

Drama and Creative Writing

BA Workshop

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Office Hours – Room 503, Tuesday – 12:00-13:00 (only by appointment)

Course Description

Drama and Creative Writing course will give you the opportunity to develop the skills and techniques as writers, focusing on dramatic genres. We will read and analyze a range of theoretical approaches to dramatic practices as well as selected exemplary texts. We will explore key concepts such as character, plot, action, scene, dialogue, and apply them practically and creatively in class. Class time will be devoted to a discussion of the writer's craft as well as sharing students' work.

Requirements

This workshop is done primarily through conversations about the texts (plays, movies, tv shows and stories) and assignments. Each student will have to do the specific assignments and come prepared to class, willing to share as well as contribute his own insights concerning his fellow students' works. When you contribute to class discussions, you make them more meaningful to you and your classmates. Sharing your work and suggesting insights into other students' texts is necessary for the success of this class as well as to your development as a writer of drama.

This class includes a reading list that consists of texts/movies/plays. Those that are specified in the class schedule are mandatory and crucial for our discussions, but the list of texts below is suggested requirements. Nevertheless, a good writer is one who writes and reads the most, so I do recommend you familiarized yourself with the list. The exact schedule of reading may change based on class discussions.

By the end of the course, each student will have a portfolio that includes all of his assignments throughout the semester. This portfolio, alongside the finished product of the course (which might be a full short play or story, a treatment for a long one, a script), will be the basis of your grade in this workshop. The grades will be based, more than anything else, on each student's efforts throughout the semester.

Grades

Attendance and Participation: 30%

Portfolio: 40%

Final Paper: 30%

Course Schedule

1. Introduction – Imagining a Different Reality

October 29th

Introducing the workshop. Specifying what we'll do throughout the semester, the course's requirements, discussing the craft of the dramatists, and the essentials of drama and dramatic writing.

2. The Essence of Drama – Desire, Action, Conflict

November 5th – Macbeth (William Shakespeare)

Discussing the Holy Trinity of Drama: "What do characters want (Desire)? What they do to get what they want (Action)? And what stands in their way (Conflict)?"

3. Where do we Start? - The Evolution of an Idea

November 12th – Misery (Novel – Stephen King, Script and Play – William Goldman).

Where does inspiration come from? How do storytellers come up with ideas? What is the difference between a good idea and a problematic one?

Assignment: Each student must bring between 3-5 ideas for a story – they could be fully developed ideas (summed up in one sentence), or potential ideas (an image, a newspaper article, a dream, a character, a line).

4. What Is It All About? – The Premise of Drama

November 19th – When Harry Met Sally (Script – Nora Ephron).

The biggest problem there is, what is your story about? Trying to understand our ideas, and conceiving the thematic and organizing principles of our stories to which all elements conform.

Assignment: Each student will choose one idea and further develop it to something substantial – a premise. From something abstract, the idea should turn into something tangible – from seed (idea) to root (premise).

5. Character – Psychology, Physiology, Sociology, Evolution

November 26th – Dangerous Liaisons (Novel – Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, Play and Script – Christopher Hampton).

Knowing your characters, where do they come from, where are they going and, most importantly, why should we care? Goals, Needs, Weaknesses, Potentialities, as the necessary elements in constructing characters.

Assignment: Decide who is your hero and providing a detailed description of them that will serve the premise to its full potential.

6. Creating Your Hero as a Social Animal – Protagonist, Opponent, Allies and Archetypes

December 3rd – Streetcar Named Desire (Play – Tennessee Williams).

Orchestrating your ensemble of characters – who in the lead, who supports and why? What types of characters can we use?

Assignment: Arranging the characters inside a specific web – how they interact with each other, how they contribute to the overall premise and to intensify the conflict as much as possible?

7. Plot – The Essentials of Story Structure

December 10th – A Doll's House (Play – Henrik Ibsen).

The construction of characters and their action over the course of an entire story. The Necessary Steps for creating a well-made drama: What steps do we need, what we don't, how can we appreciate plots that work well and how can we detect the malfunctions of those who don't?

8. Plot – Second Act Nightmares

December 17th – Network (Script – Paddy Chayefsky, Play – Lee Hall and Paddy Chayefsky)

Continuing last week's discussion.

Introducing writers' (another) dark fear: you got a great idea, a great setting, a great inciting event... and then what? Where do we go from there? Second Acts and The art of Reinvention.

Assignment: Providing a one-page summary of the drama in accordance with the necessary requirements (what is the setup, inciting event, the initial plan, the drive, desire, weaknesses, etc).

9. Plot – Closure and Resolution

December 24th – Glengarry Glen Ross (Play and Script – David Mamet).

Concluding our plot discussion. How do we finish this damn thing? Leading our hero towards a well-crafted self-revelation or ironic self-delusion. Leading our plot towards a well-crafted new status quo – either in heaven or in hell.

Assignment: Expanding and revising the first draft – improving your revision.

10. Scene Weave – A Mini Story

December 31st – The Homecoming (Play – Harold Pinter).

Getting into the specifics. Sitting and writing down your story. How do scenes fit into the overall picture of plot and story? What is the function of a scene in a specific drama? What is the function and potential of a scene as an autonomous unit?

Assignment: Writing a treatment – Breaking down the synopsis into specific scenes – what happens when, how, where and why.

11. Dialogue – The Art of Subtext

January 7th - Fleabag (Season 2, Chapter 1; Script – Phoebe Waller-Bridge).

Text vs. Subtext – the dialectical approach. How to tell a story without writing what the story is about, how to create a dramatic conflict without specifying its nature, how to develop a character's desire without... well, you get the idea.

Assignment: Writing a compelling, well-crafted scene, finding your voice through human interaction in drama.

12. Post-Drama – Deconstructing the Form

January 14th – The Shipment (Play – Young Jean Lee).

Throwing what we learned so far out of the window. The art, nature and value of deconstructed drama – anti-hero, anti-plot, against-desire, against meaning.

Assignment: Writing and revising and writing and revising you play/script/story.

13. Conclusion – The Dramatists as a Thinker

June 21st – Oedipus the King (Play – Sophocles).

The thing which differentiates a significant or profound drama from an insignificant one – writers as artists who make us see what we conveniently forgot, ignored or repressed throughout our lives.

Assignment: Writing and revising and writing and revising the play/script/story.

Plays, Movies and Stories:

"Barton Fink" (The Coen Brothers), **"Adaptation"** (Charlie Kaufman), **"Witness"** (Peter Weir), **"The Breakup,"** (Jeremy Garelick), **"Oleanna,"** (David Mamet), **"Perfect Strangers"** (Paolo Genovese), **"The Odyssey"** (Homer), **"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,"** **"A Delicate Balance"** (Edward Albee), **"All My Sons"** (Arthur Miller), **"Princess Bride"** (William Goldman), **"Casablanca"** (Julius Epstein and Philip Epstein), **"Hamlet"** (William Shakespeare), **"The Godfather"** (Francis Ford Coppola), **"The Chain"** (Andrew McKinty), **"Metamorphosis,"** **"The Trial,"** **"The Castle"** (Franz Kafka), **"Crime and Punishment"** (Fyodor Dostoyevsky), **"Iron Man"** (Jon Favreau), **"The Avengers"** (Joss Whedon), **"The Social Network"** (Aaron Sorkin), **"The Sopranos"** (David Chase).

Books and Essays:

Aristotle's *The Poetics*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Alienation Effect*, David Mamet's *Writing in Restaurants*, William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, Carl Gustave Jung's *Psychological Types*, Simon Critchley's *Tragedy, the Greeks, and Us*, Lajos Egri's *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story*, Robert Mckee's *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screen Writing*, Stephen Jeffreys' *Playwriting: Structure, Character, and How and Why to Write*, Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat*.