to the performance, identifies what worked or didn't work about the production, and describes what you would have done differently if you had been the director. DO NOT simply state that you liked or disliked elements of the production—you must support your ideas. Only papers that demonstrate critical thinking will be successful.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### *Prologue*

1 Tuesday, January 18  
Course overview: Theatre & Art

### *Act One: Script Analysis*

2 Thursday, January 20  
What's in a play?  
*Reading Due: Ball Part 1*

3 Tuesday, January 25  
Reading and understanding a script  
*Reading Due: Ball Part 2*

4 Thursday, January 27  
Reading and understanding a script  
*Reading Due: Ball Part 3*

5 Tuesday, February 1  
Theatre Literacy  
*Reading Due: Downs 1,2,3&4*

### *Act Two: Theatre Styles*

6 Thursday, February 3  
Dithyramb to Broadway  
*Reading Due: Downs 12*

7 Tuesday, February 8  
Types of Theatre  
*Reading Due: Downs 11*  
*Play Response Due: "Frankly"*

8 Thursday, February 10  
Playwriting  
*Reading Due: Downs 6*

9 Tuesday, February 15  
*Reading Due: "Fences"*  
*Play Analysis Due: "Fences"*

10 Thursday, February 17  
"Fences"

CLASS SCHEDULE (cont'd)

***Act Three: Envisioning Theatre***

11 Tuesday, February 22

A Day in the Life

*Reading Due: Downs 5*

12 Thursday, February 24

Acting and Directing

*Reading Due: Downs 7 and 8*

13 Tuesday, March 1

Acting and Directing

*Play Response Due: "Student Cabaret"*

*Reading Due: Downs 10*

*TURN IN: 3 proposed monologues for acting assignment*

14 Thursday, March 3

Approval of monologues for acting assignment

*Reading Due: "Escape"*

*Play Analysis Due: "Escape"*

***Intermission***

SPRING RECESS—NO CLASS Tuesday, March 8 or Thursday March 10

(Pssst! TIP: Work ahead—Read A Practical Handbook for the Actor and memorize your monologue)

***Act four: Making Theatre***

15 Tuesday, March 15

Acting

*Reading Due: A Practical Handbook for the Actor part 1*

16 Thursday, March 17

Acting

*Reading Due: A Practical Handbook for the Actor part 2*

17 Tuesday, March 22

*Acting Assignments Due*

18 Thursday, March 24

*Acting Assignments Due*

CLASS SCHEDULE (cont'd)

19 Tuesday, March 29

*Remaining Acting Assignments*

Design

*Reading Due: Downs 9*

*Creative Project Proposals Due*

20 Thursday, March 31

Design

*Reading Due: "The Whitman Piece"*

*Play Analysis Due: "The Whitman Piece"*

21 Tuesday, April 5

*Production Concept Group work*

22 Thursday, April 7

TBA

23 Tuesday, April 12

*Play Response Due: "The Whitman Piece"*

*Production Concept presentations Due*

24 Thursday, April 14

*Production Concept presentations Due*

25 Tuesday, April 19

*Creative Project Presentations Due*

26 Thursday, April 21

*Creative Project Presentations Due*

27 Tuesday, April 26

*Remaining presentations*

***Epilogue***

28 Thursday, April 28

Course Review

Exam Prep

***Final Curtain***

TBA