Course information:
Copy and paste current course information from Class Search/Course Catalog.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Unit</th>
<th>HIDA</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>School of Theatre and Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>THP</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is this a cross-listed course? No
If yes, please identify course(s) ____________________________

Is this a shared course? No
If so, list all academic units offering this course ____________________________

Course description:
Theories, materials, and techniques for facilitating improvisational drama with children and youth in classroom and community settings.

Requested designation: Humanities, Fine Arts and Design-HU

Note: a separate proposal is required for each designation requested

Eligibility:
Permanent numbered courses must have completed the university's review and approval process.
For the rules governing approval of omnibus courses, contact the General Studies Program Office at (480) 965-0739.

Area(s) proposed course will serve:
A single course may be proposed for more than one core or awareness area. A course may satisfy a core area requirement and more than one awareness area requirements concurrently, but may not satisfy requirements in two core areas simultaneously, even if approved for those areas. With departmental consent, an approved General Studies course may be counted toward both the General Studies requirement and the major program of study.

Checklists for general studies designations:
Complete and attach the appropriate checklist
• Literacy and Critical Inquiry core courses (L)
• Mathematics core courses (MA)
• Computer/statistics/quantitative applications core courses (CS)
• Humanities, Fine Arts and Design core courses (HU)
• Social and Behavioral Sciences core courses (SB)
• Natural Sciences core courses (NS/NS)
• Global Awareness courses (G)
• Historical Awareness courses (H)
• Cultural Diversity in the United States courses (C)

A complete proposal should include:
☐ Signed General Studies Program Course Proposal Cover Form
☐ Criteria Checklist for the area
☐ Course Syllabus
☐ Table of Contents from the textbook, and/or lists of course materials

Contact information:
Name: Erika Hughes
Phone: 480-965-2589
Mail code: GHALL 233
E-mail: erika.hughes@asu.edu

Department Chair/Director approval: (Required)

Chair/Director name (Typed): Stephanie Ethridge Woodson
Date: 05/28/2013
Chair/Director (Signature): [Signature]

Rev. 1/94, 4/95, 7/98, 4/00, 1/02, 10/08, 11/11/12/11, 7/12
Course information:
Copy and paste current course information from Class Search/Course Catalog.

Academic Unit
Subject
THP

HIDA

Department
Title
Improvisation with Youth

Units: 3

School of Theatre and Film

Is this a cross-listed course? No
If yes, please identify course(s)

Is this a shared course? No
If so, list all academic units offering this course

Course description:
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Contact information:
Name
Erika Hughes
Phone 480-965-2589

Mail code
GHALL 233
E-mail erika.hughes@asu.edu

Department Chair/Director approval: (Required)
Chair/Director name (Typed): Jake Pinholster
Date:
Chair/Director (Signature):

Rev. 1/94, 4/95, 7/98, 4/00, 1/02, 10/08, 11/11/12/11, 7/12
Arizona State University Criteria Checklist for

HUMANITIES, FINE ARTS AND DESIGN [HU]

Rationale and Objectives

The humanities disciplines are concerned with questions of human existence and meaning, the nature of thinking and knowing, with moral and aesthetic experience. The humanities develop values of all kinds by making the human mind more supple, critical, and expansive. They are concerned with the study of the textual and artistic traditions of diverse cultures, including traditions in literature, philosophy, religion, ethics, history, and aesthetics. In sum, these disciplines explore the range of human thought and its application to the past and present human environment. They deepen awareness of the diversity of the human heritage and its traditions and histories and they may also promote the application of this knowledge to contemporary societies.

The study of the arts and design, like the humanities, deepens the student’s awareness of the diversity of human societies and cultures. The fine arts have as their primary purpose the creation and study of objects, installations, performances and other means of expressing or conveying aesthetic concepts and ideas. Design study concerns itself with material objects, images and spaces, their historical development, and their significance in society and culture. Disciplines in the fine arts and design employ modes of thought and communication that are often nonverbal, which means that courses in these areas tend to focus on objects, images, and structures and/or on the practical techniques and historical development of artistic and design traditions. The past and present accomplishments of artists and designers help form the student’s ability to perceive aesthetic qualities of art work and design.

The Humanities, Fine Arts and Design are an important part of the General Studies Program, for they provide an opportunity for students to study intellectual and imaginative traditions and to observe and/or learn the production of art work and design. The knowledge acquired in courses fulfilling the Humanities, Fine Arts and Design requirement may encourage students to investigate their own personal philosophies or beliefs and to understand better their own social experience. In sum, the Humanities, Fine Arts and Design core area enables students to broaden and deepen their consideration of the variety of human experience.

Revised October 2008
Proposer: Please complete the following section and attach appropriate documentation.

### ASU - [HU] CRITERIA

**HUMANITIES, FINE ARTS AND DESIGN [HU] courses must meet either 1, 2, or 3 and at least one of the criteria under 4 in such a way as to make the satisfaction of these criteria a CENTRAL AND SUBSTANTIAL PORTION of the course content.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Identify Documentation Submitted</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☑</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Emphasize the study of values, of the development of philosophies, religions, ethics or belief systems, and/or aesthetic experience. explanation below &amp; syllabus (attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☑</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Concerns the comprehension and interpretation/analysis of written, aural, or visual texts, and/or the historical development of textual traditions. explanation below, syllabus &amp; course bibliography (attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Concerns the comprehension and interpretation/analysis of material objects, images and spaces, and/or their historical development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. In addition, to qualify for the Humanities, Fine Arts and Design designation a course must meet one or more of the following requirements:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. Concerns the development of human thought, including emphasis on the analysis of philosophical and/or religious systems of thought.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Concerns aesthetic systems and values, literary and visual arts.</td>
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<td>c. Emphasizes aesthetic experience in the visual and performing arts, including music, dance, theater, and in the applied arts, including architecture and design. explanation below &amp; syllabus (attached)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. Deepen awareness of the analysis of literature and the development of literary traditions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE:

- Courses devoted primarily to developing a skill in the creative or performing arts, including courses that are primarily studio classes in the Herberger College of the Arts and in the College of Design.

- Courses devoted primarily to developing skill in the use of a language. **However, language courses that emphasize cultural study and the study of literature can be allowed.**

- Courses which emphasize the acquisition of quantitative or experimental methods.

- Courses devoted primarily to teaching skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria (from checksheet)</th>
<th>How course meets spirit (contextualize specific examples in next column)</th>
<th>Please provide detailed evidence of how course meets criteria (i.e., where in syllabus)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Students in this course learn about dramatic structure in order to facilitate the aesthetic learning of others. Facilitating artists need a higher understanding of aesthetic philosophies. Assignments to support this learning include an analytic essay of a theatrical performance for young audiences by a professional children’s theatre company, as well as readings that explore questions of ethics and power in drama and performance. Students engage in facilitated discussions analyzing and evaluating the aesthetic structures created in class. These assignments and discussions culminate in a final synthesis essay that requires students to reflect and defend their own aesthetic philosophies.</td>
<td>Syllabus pages 3 &amp; 4 (see: &quot;Performance review,&quot; &quot;Synthesis essay and course notebook&quot;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Students are required to read and critically respond to two texts (from an extensive bibliography) that theorize drama and performance with youth. These assignments require students to reflect on and react to different philosophies of performance, definitions of drama and childhood, and the role of theatre in western society. In learning about the aesthetic qualities of the “Story Drama” genre, students are also required to analyze the process by which a work of children’s literature can be transformed into a work of improvisational performance for youth. In order to be able to manipulate narrative structures, students must develop an advanced</td>
<td>Syllabus pages 2 &amp; 3 (see: &quot;Literature reviews&quot;), attached bibliography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4c.</td>
<td>Theatre is inherently an embodied practice that by its very nature manipulates time and space. This focus on embodied aesthetics is reinforced by reading selections that consider the history of communication through physical and visual elements such as tableaux in drama. Classroom discussions encourage students to analyze and deconstruct student-generated dramatic images to explore visual representations of power, particularly as it relates to ethnicity, race, class, gender and nationality, as well as the culturally specific nature of interpersonal relationships and notions of behavior.</td>
<td>Syllabus pages 5-8 (see: readings from Tennyson, van de Water, Bolton, Goldberg, Ferrari, Zatzman).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THP 311: Improvisation with Youth  
Spring 2013  10:30 – 11:45 MW  FAC 131

Professor: Dr. Erika Hughes (erika.hughes@asu.edu)  
Office: Dixie Gammage Hall 223  
Office hours: 12-1 pm MW (or by appointment – schedule by email)  
Graduate Assistants: Miranda Giles & Lindsay McEuen  
(Miranda.Giles@asu.edu, Lindsay.McEuen@asu.edu)

Course Description: Basic materials, techniques, and theories for facilitating improvisational drama with children and youth.

In this course, we will learn how to create and devise drama sessions that we will in turn lead to classmates and to children. We will work as a group to support and mentor one another as we experiment with different dramatic teaching methods and techniques. Students must be committed to aesthetic exploration, experimentation, and discovery throughout the semester. You will be asked to consistently reflect on your own practice as you develop your own drama sessions and styles.

Class time will consist of three central areas of activity: readings that we will discuss together, practical training that we will reflect on as a group, and finally the drama activities that we will facilitate and experience with one another.

Primary Course Objectives:  
To develop the drama teacher’s skill set and knowledge base by:  
  a. devising session designs and curricula for elementary, middle, and junior high school drama programs and young people from diverse backgrounds, in accordance with Arizona Standards in Theatre and other subject areas;  
  b. facilitating drama with grades K-8 youth through classroom fieldwork;  
  c. fostering critical awareness of the aesthetic, theoretical, and methodological considerations inherent to drama in education.

Required Texts:  

One additional text for your text report from the attached bibliography (most of which are available in the Child Drama Collection or general stacks of Hayden Library).

Required Performance:  
Students will be required to view ONE of the following two shows at Childsplay in Tempe:  
Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type by James Grote, music by George Howe, adapted from the book by Doreen Cronin, running through March 3, OR  
Boats by Finegan Kruckemeyer, running March 30-31.
Online Component:
This course is on Blackboard. Announcements, additional course readings, and supplementary materials will be regularly updated on Blackboard.

Additional Required Web Site Access:
Arizona Theatre Standards Website:
http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/arts/revised/Theatre.pdf

Attendance and Participation:
This is a studio course, and your continuous presence, timeliness, and readiness to engage with the material and with others are essential to your success in this class. As you will be working in groups to devise lessons plans for young people, you will be called upon to contribute as a team member with your fellow co-teachers.

Please note that cell phone use is forbidden in class. Please completely silence all phones (do not set to vibrate) and leave in your bag (not in your pocket).

Attendance is mandatory. Please clear all anticipated absences in advance with me by the second session and notify me of medical emergencies as soon as possible. You are permitted three absences; beginning with the fourth absence, your grade will be lowered. If you must be absent from class due to religious holidays or university-sanctioned events, please inform me of these dates as soon as possible; these absences will not affect your final grade. Note that three tardies = one absence. Being absent on a day when you are scheduled to present will result in a grade of F for that assignment.

Please let me know if you have specific needs or issues that may affect your ability to participate (such as an early pregnancy, a sensory or hidden disability, etc.). It is my aim to make this course as inclusive as possible, and I appreciate your communication.

Artistry and Citizenship:
The arts require intrinsic motivation and self-discipline for successful work. Artistry consists of the affective contributions you demonstrate during class time. This includes such attitudes and actions as: a positive work ethic, risk-taking, commitment to the ideas enacted during drama demonstrations, openness to learning, focus, courtesy, and other comparable ways of working. The citizenship component of your participation includes such behaviors as: respect and support for others; providing honest, constructive, and thoughtful feedback to classmates; and participating fully in peer-facilitated activities. These are admittedly subjective areas to assess, but will be based on frequent observations of your in-class work.

Assignments:
Daily reflection cards. At the end of every class session, you will reflect on the work done in writing on a 3x5 in. notecard to be handed in. This is your personal space to ask questions, make additional critiques, and engage textually with the critical questions being asked throughout this course.

Literature reviews (2). Choose two books to review from the attached syllabus. Read each book you are reviewing in its entirety before composing your review. Reviews should be approximately 1000 words (four pages) long. They should be written in the style of an academic
journal review.
Book reviews should typically cover the following five areas:
What?
Provide full bibliographic information, including: author, title, publisher, and publication date.
Why?
Why did the author write what he or she wrote? Explain the author’s approach to the subject matter. Articulate the subject matter as the author defines it (theatre for youth, applied theatre, community theatre) and then restate the author’s perspective and his or her relevant argument(s). Use examples from the text.
How?
How did the author form the arguments put forth in the book? What is the author’s methodological approach? How does he or she define and explain this approach, and how is it subsequently employed throughout the book?
Who?
Who is the intended audience for this book? How does the author define his or her audience, and how does he or she then subsequently tailor the writing to said audience? If applicable, who else do you think would be a good potential readership for this book?
You?
What is your personal reaction to the text? Do you believe the author succeeds or fails in his or her aims as stated? Explain why and support your analysis with examples from the text.

Performance review. After viewing one of the two possible productions at Childsplay, write a review of the performance that is approximately 1000 words (four pages) long. Additional material pertaining to reviewing performances for young audiences will be covered in late March.

Facilitation of a starter activity. Each student will be asked to lead one “starter activity” – a movement/dialogue activity based on the activities in Theater Games for the Classroom or Unscripted Learning. Each starter activity should be scripted; your written work will be circulated to the class on the day the activity is led. Do not merely repeat the activity as presented in the source text, but write it out in your own words. Add material to the starter activity – a theme, other actions, etc. Students are graded on both the completion of their activity and the quality of your reflections. As I encourage you to try new things, you are not penalized when something simply “doesn’t work.” Instead, we will reflect on the activity as a group, followed by your individual written reflection on your process and experience.

Session plans #1 & 2. Working individually, students will devise session plans for a story drama and a process drama. Additional specific information to guide students as they craft their dramas will be covered throughout the semester. These session designs will be presented to and discussed by the class.

Session plan #3. Working in groups, students will devise a drama session that they will subsequently enact with children. Additional specific information to guide students as they craft their sessions will be covered throughout the semester. I, along with the graduate assistants, will lead the initial drama with young people; subsequent sessions will be led by student groups. The written session designs are due in class on Monday before the lesson is taught on Wednesday.

Reflections. After leading starter activities and drama sessions, each student will write a substantial reflection of his or her work to be turned in during the following week. The
evaluation should address each student’s experience in devising a drama throughout the semester. Questions to address can include, but are not limited to: What do you consider to be your major accomplishments in devising these sessions? What were the most difficult moments you had throughout the devising process? How would you assess your communication with the students? How did your process evolve between the two sessions? Which elements of the devising process would you use in the creation of a later drama? What would you do differently?

**Synthesis essay and course notebook.** This class is graded, in part, on your development as a teaching artist. Throughout the semester you should retain all graded material that is returned to you. On the final day of class, turn in all materials in a binder, arranged chronologically, accompanied by a 1000-1250 word synthesis essay asking you to reflect critically on your work (readings, design, facilitation) throughout the semester.

All written assignments are to be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman size 12 font, with one-inch margins left, right, top, and bottom, and printed. If you don’t already have one, I strongly suggest you purchase the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research. All papers must follow the MLA format.

Students are responsible for keeping up with due dates for assignments. Late work will be penalized by one letter grade for each additional calendar day past the due date. **I cannot accept assignments via email.**

**Grading:**

Participation, daily reflection cards, artistry, and commitment: 10%
Literature reviews (10% each): 20%
 Performance review: 10%
 Starter activity – design, facilitation and reflection: 15%
 Session designs #1 & 2 – design (7.5% each): 15%
 Session design #3 – design, facilitation and reflection: 20%
 Final synthesis essay and course notebook: 10%

Grades are assigned as follows:
--An **A** will be given to work of superior quality: insightful, thoughtful, and reflective. Ideas are strong and clear. The writer’s voice is present and shows an intense level of engagement with both the material and the reader. This level of work is often the product of pushing oneself to the limit of one’s abilities.
--A **B** will be given to work that is good: interesting, well written and deliberate, with a specific point of view and few mechanical errors.
--A **C** will be given to work that is standard. Ideas are clear and supported by evidence. Organization allows the reader to follow the text easily with smooth transitions. Some mechanical errors may be present, but they do not affect the reading of the text.
--A **D** will be given to work that falls below the standard of the course. Mechanical errors and lack of structure affect the reading of the text. Ideas may be present but are not supported by evidence. Word choice is vague, and the writer does not appear to be engaged with the material or the reader.
--An **F** will be given to work that does not fulfill the assignment, is incoherent, or incomplete.
Course schedule:

Week 1:

Monday 7 Jan.
Introduction to course materials & concepts

Wednesday 9 Jan.
Watch: Fred Rodgers video, TED talk (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Memory, real life & imagination, childhood.

Week 2:

Monday 14 Jan.
*Sign-ups for starter activities*
Reading: Heinig, “Introduction,” “Creative Drama Instruction: Some Basics” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: What are we doing when we do drama with young people?

Wednesday 16 Jan.
Reading: Tennyson, “Creative Drama,” van de Water, “Integrating Drama” (Blackboard)
*Unscripted Learning* pp.1-27
Practice/Discussion: The arts and your brain, learning theories through our ages, improvisation and devising.

Week 3:

Monday 21 Jan.
Classes excused – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Wednesday 23 Jan.
*Student-facilitated starter activities*
Reading: Rohd, “Facilitation” (Blackboard)
*Unscripted Learning* 28-31
*Theater Games for the Classroom* 2-22
Practice/Discussion: Improvisation and devising (continued), building a community in the classroom, facilitation.

Week 4:

Monday 28 Jan.
*Student-facilitated starter activities, cont.*
Reading: Metz, “Top Twelve Tips” (Blackboard)

Wednesday 30 Jan.
*Student-facilitated starter activities, cont.*

Week 5:
Monday 4 Feb.
Reading: Heinig, “Story Dramatization” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Story Drama

Wednesday 6 Feb.
Reading: “Drama Lesson Plan Outline Guide,” “Techniques for Drama Improvisations’ (Blackboard)
_Theater Games for the Classroom_, 150-167
Practice/Discussion: Performing narratives

Week 6:

Monday 11 Feb.
_Session Plan #1 – Story Drama due_
Practice/Discussion: Demos; Narrative and the devising process

Wednesday 13 Feb.
Reading: Bolton, “Two Kinds of Dramatic Activity in the Classroom” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Illustrating an idea: the power of demonstrating

Week 7:

Monday 18 Feb.
_Book Review #1 Due_
Practice/Discussion: Theory, art, praxis: Adaptations for our own work in the classroom

Wednesday 20 Feb.
Reading: Reading: _Unscripted Learning_ 62-68, 94-98, 124-128
Practice/Discussion: Content and drama

Week 8:

Monday 25 Feb.
Watch: _Three Looms Waiting_ (available on reserve in the Child Drama Collection at Hayden Library, also available online – links to be sent via Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Process Drama

Wednesday 27 Feb.
Reading: Bolton, “Teacher as Fellow Artist – Working from Inside the Drama” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Teachers in Roles, Students as Experts

**Required performance: LAST WEEKEND to see Click Clack Moo at Childsplay (Closes March 3)**

Week 9:

Monday 4 Mar.
_Session Plan #2 – Process Drama due_
Practice/Discussion: Demos; Process drama and our roles-in-role
Wednesday 6 Mar.
Reading: Morgan & Saxton, “Well, If I Called the Wrong Number, Why Did You Answer the Phone?” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Facilitating reflection – asking the right questions

Week 10:

Monday 11 Mar.
Classes excused - Spring Break

Wednesday 13 Mar.
Classes excused - Spring Break

Week 11:

Monday 18 Mar.
Group work on Session Plan #3

Wednesday 20 Mar.
Group work on Session Plan #3

Week 12:

Monday 25 Mar.
_Book Review #2 Due_
Practice/Discussion: Theory, art praxis: different sources, different styles

Wednesday 27 Mar.
Reading: Goldberg, “The Theatre Product in Relation to Teaching Dramatic Process” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Session with children facilitated by Erika, Miranda & Lindsay

March 30-31: Required performance, _Boats_, at Childsplay

Week 13:

Monday 1 Apr.
Reading: Ayling, “Caving with Infants,” Gallas, “Arts as Epistemology” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: The next steps – multi-session dramas

Wednesday 3 Apr.
_Session Plan #3 – Group 1_

Week 14:

Monday 8 Apr.
_Performance Review Due_
Practice/Discussion: Defining theatre, drama, participant, audience member
Wednesday 10 Apr.
Session Plan #3 – Group 2

Week 15:

Monday 15 Apr.
Reading: Ferrari, “Ethics in Theatre/Drama Education,” Zatzman, “Drama Education and Memory” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: Ethical considerations of drama

Wednesday 17 Apr.
Session Plan #3 – Group 3

Week 16:

Monday 22 Apr.
Reading: McLauchlan, “What Makes A Great High School Drama Teacher?” (Blackboard)
Practice/Discussion: How do we define ourselves as teaching artists?

Wednesday 24 Apr.
Session Plan #3 – Group 4

Week 17:
Monday 29 Apr.
Synthesis Essay and Course Notebook due
Have a lovely summer!

Important additional notes:

The Course Withdrawal Deadline: March 31, 2013. If you wish to withdraw from this course, it is your responsibility to do so. Course registration changes are processed through My ASU: http://my.asu.edu

Instructor’s Withdrawal Option: The instructor has the option, under university policy, to initiate a student withdrawal from the course for non-attendance, or if she feels the student is disruptive or detrimental to creating a positive and respectful educational environment in the class.

All necessary and appropriate sanctions will be issued to all parties involved with plagiarizing any and all course work. Plagiarism and any other form of academic dishonesty in violation of the Student Code of Conduct will not be tolerated. Students that engage in academic dishonesty will be subject to assignment and course failure on these grounds. For more information, please see the ASU Student Academic Integrity Policy: http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/studentlife/judicial/academic_integrity.htm

ABOR Resolution: In the wake of the incidents at Penn State, The Arizona Board of Regents reaffirms its commitment to safety on our campuses. Our policies prohibit intimidation, harassment, threats, and acts of violence. All incidents and allegations of violent or threatening
conduct must be immediately reported to law enforcement. We are resolved that there will be zero tolerance of abusive and violent conduct at Arizona’s Universities.

To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact the ASU Disability Resource Center (http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc/#; Phone: (480) 965-1234; TDD: (480) 965-9000). This is a very important step as accommodations may be difficult to make retroactively. If you have a letter from ASU Disability Resource Center’s office indicating that you have a disability which requires academic accommodations—in order to assure that you receive your accommodations in a timely manner—please present this documentation to me no later than the end of the first week of the semester so that your needs can be addressed effectively.

The instructor reserves the right to modify, change, or reschedule any aspect of this syllabus at any point during the semester based upon her professional judgment.
Erika Hughes
erika.hughes@asu.edu

THP 311 Bibliography

Note: I also welcome suggestions of other books for review; please see me with the title and publication information for approval.


UNSCRIPTED LEARNING

Using Improv Activities Across the K-8 Curriculum

CARRIE LOBMAN
MATTHEW LUNDQUIST

Teachers College Press
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York and London
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General Studies "Hu" Supplemental Materials – Criterion 1

The following handout, "How to review a play," taken from the University of Wisconsin Writer’s Handbook, is representative of the supporting materials students will be assigned to read alongside their writing assignments. Online: http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/PlayReview.html
How to review a play

Preparing to Write a Play Review

- Preparing to Write a Play Review
- Writing the Review

Preparing to Write a Play Review

Below are some tips to help you prepare to write a play review:

- The Nature of the Assignment
- Before You Attend the Production
- Attending the Production

The Nature of the Assignment

Because the performance of any play is such an ephemeral experience, writing a play review can be an exciting, though difficult, task. You have to be both spectator taking in and enjoying the performance and critical analyst of the production itself. You have to be able to provide a very brief summary of the play, a close objective analysis of the performance you attend, and an interpretation and evaluation of the entire ensemble of staging, acting, directing, and so on.

The review assignment asks you to analyze in an objective manner the relative success or failure of a given production. Note that you are not asked simply to summarize the plot or give an opinion regarding the text of the play being mounted; your review must be grounded in the production itself. Your job is to describe the production accurately, and then to render a value judgment of it based upon what you have seen and what you expected. The assignment will test your skill as a reader of the play and as an observer and critic of the production.

In addition to grounding your review on the production you witness, you must be careful to limit your review to a few essential observations in support of your thesis (which will be discussed below). You must concentrate on a few important ideas and aspects of the production and focus your attention on only what you consider the most significant parts of the production itself. Unlike a newspaper review, which can be loosely structured and superficial, your assignment is quite definite. You are not asked to cover a wide variety of production elements (i.e., performance of every actor, every costume change, every set change, every directorial decision, and so on); instead, the assignment demands that you develop a few key ideas in thoughtful detail.

Remember, too, that your stance is to be objective and critical, not impressionistic and merely nasty. A critic is not someone who simply "criticizes," but a person who studies, analyzes, and then renders a rational judgment of what he/she has seen. Your tone will be very important in making your review reliable and intelligent.
Before You Attend the Production

Read the play before going to the production. (It is important to be prepared for the production you plan to attend; otherwise, you run the risk of having to see it several times.)

- In your mind, have a good sense of how a "standard" production might look, complete with a sense of what the characters might look like, the type of costuming that might be used, a suitable set design, and an appropriate rendering of the theme and tone of the work.

- Pick out, as you read, several critical or problematic points within the play that may be of particular interest to watch for in the production you are about to attend. If your instructor has asked you to pay particular attention to certain elements, make sure that you are prepared to recognize them in performance.

Attending the Production

Attend the play with an open mind, a willingness to accept the play as the director has presented it in production.

- Note any deviations from your concept of a "standard" production and try to find a good explanation for that deviation. (Is the director trying to "say" something new or different? Was your sense of the play somehow inaccurate, or were you shown new insights by the director's production?)

- You may want to consider some of the following:
  - Why the choice of costumes, and why the set design?
  - How did the actors deliver their lines (seriously, comically, realistically, formally)? Were there any significant actions or gestures that contributed to the play's meaning?
  - Were any "special effects" utilized (consider lighting, sound, audience participation, machinery)?
  - Were any significant cuts made in the script?

After the performance, jot down the details you recall and talk about the performance with friends. You'll need these details for your paper in order to substantiate your argument.

Evaluate the performance.

- Did the director miss any important opportunities to convey something you were able to see in your reading of the play?
- Would you have liked to have seen more attention paid to what you perceived as critical passages, passages the director seemed less interested in?
- Why would you have preferred this attention, and why do you think the director avoided giving the passage such attention?

Consider the following practical aspects:

- What kind of stage does the director have at his disposal? What kinds of restrictions does the stage impose on the director concerning movement and set design?
- Are the actors professionals, amateurs, or students? What restrictions does this impose on the director? Are the actors capable of dealing with the script's requirements? (Be fair to the actors in your assessment of their talents and the level of their "craftsmanship.")

Writing the Review
Below are some tips for writing play reviews:

- Writing the Introduction
- Writing the Statement and Summary
- Writing the Body of the Paper: The Review
- Writing the Summary and Conclusion

Writing the Introduction

The introduction should include the following:

- The title of the play, the name of the playwright, and any pertinent historical information regarding them (other similar works from this period? by this writer?).
- The name of the director, the place and date of the production you attended, and the name of the production company (again, do you know of any previous work by this company? this director?).
- The thesis of your review, which should include (possibly in more than a single statement) the following:
  - A general impression of the relative success or failure of the production, based on what you actually saw and on your initial impression of how the play should have been performed.

(Note that even if the production did not exactly coincide with your own conception of the play, you should not feel obliged to condemn the performance outright. Be open-minded and willing to weigh pros and cons.)

Examples:

<table>
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<th>Papp's production of Lear captured all the horror of a world where love can't be counted on and where life is nasty, brutish, and appallingly short.</th>
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<td>Smith's You Can't Take It With You made me sympathize with the notion that freedom must permit eccentricity and even, to a point, endorse it. Without that sympathy, the play would have been reduced to pure chaos and would have failed to portray an American ideal of freedom.</td>
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(This thesis suggests that "sympathy" was the director's intention. Note also that the reviewer gives a strong indication of what he/she expected to find in the production.)

- Since you will not be expected to discuss all aspects of the production, focus your thesis on one or two major concerns that the performance has or has not addressed. Read your assignment carefully to find out which aspects of the performance are to be emphasized in your review.

Example:

| In You Can't Take It With You, the acting by the family members on the open, exposed stage displayed an innocent and vigorous freedom, as well as a proud independence in their confrontation with accepted norms of behavior. |

Writing the Statement and Summary

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/PlayReview.html
Include a brief thematic summary (but not a plot summary) of the play, and support that summary with concrete evidence from the text.

You can include this summary in the introduction; or, if you wish to expand the summary, include it in a separate paragraph following the introduction.

Writing the Body of the Paper: The Review

Remember that in the body of the paper you are obliged to deal specifically with each element of the production that you mentioned in the introduction and thesis.

In order to give your review a tight internal logic and cohesiveness, you should also discuss these elements in the order that you outlined in the introduction. Such points of discussion might include the non-technical (acting, directing) and/or the technical (lighting, scenery, costumes) aspects of the production.

For each element that you discuss:

- **Describe:** In as brief and precise a manner as possible, describe in detail the physical aspects of what you saw performed. Keep in mind at all times that whatever you include must in some way contribute to the assertion you made in your introduction and thesis. Focus on particular scenes or performances that will provide the evidence for your final evaluation of the play.

  Example:

  The tempest scene in *Lear* utilized a particularly hostile set in order to universalize the suffering depicted throughout the play. The lights were dimmed and the backdrop was flat black. Against this backdrop were propped, in no particular order, seven skulls that looked out over the events to come.

  (Note the vivid description of what was seen, and the use of detail to convey that vividness. The passage will work nicely as evidence for an overall, positive evaluation of the production.)

- **Interpret, Analyze, Evaluate:** This part of the paper requires the most thought and organization and consequently receives the most attention from your reader. After you have finished describing important elements of the production, proceed to evaluate them.

  For example, you would need to answer the following questions regarding the last description of *Lear*:
  - Why were the lights dimmed at the beginning of the scene? (shock effect? slow unfolding of horror?)
  - Why was the backdrop painted black? (contrast? mood?)
  - Why was there no order to the skulls? Why seven? (emblem of disorder or chaos? significance in number?)

  In other words, assume that everything used in production has significance, but don't panic if you cannot find "answers" for all the questions raised by what you see in the production.

  In the evaluation, you are given the opportunity to attack as well as commend the performance; if the production fails to answer questions that you feel need answers, then say so. If the question or problems are relatively minor, ignore them. Don't quibble at the expense of missing the more important concerns.

Writing the Summary and Conclusion

Your conclusion should not merely recapitulate your thesis in a mechanical
way.

Rather, you should try to show why your response to the play is valid and significant, based on what you have described in the body of the paper.

Do not add any significant new material, but don’t be afraid to leave your reader with something to think about.

For further information you may wish take the Writing Center workshop entitled Literary Analysis?: No Problem!. 

Contact Us

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Feedback, questions or accessibility issues

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