

TA-145-1 Writing for Performance
Instructor: Diana Small
Spring 2021

Class Time

Location

Office Hours: By appointment

Before we dive-in to the technical nature of a course syllabus, I want to express how honored I am to share space with you. Creating art is one of the greatest practices to our survival; it is thrilling, embarrassing, intimate, catalytic, generous and an excellent way to spend what time we are given. There are too many intersections between the collaborative nature of art-making and the story of The Last Supper to contain in a paragraph. Thank you for sharing your personhood, known and unknown, with me and with your classmates. I desire to respect you on your artistic journey and I hope you will respect me and your classmates, too.

Course Description

This course satisfies two General Education Learning Outcomes: 1) *Common Inquiry: Reading Imaginative Literature* and 2) *Common Skills: Writing Intensive*.

Common Inquiry: Reading Imaginative Literature

Students who take a course in "Writing for Performance" will (at the end of the course) have read and discussed 5 full-length plays by contemporary U.S. theatre professionals and at least 8 new imaginative works by classmates. Students will have developed skills to discern tone, plot, comedy, tragedy, irony and character in the play form. Students will be skilled in reading and interpreting dialogue, distinguishing it from stage direction and the moments of silence in a drama. Students will distinguish the narrative structural scope of plays, whether that be the epic, living-room drama, immersive, or an experimental form, understanding its historical context and imaginative impact. Students will build a library of plays and other experimental writings-for-performance by authors from a diversity of racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Students will be able to think critically about the authors' contexts and respond with empathic depth to the question, "Why this play *now* and *how*?"

The specific student learning outcomes for *GE Common Inquiry: Reading Imaginative Literature* are:

1. [Theatre Arts] Students will be able to comprehend and interpret imaginative works for performance grasping not only the narrative, themes and genre(s) a play expresses, but *how* the play achieves that end; students will demonstrate the ability to read imaginative literature to support their own theatre-making practice.

2. [Liberal Arts] Students will be able to comprehend and interpret imaginative works for performance grasping not only the narrative, themes and genre(s) a play expresses, but *how* the play achieves that end; Students will be able to articulate and demonstrate how reading imaginative texts for performance enriches their liberal arts education and their particular vocational discernment process.

Common Skills: Writing Intensive

Students who take a course in the "Writing for Performance" will (at the end of the course) have written weekly reflections on readings, weekly 1-page creative writing drills, and three larger pieces of creative work consisting of at least 25 pages that will be developed over the course of the semester. Students will distinguish the multitude of performance-based writing genres that are possible including plays, solo-shows, stand-up comedy, speeches, rituals and hybrid performance-based events. Students will build a catalogue of writing-based exercises to strengthen their abilities to write for spoken-word and time-based events, having practiced writing exercises throughout the semester. Students will be able to articulate the value of revision, receiving and offering critique, and writing with close attention to grammar, syntax and page layout. Students will distinguish their particular writing style, voice and how to write in the voice of characters. Students will develop the ability to integrate their particular theological/existential questions with writing imaginatively for performance.

The specific student learning outcomes for *GE Common Skills: Writing Intensive* are:

1. [Theatre Arts] Students will write creative work that demonstrates an awareness to narrative, character, dialogue, genre, theme, form and live-performance, equipping them to contribute original works to the U.S. American theatre community.
2. [Liberal Arts] Students will write creative work that demonstrates an awareness to narrative, character, dialogue, genre, theme, form and live-performance, equipping them to apply the course's writing practices to their particular vocational context.

By the end of this course you will have practiced...

- Composing and developing your plays and other writings-for-performance from the angles of time, events, places, characters and major dramatic questions.
- Writing poetically with an attention to spoken language and off-the-page interpretation.
- Listening to your prophetic voice to create worlds and characters and thematic questions that are destined to emerge from you.
- Responding to the work of other artists with intention, curiosity and courage.
- Reading, watching and seeking-out theatre and performance-based arts of all sorts.

What Class Looks Like

This is a 3-hour course that meets weekly. We will balance the class-time between sharing our original work, discussing assigned readings/videos/podcasts and collaborating on play-making. Please come prepared with your Weekly Practice and Reflections (see below) printed so that we can dive-in with vigor. We will rotate students sharing drafts of their larger projects the second half of the semester, but you are expected to begin working on them straight away. The week before you share, bring enough copies of your project for every student and the instructor to have a copy so we can make notes on it as we read it in preparation for the next week. If you post your project to Canvas by Tuesday at midnight, the instructor can have those copies made for you.

Readings to Acquire

Imogen Says Nothing, Aditi Brennan Kapil (full-length play)

An Octoroon, Branden Jacob-Jenkins (full-length play)

Sojourners, Mfoniso Udofia (full-length play)

How I Learned to Drive, Paula Vogel (full-length play)

Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy, Judd Apatow (collection of interviews)

The Immeasurable Want of Light, Daaimah Mubashshir (full-length play)

Attendance

We meet once a week. *Every* class counts. In this course, we are going to learn many fundamentals to narrative, character, plot and dialogue; every class really will support the learning for the next one. College Policy allows 2 excused absences. For every absence (excused or unexcused) beyond that, your final grade will be lowered 1/3 (ie: A- to B+, C to C-).

Office Hours

I am available to meet by appointment. Please email me and we will work out a time.

Projects and Grading

Weekly Practices - 20%

These are creative writing exercises that will build muscle. These will never be more than 1 page. You will be assigned these weekly and expected to bring 2 printed copies to class (one for you to reference and one for the instructor). We will share them during class so we can learn from each other and delight each other with fresh art. Bringing your weekly practice to class incorporates how participation & discussion factor into your grade.

Reflections on Readings, Videos and Podcasts – 20%

You will bring your curiosities from the readings/videos/podcasts for class discussion. This will look like a printed page that has an excerpt of the material and then no more than a paragraph of written reflection that responds to that excerpt (something you want us to wrestle with

alongside you). Imagine you have encountered something provocative and then you get to meet-up with other artists and talk about it. That's our real lives happening every Wednesday! Bringing your reflection to class incorporates how participation & discussion factor into your grade.

Projects – 60%

You will focus on writing three works. You will propose to the instructor what you want those three projects to be and how you want to distribute the 60% of the grade. For example, you may want all three projects to be 20% and work on them with equal attention. Or, you may want to dabble in two forms for 10% each and then focus more intently on one project for 40%. The three works can be formally similar (for example, three one-act plays), but why not explore different modes of writing for performance? Stand-up comedy! A one-act in verse! A sermon! A guerilla performance for 100 gorillas! These projects will be shared throughout the semester, but you will submit all three at the end of the course to be graded as your final for the course.

Fringe Festival

In lieu of making participation in Fringe Festival a percentage of your course grade, I offer another incentive for you to integrate Fringe into class. Throughout the semester there will be opportunities for you to “claim time” during class to utilize your classmates and the nature of the course to work on your Fringe piece. For example, you may want to “claim time” to have a scene read and get feedback. Perhaps you want to “claim time” to rehearse a piece of a solo-show you are working on for Fringe. Perhaps you need to “claim time” to ask for help in addressing a challenge in rehearsal. The amount of time you can claim will vary on the week and we will collaborate together on this element of the course.

Schedule

Week 1 – Course Intro

Week 2 – Identity & Performance

Read before class: Pgs. 75-100 “Of Identity,” *Sensuous Knowledge*, Minna Salami

Watch before class: [‘What To The Slave Is The Fourth Of July?’: Descendants Read Frederick Douglass' Speech \(produced by NPR\)](#)

Watch before class: [How Depression Led to Stand-up Comedy](#), Aparna Nancherla

Watch before class: [We're Gonna Die](#), Young Jean Lee (first 11 and a half minutes)

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection from reading or videos

Practice to bring to class: Monologue for yourself to perform to begin the performance that is this spring semester.

Week 3 – Worlds, Environment & Historical Moment

Read before class: *Imogen Says Nothing*, Aditi Brennan Kapil

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of *Imogen Says Nothing*

Practice to bring to class: 3 plays proposals for adaptations of canonical stories

Week 4 – Inner Worlds and Imagination

Listen to before class: *On Being: Kevin Kling—The Losses and Laughter We Grow Into* (podcast)

Listen to before class: *The Way of Love with Bishop Michael Curry: “Praying with Our Bodies and Our Creativity”*

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection from either podcast.

Practice to bring to class: List-poem of questions & images you have to God/the World/Yourself

Week 5 – Action

Read before class: *An Octoroon*, Branden Jacob-Jenkins

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of *An Octoroon*

Practice to bring to class: 4, unique A-B-A “microplays”

Example: Character A: The house is on fire.

Character B: I can’t get pregnant.

Character A: Come meet your daughter.

Week 6 – Action Round 2

Read before class: *Sojourners*, Mfoniso Udofia

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection from *Sojourners*

Practice to bring to class: 7-Cs for one of the play proposals from Week 3

Project(s) Proposal due today

Week 7 – Time

Read before class: *How I Learned to Drive*, Paula Vogel

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection on *How I Learned to Drive*

Practice to bring to class: 7-page play of the play proposal from Week 6

Week 8 – Stand-Up Comedy

Read before class: Pgs. 105-109 “The Short Happy Recent History of the Rape Joke,” *The Mother of All Questions*, Rebecca Solnit

Read before class: “[Rape Joke](#),” Patricia Lockwood

Listen before class: *You Made It Weird: Rhonda V. Magee* (podcast)

Watch before class: *My Next Guest Needs No Introduction: Dave Chapelle* (Netflix)

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection from either podcast or video

Practice to bring to class: “Cosmic joke” 1-page creative essay.

Spring Break

Week 9 – Stand-Up Comedy Continued

Read before class: Select 2 interviews from *Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy*, Judd Apatow

Watch before class: [White Women Talking About Feminism](#), Dulcé Sloan

Watch before class: [I am a Raccoon](#), Maria Bamford

Watch before class: The New One, Mike Birbiglia (Netflix)

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection from any video

Practice to bring to class: 1-3 minutes of stand-up material

Week 10 – Experimental Genres

Read before class: *The Immeasurable Want of Light*, Daaimah Mubashshir

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of *The Immeasurable Want of Light*

Practice to bring to class: Experimental re-telling of your spring break

*Week 11 Student-Shares submit pages for next week on Canvas

Week 11 – Workshop

Reading for class: 2-3 Students' "Projects"

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of Students' pages

Practice to bring to class: None; report progress on your Project(s)

*Week 12 Student-Shares submit pages for next week on Canvas

Week 12 – Workshop

Reading for class: 2-3 Students' "Projects"

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of Students' pages

Practice to bring to class: None; report progress on your Project(s)

*Week 13 Student-Shares submit pages for next week on Canvas

Week 13 – Workshop

Reading for class: 2-3 Students' "Projects"

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of Students' pages

Practice to bring to class: None; report progress on your Project(s)

*Week 14 Student-Shares submit pages for next week on Canvas

Week 14 – Workshop

Reading for class: 2-3 Students' "Projects"

Reflection to bring to class: Excerpt and paragraph-long reflection of Students' pages

Practice to bring to class: None; report progress on your Project(s)

May 3-6 Final Exam Week

Project(s) Due!

Phone and Computer Policy

This is a device-free class. It will help us focus and stay centered in our intention to think and write creatively. Please leave your phones on silent in your backpack. Please do not use your laptops in class. You will want to take notes and should bring a notebook and pen to make that possible.

Plagiarism Statement

To plagiarize is to present someone else's work—his or her words, line of thought, or organizational structure—as your own. This occurs when sources are not cited properly, or when permission is not obtained from the original author to use his or her work. Another person's "work" can take many forms: printed or electronic copies of computer programs, musical compositions, drawings, paintings, oral presentations, papers, essays, articles or chapters, statistical data, tables or figures, etc. In short, if any information that can be considered the intellectual property of another is used without acknowledging the original source properly, this is plagiarism. Please familiarize yourself with the entire Westmont College Plagiarism Policy. This document defines different levels of plagiarism and the penalties for each. It also contains very helpful information on strategies for avoiding plagiarism. It cannot be overemphasized that plagiarism is an insidious and disruptive form of academic dishonesty. It violates relationships with known classmates and professors, and it violates the legal rights of people you may never meet.

Academic Accommodations

Students who have been diagnosed with a disability (learning, physical/medical, or psychological) are strongly encouraged to contact the Disability Services office as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by the Disability Services office. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your full participation and the successful completion of this course. For more information, contact Sheri Noble, Director of Disability Services (565-6186, snoble@westmont.edu) or visit the website <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability>

Westmont College theatre arts anti-racism statement

The Westmont college theatre arts department recognizes the historic, ongoing impacts of structural, systemic racism, and the injustices visited on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in North America. The department laments and apologizes for the way the discipline of theatre, and Westmont's theatre arts department, have participated in those systems and injustices. These are imperiled times, and the cries for justice, equity, and inclusion can no longer be ignored. The department dedicates itself to the investigation and embodiment of equity and inclusion for all students, faculty, and staff. The department strives to be anti-racist in speech, actions, work in the rehearsal room, and play choice. Westmont College is animated

by a vision of God's dream for God's people and all creation. The department affirms that all people are created in God's image, and works to uphold and encourage that sacred reality.

The fundamental subject of the theatre is Change. Change is impossible without action. Change comes as a consequence of willed, focused, motivated intent – of the spirit moving toward some desired end. The Westmont College Theatre Arts Department recognizes that this is a momentous time in the history of the college and the country, and enacts change toward a more just, inclusive, and equitable department.

The department seeks to decentralize white power and privilege from the department's curriculum, stage, studio, classroom, and seasons. The department has much to do. But it does so with joy and hope, and with the desire that the department will be brave and safe, where all students, faculty and audiences become free to participate in the here and now, where equity and inclusion are discussed and realized. To that end, these are the concrete, actionable steps the department will take this year to realize departmental transformation and change.

- 1) Create anti-racism statement, to be posted on the departmental website and included in class syllabi.
- 2) Audit all courses to ensure that the department's materials are sufficiently diverse, inclusive, and equitable.
- 3) Post all syllabi on the college website to ensure inclusion of works by BIPOC writers, scholars and creators.
- 4) Participate in implicit bias training.
- 5) Create anti-racism in the arts reading and teaching group, funded by the college, and require all full time faculty to participate.
- 6) Engage outside facilitators to lead student workshops and conversations around race and theatre.
- 7) Re-allocate fiscal and human resources to create a semester-long, full-time artist/scholar in residence position that will help develop equity, inclusion, and diversity.