

TH 330 American Theater

T/TH 9:30-10:45
Bartlett 203

Christopher Baker

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Office Hours: T 1-2

DESCRIPTION

This class will explore American theater and drama from its beginnings to contemporary practice. We will concentrate on post-WWII American theater, with a special emphasis on 21st century plays. The course will begin by thinking about what "American" actually means and then by tracing the historical ways the theater reflected this search for identity. It will end with a look at how contemporary theater artists continue that exploration.

The class will consist of lectures, discussions, and in-class presentations. You will be asked to read and discuss plays, analyze them in written assignments, participate in group projects and give presentations.

This is a junior year writing course, so you will be asked to express your ideas clearly and thoughtfully in writing over several assignments. We will also be reading many plays, so make plans to keep up.

REQUIRED READING

The following plays are available in hard copy:

ALL MY SONS by Arthur Miller, DPS (Dramatists Play Service), 978-0-8222-0016-1

ASSASSINS by Stephen Sondheim & John Weidman, TCG, 978-1-5593-6038-8

AT HOME AT THE ZOO by Edward Albee, DPS, 978-0-8222-2317-7

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF (1974 Broadway Version) by Tennessee Williams, DPS, 978-0-8112-1601-2

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN, by Eugene O'Neill, Samuel French, 978-0-5736-1246-6

NICKEL AND DIMED by Joan Holden, DPS, 978-0-8222-2042-8

WAITING FOR LEFTY by Clifford Odets, DPS, 978-0-8222-1215-7

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, DPS, 978-0-8222-1287-4

ZOOT SUIT AND OTHER PLAYS, by Luis Valdez, Arte Publico, 978-1-5588-5048-4

The following are available as e-books from the UMass Library:

SONGS OF THE DRAGONS FLYING TO HEAVEN by Young Jean Lee in *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven and Other Plays* [electronic resource]/ Young Jean Lee

The following will be on Moodle:

DUTCHMAN by Amiri Baraka

THE GREAT DIVIDE by William Vaughn Moody

PARADISE NOW by The Living Theater

The following are available on line:

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN by George Aiken from the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe at
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/scripts/aikenhp.html>

The following is a required reference text:

PENGUIN HANDBOOK, SECOND CUSTOM EDITION FOR UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST. (ISBN 978-0-558-33612-7)

JUNIOR YEAR WRITING

This is a Junior Year Writing class, with certain goals for the development of your writing skills. The class will reinforce basic writing skills including the ability to compose coherent sentences and logically developed paragraphs. You will be asked to draft, revise, and edit your writing as well as give useful feedback to others. You will be expected to proofread all work for grammatical errors and to cite secondary sources correctly.

Over the course of this class, it is hoped you will gain competency in more advanced writing skills. You should be able to think and write analytically and interpretatively, rather than simply restating information. Your work should follow a logical line of development, using details and examples to argue or explain a thesis. Finally, you should be able to write with the authority needed to accomplish a particular purpose with a particular audience.

WRITING/PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENTS

This class includes 7 writing and presentation assignments. Detailed instructions will be handed out in class and posted on Moodle. The length, tone and purpose of each assignment are different. What is important in each is your ability to communicate your interpretations, reflections and analyses in writing and in oral presentations. We will discuss preparing for your presentations on March 27.

1. "I am an American" monologue. 1-2 pages.
Create a monologue based on the experience of someone in your family that begins "I am an American." The monologue should in some way explore how this person thinks of him or herself in relation to America, or reveal something that seems uniquely American to you. In addition to turning in the written text, you will also present it to the class.
2. American plays and American audiences essay. 4-5 pages.
Choose one topic from a list of three. Each topic asks you to compare at least two of the plays we have read up to Feb. 25. Some research will be required.
3. Contemporary Playwright Paper—First Draft . 9 pages
This paper focuses on a contemporary playwright, chosen from a list provided by the instructor. The paper should include a discussion of the playwright's career and writing, an analysis of one play, and a production history of that play. **This draft will be peer-reviewed. After edits it will be turned into the instructor for further review.**
4. Production Response. 4 pages.
Write a response to a production of an American play, musical or devised work from a list provided by the instructor. Describe the production and then try to determine the goals of the production. Finally, you should evaluate whether the production was successful in what it set out to do.
5. Contemporary Playwright Paper—Final Draft, and presentation script.
This is the final, revised version of your paper. In addition, you will turn in a draft of your script for your in-class presentation. (see below)
6. In-class presentation of paper topic. 10 minutes.
This should be a presentation of your research and analysis and will include visuals (photographs, video clips). It will not be you reading your paper, but rather something appropriate to introduce your playwright to a general audience, and so will require a script adapted from your paper.
7. What are the concerns of contemporary playwrights? 3-4 pages
Identify one or two themes and/or techniques that are common to the contemporary playwrights presented in class.

GRADES

Your grade will be based on 1100 points and will consist of the following elements:

Attendance	125 (each class is worth 5 points)
Participation	25
Peer review	50
Assignment 1 monologue	100
Assignment 2 short essay	100
Assignment 3 paper draft	75
Assignment 4 prod. response	100
Assignment 5 paper	200
Assignment 5 script	50
Assignment 6 presentation	150
Assignment 7 paper	100

GRADING SCALE

A	1023	B+	957	C+	847	D+	737
A-	990	B	913	C	803	D	693
		B-	880	C-	770	D-	660

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Research is pretty clear that understanding of class material is related closely to attendance. **I take attendance at the beginning of each class and I don't go back to fill in the people who came late.** So don't come late. Sleeping in class does not count as attending. I will ask you to leave.

If you participate in class in a significant way—more than “I hate this play” or “I agree with her”—at least five times, you will receive full credit for participation. **Make sure you are present for the day we peer review. Your work as a reviewer is worth 50 points.**

PLAGIARISM

The UMass Amherst Academic Regulations (p. 7) and Code of Student Conduct (p. 28) define plagiarism as: “Knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, pre-written term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials.”

The Writing Program has prepared a more-detailed explanation of plagiarism:
<http://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/geninfo/plagiarism.html>

The Code of Student Conduct (http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/) states: “The integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research. Academic honesty is therefore required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty” (p. 28).” The Code also outlines the process by which student rights are protected in academic honesty cases, which are handled through the Ombuds Office.

Check out <http://www.umass.edu/academichonesty/> (especially “How Can I Avoid Plagiarism?--Quick Tips”)

THE WRITING CENTER

www.umass.edu/writingcenter

Contact: writingcenter@acad.umass.edu or by phone at 577.1293.

I will often recommend that students use The Writing Center. This is a great resource, especially if you are receiving lower grades on your papers than you expected, or if you are having difficulty expressing your thoughts in writing. The Writing Center offers free tutoring. Tutors work with writers to brainstorm, structure a piece of writing, learn strategies for copyediting, and more. All student writers—whether you love writing, struggle with writing, are mystified by writing, or all of the above—are welcome. The website lists the Center's hours and appointment policies. Be sure to bring your assignment, your draft (a print copy or an electronic copy), and any relevant materials. The Center is located on the lower level of the W.E.B. DuBois Library.

COMPUTERS AND YOUR SMARTPHONE

Laptops or other computer devices are not allowed in class. As there is no evidence that these devices aid learning or comprehension in any way, I ask you not to use them except as needed during group work. As theatre people, we must honor live, unmitigated interaction. Looking at a screen is rude to the person talking (and to the person sitting behind you) and encourages you to listen rather than interact. This may seem old-fashioned, but theatre is a pretty old-fashioned art form. The same goes for your phone.

ADVICE

Do not wait until you are having a big problem to talk to me. Talk to me when it is still a little problem.

Do not miss turning in an assignment and then talk to me about why you couldn't get it in on time. Talk to me before you miss the deadline.

Do not fall behind hoping you'll catch up or that there will be a chance for extra credit. You probably won't, and there will not be. If you really don't know what's going on, come see me during office hours or make an appointment.

SCHEDULE

Subject to change. Read each play by the date we are discussing it in class.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>ASSIGNMENT DUE</u>
INTRODUCTION AND BEGINNINGS		
Jan 21 T	Introduction	
Jan 23 Th	Search for Identity	
WHAT IS AMERICAN?		
Jan 28 T	I am an American monologues	1. monologues
Jan 30 Th	I am an American monologues/Beginnings	
DIVISION AND EXPLORATION		
Feb 4 T	<i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>	
Feb 6 Th	<i>The Great Divide</i>	
MUSICALS		
Feb 11 T	From minstrelsy to <i>Show Boat</i>	
Feb 13 Th	<i>Assassins</i>	
Feb 18 T	NO CLASS. MONDAY SCHEDULE FOLLOWED.	
FAMILY		
Feb 20 Th	<i>You Can't Take It With You</i>	
Feb 25 T	<i>A Moon for the Misbegotten</i>	2. essays
BUSINESS		
Feb 27 Th	<i>Waiting for Lefty</i>	
Mar 4 T	<i>All My Sons</i>	
Mar 6 Th	<i>Nickel and Dimed</i>	
STRUCTURE		
Mar 11 T	Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional	3. contemporary draft for peer review
Mar 13 Th	Peer Review	
BREAK		
CRISIS		
Mar 25 T	<i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>	3. <i>edited contemporary draft to instructor</i>
Mar 27 Th	<i>At Home at the Zoo</i> How to prepare your presentation	
ACTING		
Apr 1 T	Actor's Studio, Robert Wilson, Anne Bogart	
POLITICAL		
Apr 3 Th	<i>Dutchman</i>	
Apr 8 T	<i>Zoot Suit</i>	4. production response
Apr 10 Th	<i>Paradise Now</i>	

NOW

Apr 15 T	<i>Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven</i>	5. contemporary final paper
Apr 17 Th	Luis Alfaro, Anna Deveare Smith	
Apr 22 T	Contemporary theatre artists presentations	6. presentations
Apr 24 Th	Contemporary theatre artists presentations	
Apr 29 T	Contemporary theatre artists presentations/ Conclusion	
May 6 T		7. Response to presentations