

Fall 2023

THTR-365 (001): Principles of Playwriting

Diana Lobontiu

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Professor Diana Lobontiu (they/them)

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Mondays & Wednesdays 1:00pm – 2:30pm, 110 Kupfrian Hall

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30pm – 3:30pm, 113 Kupfrian Hall, or by appointment

Course prerequisites: HUM 101 and 102, HUM 2XX

THTR 365 PRINCIPLES OF PLAYWRITING, FALL 2023

This is an introductory playwriting class. There are two parts:

1. The reading. In order to write good, you need to read good (things)! We will read and analyze contemporary, bold, explosive playwriting. These writers' works will help you understand how to play with conventions to create truly original pieces.
2. The writing. In which, you guessed it, you write! And also listen. And also share. And also support. And also rewrite. Throughout the semester you will complete writing exercises and tap into your creative voice. You will write 2 short plays (or one longer one) and present them to the class. You will also provide verbal and written feedback to classmates throughout the semester, and participate in class discussions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Exploration of the writer's craft from the page into the physical life of the play.

Covers the basic tools in crafting plays by developing skills in play

formatting, character work, story structure, and workshop techniques.

COURSE OUTCOMES

Understand the language and crafting of a stage script. Read and analyze contemporary, explosive plays and hone own artistic voice. Work with story structure, write and rewrite to develop 1-2 plays.

ABSENCE POLICY

Attendance is important for this course as most of the coursework will be discussions happening in class. Lateness and unexcused absences will be reflected in your grade.

To get absences excused, a note is needed from the Dean of Students. If there are mitigating circumstances, contact me before the class you will miss. If you are feeling sick, please do not attend class in-person.

If a student has a note from the Dean of Students stating there was a valid reason for missing class and/or assignments, then an appropriate schedule to make up work will be scheduled.

PARTICIPATION

For this class you may be asked to read out loud in class and do some acting, as well as offer thoughtful feedback and discussion. While I do not expect it to be award-winning caliber, I do expect you to make an effort. Please bring a device to class that allows you to easily access the plays we are discussing.

HONOR CODE

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating or use of AI (Chat GPT, etc.) to complete assignments is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

GRADING

A = 100 - 89.5

B = 89.4 - 79.5

C = 79.4 - 69.5

D = 69.4 - 60

F = 59 and lower

ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN

Writing Exercises (10%)

These will occur periodically throughout the semester, in class (likely at the beginning of each class). Please turn these in on paper (written out) at the end of the class in which we cover the assignment.

In Class Participation/Workshop Feedback (15%)

You will read the required materials participate in class discussions on the writer's craft. Be bold, be inquisitive, be lively – your voice is wanted in the space! You may be asked to read out loud during workshop and will provide verbal feedback to your classmates.

Presentation on a Piece in Class (5%)

You will each be responsible for presenting one of the pieces/authors we will be studying. You will give us context as to who the author is, what their background/influences are, how the piece came about, any interesting snippets from interviews, etc. Basically, anything you think is useful in terms of understanding the piece better. You will select a passage (or a snippet, if it's a video) for us to read/watch as a class out loud. You will then pose 2-3 discussion questions for the class.

Response to On Campus Show (5%)

You will watch 1 play on campus (this semester, *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*) and write a 2-3 paragraph response about your impressions of it. What worked? What didn't? What surprised you? What bored you? What made you laugh? And why?

Response to Off Campus/NYC Show (5%)

You will watch 1 play off campus (I will provide a list of possible options to low cost productions) and write a 2-3 paragraph response about your impressions of it. What worked? What didn't? What surprised you? What bored you? What made you laugh? And why?

Play 1 (20%)

You will write a 10-15 page original play and present it to the class in workshop. You will receive feedback in class.

Play 2 (20%)

You will either write another 10-15 page original play or extend your first play by 10-15 pages. You will present it to the class in workshop and receive feedback from your peers.

Final Staged Reading (20%)

You will take one of your two pieces and, applying the feedback you received on it from your professor and classmates, submit a second draft. You will provide a statement talking about your process of writing, noting what changes you made between drafts, and how your piece changed. We will read this piece during finals period.

COURSE MATERIALS (all will be provided to you on Canvas)

*please bring a notebook and pen/pencil to class!

- Excerpts from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting*, Jeffrey Hatcher
 - The Six Principles of Aristotle
 - Structure/Dialogue
- *A Chrestomathy of 22 Answers to 22 Wholly Unaskable and Unrelated Questions concerning Political and Poetic Theater*, Mac Wellman
- *Is God Is*, Aleshea Harris
- *Plano*, Will Arbery
- *Galatea*, MJ Kaufman

Workshops round 1

- *Nate: A One Man Show*, Natalie Palamides – need Netflix for this!
- *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 – 1915*, Jackie Sibblies Drury
- *A Map of Virtue*, Erin Courtney
- *Circle Jerk*, Michael Breslin, Patrick Foley

Workshops round 2

TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1

- Wednesday, 9/6 Course introduction, set in class expectations.
HW: Read The Six Principles of Aristotle from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting*, by Jeffrey Hatcher
- Week 2
Monday, 9/11 Discuss The Six Principles of Aristotle from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting*, by Jeffrey Hatcher.
HW: Read Structure and Dialogue sections from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting*, by Jeffrey Hatcher.
- Wednesday, 9/13 Discuss Structure and Dialogue sections from *The Art & Craft of Playwriting*, by Jeffrey Hatcher. Discuss examples of play formatting. In class brainstorming exercises if time.
HW: Read *A Chrestomathy of 22 Answers to 22 Wholly Unaskable and Unrelated Questions concerning Political and Poetic Theater*, by Mac Wellman
- Week 3
Monday, 9/18 Discuss *A Chrestomathy of 22 Answers to 22 Wholly Unaskable and Unrelated Questions concerning Political and Poetic Theater*, by Mac Wellman.
HW: Read first half of *Is God Is* (beginning through "Up Through The Hills"), by Aleshea Harris.
- Wednesday, 9/20 Discuss first half of *Is God Is* (beginning through "Up Through The Hills"), by Aleshea Harris.
HW: Read second half of *Is God Is* (through the end).
- Week 4
Monday, 9/25 Discuss second half of *Is God Is* (through the end).
HW: read Plano, by Will Arbery
- Wednesday, 9/27 Discuss Plano, by Will Arbery
HW: Read *Galatea*, by MJ Kaufman
- Week 5
Monday, 10/2 Discuss *Galatea*, by MJ Kaufman. Discuss expectations for workshop.
- Wednesday, 10/4 Workshop: Play 1 (1 student presents)
- Week 6: WORKSHOPS BEGIN!
Monday, 10/9 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)
- Wednesday, 10/11 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)
- Week 7
Monday, 10/16 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)

Wednesday, 10/18 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)

Week 8

Monday, 10/23 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)

Wednesday, 10/25 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)

Week 9:

Monday, 10/30 Workshop: Play 1 (2 students present)

Wednesday, 11/1 Watch *Nate: A One Man Show* in class.
HW: Read first half of *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 – 1915*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury

Week 10

Monday, 11/6 Discuss first half of *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884 – 1915*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury
HW: Read second half of *We Are Proud to Present...*

Wednesday, 11/8 Discuss second half of *We Are Proud To Present...* in class writing exercise, if time.
HW: Read *A Map of Virtue*, by Erin Courtney

Week 11

Monday, 11/13 Discuss *A Map of Virtue*, by Erin Courtney.

Wednesday, 11/15 In class writing exercises.

Week 12

Monday, 11/20 Watch snippets of *Circle Jerk* in class.

Wednesday, 11/16 Workshop: Play 2 (1 student presents)

Week 13

Monday, 11/21 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14

Monday, 11/27 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

Wednesday, 11/29 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

Week 15

Monday, 12/4 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

Wednesday, 12/6 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

Week 16

Monday, 12/11 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

Wednesday, 12/13 Workshop: Play 2 (2 students present)

TBD: Staged reading day during finals week.