

CREATING CHARACTERS (THTR 486) Section 63126R GFS 112
Fall 2012 4 units Wed. 3 - 5:50 p.m. 8/29 – 12/05

Catalogue description: THTR 486 Fa) A writing workshop devoted to the creation of living, breathing characters, exploring a range of techniques designed to develop authenticity.

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Office hours: Wed. 6 – 8 pm; Thurs. 10 am - 1 pm. BY APPOINTMENT.

In most good stories, it is the character's personality that creates the action of the story. If you start with a real personality, a real character, then something is bound to happen.
--Flannery O'Connor, *Writing Short Stories*

Welcome to Creating Characters...

This class is a writing workshop devoted to the creation of living, breathing characters, exploring a range of techniques designed to develop authenticity. Primarily designed for creative writers of all genres (playwrights, screenwriters, prose writers, poets, and interactive media writers), the course may also be useful to actors and other theatre makers with regard to developing characters for performance. The workshop offers a wide variety of techniques designed to develop complex, authentic characters, including: writing exercises, brainstorming tools, character voice exploration, character banks, and analyzing characters from exceptional plays, films, and novels. This course augments other writing courses, which, due to time constraints are often devoted primarily to plot, theme, and structure. By focusing on characters, this course provides an opportunity to explore a more character-driven approach to writing. A useful side benefit of character work is a resulting improvement in dialogue, environment, and tone. Both the interior life of the character as well as external motivators will be explored by working with archetypes from myth, psychological profiles, a real life/documentary perspective, and various elements of human nature--including habits, desires, lies, inner demons, attitudes, quirks, secrets, and fatal flaws. In addition, working from the approach of the hero's journey, characters will be viewed as story generators and as the source of movement in a written work.

Course Objectives

- To create the recipes for multidimensional main and supporting characters;
- To use complex characterization as a point of origin for stories;
- To explore the dark side of characters to determine the obstacles in their way and the resources available to overcome them; and
- To establish for each character a unique tone, rhythm, and voice.

As a student in this workshop, you will experience the creative process firsthand at both the intuitive and technical level while being guided through the writing of a creative Final Project. Final Projects may include the writing of a character-focused play, screenplay, short story, novel excerpt, or game/media project; a creative research paper making use of character-creation principles; or some alternative project approved by the instructor.

Required Texts

THE SOUL'S CODE. James Hillman.
 TREEFALL. Henry Murray.
 MILK LIKE SUGAR. Kirsten Greenidge.
 SONG OF EXTINCTION. E M Lewis.
 BFE. Julia Cho.
 JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE. August Wilson.
 blu. Virginia Grise.

--Plus a minimum of two selections from the following list:*

JERUSALEM. Jez Butterworth.
 FROZEN. Bryony Lavery.
 TRESTLE AT POPE LICK CREEK. Naomi Wallace.
 BULRUSHER. Eisa Davis.
 9 PARTS OF DESIRE. Heather Raffo.
 YELLOW FACE. David Henry Hwang.
 BECKY SHAW. Gina Gionfriddo.
 LAST LISTS OF MY MAD MOTHER. Julie Jensen.
 RUINED. Lynn Nottage.
 DOUBT, John Patrick Shanley.
 MICHAEL CLAYTON: THE SHOOTING SCRIPT by Tony Gilroy.
 THE LOVELY BONES, Alice Sebold.
 THE DJINN IN THE NIGHTINGALE'S EYE. A.S. Byatt.
 PLAYS : IVANOV, UNCLE VANYA, THREE SISTERS, THE CHERRY ORCHARD. Chekhov.
 MARISOL AND OTHER PLAYS. Jose Rivera.
 TWO SISTERS AND A PIANO AND OTHER PLAYS. Nilo Cruz.
 CRIMES OF THE HEART. Beth Henley.
 INTERPRETER OF MALADIES. Jhumpa Lahiri.
 NATIVE SPEAKER. Chang-Rae Lee.
 SIDEWAYS: THE SHOOTING SCRIPT. Alexander Payne & Jim Taylor.
 SAVAGES: THE SHOOTING SCRIPT. Tamara Jenkins.
 BEING JOHN MALKOVICH (screenplay). Charlie Kaufman.
 OLIVE KITTERIDGE by Elizabeth Strout.
 HOUSEKEEPING by Marilynne Robinson.
 SEVEN by Cizmar, Filloux, Kriegel, Mack, Margraff, Smith, and Yankowitz.

Recommended Additional Reading

AN ANATOMY OF DRAMA. Martin Esslin.
 ASPECTS OF THE NOVEL. E.M. Forster.
 THE ART OF FICTION. John Gardner.
 HEALING FICTION. James Hillman.
 THE POWER OF MYTH. Joseph Campbell.
 THE HEROINE'S JOURNEY. Maureen Murdock.
 WOMEN WHO RUN WITH THE WOLVES. Clarissa Pinkola Estes.
 MY YEAR OF MEATS. Ruth Ozeki.
 THE LONE RANGER AND TONTO FISTFIGHT IN HEAVEN. Sherman Alexie.
 WHITE TEETH. Zadie Smith.
 EAST OF EDEN. John Steinbeck.
 SONG OF SOLOMON. Toni Morrison.
 MY ANTONIA. Willa Cather.
 THE PLAGUE OF DOVES. Louise Erdrich.
 AS I LAY DYING. William Faulkner.

Note on Reading Requirements

The School of Theatre’s Dramatic Writing Program’s guidelines call for each student in playwriting classes to read plays as part of the course. In this course, however, it is possible to combine the reading of plays with the reading of fiction and screenplays. Thus, you may read a combination of the plays, fiction, and screenplays listed under “Required Texts” to fulfill this requirement; please be sure to advise me of the two (minimum) texts you have selected no later than the midterm. You are also encouraged to read texts from the Recommended section, particularly the books about writing, at some point in your writing career. The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer—and the easier it will become to create multidimensional characters.

Grading

Your grade will be based on the creation of a character inspiration presentation, the development of character banks/character recipes, completion of the reading assignments, participation in class exercises and discussion, ongoing writing, and completion of your Final Project.

Components of the overall grade are as follows:

Character Inspiration Presentation	15 percent
Character Bank/character recipes/monologues	10 percent
Reading assignments (oral pres. & responses in journal)	10 percent
Participation	15 percent
Ongoing writing and revision	25 percent
Final Project & Final Exam	25 percent

TOTAL 100 percent

Please bear in mind that a significant portion of the work you do will be done outside of class. The course requires independent research, outside reading, and the generation of both creative writing and analytical writing projects. You earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Missed assignments count as a zero. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline.

The Character Inspiration Presentation is a creative project in which each writer presents the various sources that provide the background for the characters of the play and for the world of the play. This is partly a research component of writing—but more than that, it is a way to get in touch with your unconscious motivators. These presentations will be supported by video projection (available in GFS 112) and may include visual art, musical inspirations, charts, graphics, articles/news stories/essays, photographs, Powerpoint or Keynote displays, podcasts, etc. Be prepared to discuss your resources and inspirations for your characters/story both in a creative/metaphoric language, as well as pragmatically.

Participation includes: Writing exercises, character exercises (including found character monologue); discussion of reading assignments; and feedback provided to other writers’ work.

Your Final Project is a creative work illustrating your understanding of multidimensional characters plus your ability to develop and use such characters. The Final Project may be a play, a screenplay, a short story, a section of a novel, or a game/interactive media project. Or, it may be a research paper that makes use of character-creation principles. Or, it may be an alternative project of your own devising. Please be advised: Your plans for your Final Project must be approved by me no later than the midterm. The project will be graded on artistic merit,

comprehension of character principles, and progress, i.e., your growth from early exploratory work to final draft.

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, ensemble-oriented medium and script/character development is a vital part of this art form. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. One unexcused absence is allowed. All other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare whatever assigned work is due and hand it in immediately upon your return to the workshop.

PLEASE NOTE: If you miss class, it is YOUR responsibility—and solely YOUR responsibility—to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates, not from me. Please keep in contact with your cohorts and arrange to get their class notes if you miss class. It may also be necessary for you to do independent research to make up for what you have missed. Again: When you miss a workshop, you must find a way to make up what you have missed ON YOUR OWN.

Extra Credit

If you desire extra credit, you may participate in a service learning project. Please let me know as early as possible in the semester, so that I can put you in touch with Brent Blair; he will acquaint you with the opportunities for service learning through the exciting new Master's in Applied Theatre Arts program.

Official Statement from School of Theatre on Trojan Integrity and Plagiarism

Dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the School of Theatre. Therefore, USC policies on academic integrity will be enforced in this course. Papers suspected of containing plagiarized material (the unacknowledged or inappropriate use of another's ideas, wording, or images) will be verified for authenticity by the School of Theatre through internet services. I expect you to familiarize yourself with the academic integrity guidelines found in the current "Scampus."

(www.usc.edu/dept/publications/scampus; http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/appendix_a.p)

Disability Services

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 – 5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776. (Please note: If a medical problem or disability arises during the course of the semester and academic accommodations are needed, the same procedure as detailed here must be followed.)

Student Responsibilities

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time.
4. Only one (1) unexcused absence is allowed. Other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance).

5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Please bear in mind I reserve the right to not accept late assignments at all. If I do accept the late assignment, it will be marked down due to the missed deadline.
6. It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed; I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; you will need to make arrangements to do independent research on whatever topics you have missed to keep up with the workshop. You will also need to make arrangements with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Do not request notes or information from me.
7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting place, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new location for class meeting. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail.
8. We will go as green as possible in this class, thus written work will be presented via video screen in the classroom. It is not necessary to print your work EXCEPT for the Final Project, which you will turn in as a hard copy. Because we are not printing, however, it will be necessary for you to bring your laptop or tablet to class so that you can project your work from a computer. OR: You can make arrangements with other writers and share who will be providing a laptop from week to week. Be sure to email your script to the designated laptop provider.
9. Please remember: A grade is not given, it is earned.
10. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or via telephone at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee that I will receive your message. (Contact information is printed on the first page of the syllabus.)

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Weeks 1 – 3 Gathering/Preparing

Introduction: Complex Characters and Deep characterization. The Roles of Characters (in both the creative work and the writing process).

True Life Characters: Advantages and Disadvantages of “Documentary” Characters.

Heroes/Myths from the Millennia—Ancient to Contemporary: Archetypal Characters and the Stories They Unmask.

The Psychology of Characters – Psychological Profiles/Temperaments/Types. Plus: Values and Intentions.

Consider: Secrets, Quirks, Contradictions, Habits, Attitudes, Inconsistencies, Flaws.

What is a character-driven script/story?

Assignments for weeks 1 - 3:

Write a 2-3 page “found character” monologue for week 2.

Create a Character Inspiration Presentation. (Presentations will occur weeks 2 and 3; if necessary we will go into week 4. Please note—character bank characters may be included in this presentation.)

Create a character bank with multiple characters including the following:

--at least one character from current events and/or history (with monologue);

--at least one character based on myth/archetype (with monologue);

Read: Selections from *The Soul's Code*. Prepare to discuss.

Read: *Treefall*, *BFE*, *Milk Like Sugar*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Song of Extinction*, and *blu*. Prepare to discuss.

PLEASE NOTE: In this workshop, we will be doing many things at once. We will be exploring and developing characters, analyzing already existing characters, and writing/preparing a Final Project. Students from different disciplines and/or different levels (undergrad and grad) may be working on different types of projects or in different ways. Be prepared to be flexible, even with assignments. Some people in the workshop may be working on full-length scripts while others are working on monologues or scenarios. Don't worry. It will all get done. Above all, even if you are working on a play that you had planned on writing well in advance of the class, be prepared to expand your vision and try new approaches to the writing of the script.

Weeks 4 – 6 Exploration and Experimentation

Character Voice – Including: Rhythm, Diction, Slang, and Sensory World of the Character.

Active Characterization: Characters as Story Generators. Character Revelations. Self and Shadow Self. The Inner Character: Inner Child, Inner Demon, Inner Life. An Exploration of the Characters Often-Invisible Motivators.

Assignments for weeks 4 -6:

Prepare a character-voice-exploration monologue to present. Pay particular attention to the character's rhythms and "shadow" elements.

Write experimental scenes/pages for proposed play.

Present: Ideas/proposals/refined or expanded thoughts for Final Project.

Discuss: *The Soul's Code* (further selections) and how it relates to the plays read so far.

Note: Experimental scenes may be the early scenes of your Final Project—or later scenes. It's not necessary that you write in order, at this point. These may also be simply scenes that don't make it into your Final Project, but rather serve as a springboard or inspiration point. If your Final Project will not be a script, write a scene or short short story or a meditation on a character you wish to explore. (Hint: Look at writing exercises and journal entries for inspiration.)

Weeks 7 - 9 Mission and Transformation

Hero's (and Heroine's) Journey. The Mission, The Transformation, The Arc.

Putting It All Together—Structure.

The Dark Side: Villains, Antagonists, and Anti-Heroes. Working Beyond the One-Dimensional.

Supporting Players: Sidekicks, Mentors, Catalysts, and Clowns.

Assignments for weeks 7 – 9:

Write scenes/pages for your Final Project.

Prepare an oral presentation about your Final Project. (Progress report, problem/issues to be addressed, brainstorming needed, Q&A.)

Prepare to lead a discussion about one of the alternate plays you read.

Week 9: TURN IN raw draft of your Final Project.

Weeks 10 - 12 Insight and Evaluation

Character Epiphanies and Revelations.

Charting/Tracking with Concrete Creative Tools.

Final Project Preparation. Self-assessment and Plans for Revision.

Assignments for weeks 10 – 12:

Discuss: The feedback on raw draft of your Final Project. Questions and answers; brainstorming.

Assess your character inspiration projects, character banks, and raw draft. Prepare pages/revision/revision plan/whatever is needed for your Final Project; discuss.

Rewrite.

Keep working on your Final Project.

Weeks 13 - 15 Presentation, Post-mortem, and Beyond.

Presentation/Playreadings/Demonstrations of Final Final Projects.

(Note: No class week 13. Thanksgiving.)

Assignments for weeks 13 – 15:

Keep working on your Final Project. Revise as needed.

Week 15 (last day of class): TURN IN your Final Project.

FINAL EXAM: Feedback & Critique of Final Projects. Mon Dec 17, 2 –4 pm

We all have two heads and two memories. A head of clay, which will turn to dust; and another, forever invulnerable to the gnawings of time and of passion. One memory that death kills, a compass that expires with the journey, and another memory, the collective memory, which will live as long as the human adventure in the world lives.

--Eduardo Galeano, Memory of Fire: Faces and Masks

FORMAT (Stage Plays)

In formatting your script, the most important point to consider is readability. There are a number of possible formats—and one that is considered the professional standard. I don't require any one in particular; however, **DO NOT use the following:**

Max: Did you hear from him yet?

Pat: He'll call. Give him time.

This format is too cramped, becomes difficult for actors, directors, literary managers, and producers to read after a while. Literary managers, in particular, who have to read large numbers of scripts go out of their way to avoid reading plays typed in this format, which is accepted generally only in published scripts.

A standardized format—presented below—has been adopted by many professional playwrights, but there are also variants on the form which are easy to read and which also help convey the atmosphere/tone of the play.

The following format (or a variation) is used by most professional playwrights:

Stage directions--are indented, single-spaced, and placed in parentheses. Double space before character name.

Character name--is capitalized and centered. Single space between character name and dialogue.

Dialogue--single-spaced and typed on a full line, with reasonable margins. Double space before next character name.

Line readings--are discouraged; but if you use them, they should be centered like character name and placed in parentheses.

The typed script, then, using this format style, looks something like this:

(Stage directions in
parentheses, like so.)

CHARACTER NAME

Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue.

CHARACTER NAME

Dialogue. Dialogue. Dialogue.

Note how this looks different from a screenplay in that the dialogue extends out to the left margin rather than being clustered under the character name.

A sample from a play manuscript follows:

(Len takes another drink, hands Celia the bottle. She drinks and hands it back.)

LEN

Good ole Bobby. Here's to you, B.C. Wherever you are.

(Len finishes off the liquor.)

This place is a pit.

CELIA

It's old. Everyone's old.

LEN

Look at that. Lawns shaved within an inch of their life. Stunted little bushes, one here, one there, no flow to the branches, just regimented rows of ugly little shrubs.

CELIA

Yep. Cracked driveways. Greasy bricks.

LEN

Everything's the color of rust.

CELIA

Rust and motor oil.

LEN

I'm taking you out of here, Celia.

CELIA

Forget it. I'm not leaving.

LEN

Today. Now. Tonight.

(He grabs her; she throws his hand off her arm. He staggers.)

Damn, I'm so drunk.

*** (If you insist on line readings, they should look like this:)*

CELIA

(coolly determined)

Forget it. I'm not leaving.

FORMAT (screenplays and teleplays)

The industry has standardized the formatting of screenplays; teleplays use specific formatting as well, depending on whether they are half-hour or hour shows. Fortunately, software (such as Final Draft) is available that will automatically format your script for the screen, whether it is for film or television. In general, a screenplay is formatted as follows:

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY [Note: This is called a slug line.]

Use action lines immediately following a slug line. Action lines tell us what the location looks like, which characters are in the scene, and what they are doing. Remember to use all capital letters for a CHARACTER'S NAME in the action lines the first time the character appears in the script. Note the font is 12-point Courier.

CHARACTER NAME

Here's where you put the dialogue. Note that the character name is in all caps, and that the dialogue is indented.

NEXT CHARACTER

Leave two spaces between the last line of dialogue and the next character name.

Note: In a screenplay's slug line, INT means interior; EXT means exterior. Use INT for all scenes that are set indoors. Use EXT for all scenes that are set outdoors. After INT or EXT, give us the location in one or two words (e.g., WAREHOUSE or JESSE'S BEDROOM), and follow with DAY or NIGHT (the "time" the scene takes place).