

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR: THEATRE ALIVE – FALL 2009

Seminar: a group of students studying under a professor with each doing original research and all exchanging results through reports and discussions. (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary)

MWF- 12-12:50

Instructor: Sharon Andrews

Office: 210 Scales Fine Arts Center

759-4377

andrews@wfu.edu

Objective: to strengthen your discussion, writing, analytical, presentation and creative skills. We will use the works of three important contemporary playwrights, John Patrick Shanley, Jose Rivera and Michael Weller as our basic course content. WFU Theatre is producing plays this semester by Rivera and Shanley and one by Weller in the spring, so you will have the opportunity to observe closely the movement of a play from the page to the stage.

Texts:

REFERENCES TO SALVADOR DALI MAKE ME HOT and OTHER PLAYS by Jose Rivera

MARISOL and OTHER PLAYS by Jose Rivera

FIVE PLAYS by Michael Weller

INTRODUCTION TO PLAY ANALYSIS by Cal Printner and Scott E Walters

(There will also be plays by John Patrick Shanley)

Point Values (Based on 1000 points total)

Attendance and Participation (50pts)

One of the most exciting things about a seminar environment is the opportunity for discussion and free exchange of ideas. Your willingness to participate in lively discussions will make this class an engaging learning experience for all of us and will affect your A&P grade.

Thoughtful and enthusiastic contributions to your group projects will also be considered in this grade.

More than two absences will result in a deduction of 10 points per absence from the final grade. If you feel you may have the flu, please visit Student Health immediately and if your illness is confirmed, your necessary absences will be excused and you will be allowed to make up missed work.

ASSIGNMENTS

Production Responses (2 @ 50 = 100 points)

You are required to attend both of the Wake Forest University Department of Theatre and Dance productions this semester and write a 2-3 page typed response paper to both of them. Each paper will address a question that will be given to you by the instructor.

Doubt

by **John Patrick Shanley**

Sept. 25, 26 & Sept 30, Oct. 1-4, 2009

Sonnets for an Old Century

by **Jose Rivera**

Oct. 30, 31 & Nov. 4-8, 2009

Be SURE to clear your schedule so that you can see both of these productions.

Play Responses (5 @ 25 = 125)

For 5 of the plays we read this semester you will be expected to turn in a 1 page typed response. This response will begin with a statement relevant to one of the following four categories: Character, Theme, Plot and World of Play. The paper will then consist of a defense/elaboration of the opening statement using specific references to the play. Each of the 4 categories should be used at least once. You may choose your 5 responses from any of the plays we read this semester.

Examples of opening statements: (Referring to Shakespeare's HAMLET)

CHARACTER: *Hamlet is an indecisive man.*

PLOT: *Shakespeare could not have placed the appearance of old Hamlet's ghost to his son anywhere else in the sequence of events.*

THEME: *Parent/child relationships is a primary theme in HAMLET.*

WORLD OF THE PLAY: *If Hamlet were set in England rather than Denmark, it would be a more powerful play.*

Whether or not your statement is true or I agree with it is not the issue. Your papers will be graded on the extent to which you display a careful reading of the play in your defense of or elaboration on your statement.

Make sure each report identifies the play and to which category your statement is relevant. Reports are due on the first day of discussion for that particular play. No reports will be accepted after the day of discussion.

Report, Oral Presentation and Self Evaluation (100 points - Written Report=50, Oral Report =25, Self Evaluation =25)

Early in the semester topics for short reports will be assigned. The reports will focus on the authors and plays we are reading and other related topics. The written portion of this assignment consists of a 2 page typed double spaced informational report. Each member of the class will present a rehearsed oral presentation of their report working from note cards or an outline. The oral presentations will be 5-6 minutes long. The presentations will be videotaped and placed online where, after an opportunity to review your presentation, you will turn in a self-evaluation.

Staged Readings (25 points)

Readings of scenes from plays on the syllabus will be presented in class. All the scenes must be thoughtfully prepared and rehearsed but each group may decide to what extent they want to actually “stage” the scene.

Student Led Discussions (100 points)

During the course of the semester, with a partner, you will lead one 15-20 minute full class discussion based on your reading assignments or class lectures. 9 topics and the day they are to be discussed will be determined during the 2nd week of the semester. Each date and topic will be assigned arbitrarily (i.e. drawn out of a hat) and you are then free to negotiate and swap with your classmates. Once you have settled on a date and topic, your task is to, with your partner, narrow and research the topic. Then the two of you decide on and write down 5-7 questions relating to your topic that will stimulate a lively class discussion. The two of you will facilitate and moderate the discussion. After each discussion we will take a few minutes as a class, to consider the effectiveness of the discussion. You will be evaluated on:

1. How well you narrow your topic.
2. Depth of understanding of your topic.
3. Whether or not your questions stimulate discussions
4. How well you facilitate and control the discussion

EXAMPLE:

Broad Topic: MOONCHILDREN

Discussion Topic: The Draft

Questions:

1. How were the men in this play affected by the draft?
2. How were the women in this play affected by the draft?
3. Would it have been OK for Bob to go to Canada? Why? Why not?
4. Should the draft be reinstated today?
5. If the draft were to be reinstated what should be considered in relation to drafting women?

****NOTE** You must submit your questions for me to review *at least one class period* before you student led discussion!**

Quizzes (200 points)

There will be a quiz on your text INTRODUCTION TO PLAY ANALYSIS and short quizzes on plays and other assigned readings.

Research Paper (200 points)

There are several ways to approach a research paper. It is most important that you choose a topic that is challenging and of genuine interest to you. The best research papers are narrowly focused. The following options are available to you:

1. Research Paper: Pose a question such as, “What impact has Shanley’s play DOUBT had on contemporary American theatre?” or “What was the critical response to MOONCHILDREN when it was first produced?” and then seek to answer your question by doing research. Your research should involve reading and investigation in a variety of primary and secondary sources.
2. Critical Analysis of One or More Plays: Read and analyze a play script/s by playwrights we are reading this semester. Examples of this type of paper might be “Magical Realism in ‘Marisol’” or “Compare and contrast the theme of honesty in John Patrick Shanley’s DOUBT and Michael Weller’s MOONCHILDREN.” Your research should involve intensive reading of the plays and consultation with relevant critical studies.
3. Research Report: Choose a topic that can be historically and factually researched and report on the details of the subject. For example: A report on the production history of REFERENCES TO SALVADOR DALI MAKE ME HOT. You would be responsible for discovering and reporting on as much information as possible about the various major productions of the play.

Before you start to write you must make a short appointment with me to discuss your topic.

Papers must be 4-5 pages in length, typed (double spaced), documented, and have a bibliography.

I will read and respond to a rough draft of your paper if you turn it in to me no later than two weeks before the paper is due.

I encourage you to use the Writing Center

From the Writing Center website: “The primary purpose of the Writing Center at Wake Forest is to offer students a place where they can discuss their writing and writing processes with trained tutors. Because everyone writes differently, the Writing Center tailors its help to each student’s needs. The Center is staffed by advanced Wake Forest students who act as an audience for students’ writing; they work by asking questions to help students discover what they want to say and if they have effectively communicated what they intended to say. Tutors do not evaluate, correct, or edit student assignments; their main goal is to help students become critical readers of their own writing. Students are encouraged to go to the Center as soon as possible after receiving a writing assignment. Help is provided during every stage of the writing process, including: generating ideas and settling on a topic; organizing ideas in a paper; developing support for arguments; composing more effectively; learning to revise drafts; learning to identify and correct errors in grammar and punctuation. Students may either drop in or make an appointment.”

Research papers are due on **November 23rd**. Late papers will be marked down 20 points.

Final Project (100 points)

The objective of the final project is to create a 10-20 minute “theatrical piece that is inspired by this semester’s readings and discussions.” You may decide to write a scene inspired by Rivera’s use of magical realism or to write a scene with characters based on your own generation or to create more of a performance piece that incorporates music and movement...the possibilities are enormous but the point is that what you create is intended to be performed for an audience in a space that is designated “theatre”.

You will work in 6 groups of 3 people. Division of labor is up to the group but since this is a “group” project, just as theatre is a collaborative art form, the expectation is that responsibilities will be as equal as possible. Some may write; others direct; some choose, gather and record music; others perform and so on. The goal is that everyone’s contributions come together to form a unified theatrical production. Production values, i.e. sets, lights, costumes, etc. will, by necessity, have to be kept to a bare minimum. Great theatre can be, and has been done, on a bare stage with sunlight.

The project will be evaluated on the basis of:

- Imagination
- Care and effort in preparation
- Thoughtful connection to the semester’s work
- And how well it works for an audience

HONOR CODE: You are expected to know and abide by the WFU Honor Code.

FYS100 • The World and Work of August Wilson • TR 1:30P • Fall 2009 • CRN86892

John E. R. Friedenberg, 220 Scales Fine Arts Center • 336-758-5995(office) 336-416-3142 (cell) • jerf@wfu.edu

Office Hours: MWF 9-10; or almost anytime by appointment

Description: Through the lens of August Wilson's plays, students will explore the 20th century African-American experience in the U.S. The focus will be on articulating points of view both orally and in writing, drawing on their own understanding and interpretation as well as informed opinions and factual information from critics, journalists, historians, etc.

Goal: To develop analytic and critical skills through taking and intelligently supporting clear positions or points of view

Content: The reading list includes the following including August Wilson's 20th century play cycle:

- 1900s – “Gem of the Ocean” (2003)
- 1910s – “Joe Turner's Come and Gone” (1984)
- 1920s – “Ma Rainey's Black Bottom” (1982)
- 1930s – “The Piano Lesson”* (1989)
- 1940s – “Seven Guitars” (1995)
- 1950s – “Fences”* (1985)
- 1960s – “Two Trains Running” (1990)
- 1970s – “Jitney” (1983)
- 1980s – “King Hedley II” (2001)
- 1990s – “Radio Golf” (2005)

* received Pulitzer Prize -- These will be read in order of their premiers

Additional reading:

The Ground on Which I Stand (Dramatic Contexts) by August Wilson (2002)

I Ain't Sorry for Nothin' I Done: August Wilson's Process of Playwriting by Joan Herrington (2004)

These will be augmented with essays and articles on the plays, the artists and the times.

- Students will read 10 plays by August Wilson (above) as well as critical essays and other writings on both the plays and their settings.
- Students will be expected to turn in a 1 page typed response to 8 of these plays. These will begin with a statement relevant to one of the following four categories: Character, Theme, Plot and World of Play. The paper will then consist of a defense/elaboration of the opening statement using specific references to the play. Each of the 4 categories should be used at least once. You may choose your 5 responses from any of the plays we read this semester.

Examples of opening statements: (Referring to Shakespeare's HAMLET)

- CHARACTER: *Hamlet is an indecisive man.*
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- THEME: *Parent/child relationships is a primary theme in HAMLET.*
- WORLD OF THE PLAY: *If Hamlet were set in England rather than Denmark, it would be a more powerful play.*

Your papers will be graded on the extent to which you display a careful reading of the play in your defense of or elaboration on your statement. *Make sure you identify the play and to which category your statement is relevant. These are due on the first day of discussion for that particular play and I will not accept late papers*

- Students will have research projects on each of Wilson's four “B's”:

 - The Blues – Bessie Smith, Blind Lemon Jefferson and others
 - Amiri Baraka – Black cultural nationalism
 - Romare Bearden – daily life and symbolic images in African American culture
 - Jorge Luis Borges – mysticism, magical realism, metaphysics

These will be a 10 page report from which a 15-20 minute (powerpoint?) presentation will be made in class.

- Students will be assigned to lead discussions on two of Wilson’s plays. Students will post discussion questions for each of the plays in advance of the presentation. This is done in conjunction with the specific research described below.
- Students assigned to lead a discussion of a play will turn in a 4-6 page paper on the socio-economic and historical circumstances relevant to the specific decade of the African-American experience as addressed by Wilson in the play. These will be presented in class prior to the discussion.
- These assignments will culminate in a final multi-media project: Students will undertake to create a significant presentation combining both dramaturgical research and script analysis to present a context for a selected play. These ‘world of the play’ presentations will include abbreviated script analysis with focus on character and circumstances along with more extensive visual, aural, and chronological research, providing an understanding of the people, places, time, clothing, architecture, politics, and selected world events. (20 minute annotated lecture/powerpoint presentation)

If possible, we will arrange to visit the Mint Museum in Charlotte to see Romare Bearden’s works. I hope to find productions of Wilson’s plays in the area that we can attend as well or to provide an time to watch video of Wilson’s plays. This will obviously happen outside of our scheduled class time.

Evaluation:

Participation/Discussion	10%
Reaction Papers/Responses (8)	15%
Essay/ Student Led Discussion (2)	20%
Research Presentations (2)	20%
‘World of the Play’ Final Project	35%