

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 365 62963 Playwriting I
Fall 2014 Thursday 3 – 5:50 pm
Location: GFS 216

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: Contact me for location at cizmar@usc.edu

Office Hours: Available: Thurs 10 am - 1 pm; Wed 6 – 8 pm; Tues 1 - 4 pm; please note that office hours are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24 hours in advance. For appointments outside these hours, I am available by videoconference on SKYPE or Google Hangout.

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Course Description and Overview

Catalogue description: 365 Playwriting I (4, FaSp) Essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students' initiative, occasional productions of scenes, and extensive classroom analysis.

Mauve takes offense at my having said, "I am an artist"--which I do not take back, because the word of course included the meaning: always seeking without absolutely finding. It is just the converse of saying, "I know it, I have found it." As far as I know that word means: "I am seeking, I am striving, I am in it with all my heart. —Vincent Van Gogh

Learning Objectives

In this workshop, you will experience the creative process firsthand at both the intuitive and technical level while being guided through the writing of work for live theatre.

Playwriting 1 is designed to explore the art and craft of dramatic writing with a particular focus on *process* including: creative brainstorming, inspiration/research, developing characters, generating stories, intentional use of language, plus analysis and revision. The Final Project of the course consists of two components: (1) A portfolio of short plays including at least one revised draft of a short play and (2) contribution to the Deep Map collaborative play/projects. Emphasis is placed on *empathy* and *metaphor* as each person strives to:

- discover and evolve his/her own unique, artistic voice;
- develop a creative process—including inspiration, exploring, drafting, revising;
- experiment with new modes of writing for theatre;
- explore collaboration and new delivery systems for live theatre.

Each week discussion and writing exercises will accompany a workshop session in which student writers present ideas/images/scenes/pages for exploration and critique as part of the process of writing, rewriting, expanding, and polishing.

We're also adopting key elements of USC's 21st-century vision as our own by:

- GOING GREEN
- CONNECTING
- TRANSFORMING

What does this mean?

GOING GREEN means that we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will no longer have to print your work; instead, we will project your scenes, brainstorming materials, revision plans, etc. onto a giant screen in GFS via laptop computer. You won't have to print your Final Project; instead, you'll turn in a PDF of the script electronically and I will give you feedback directly on your manuscript via electronic Sticky Notes. All handouts and course materials will be paperless, sent via email and available online via Blackboard.

CONNECTING means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. We'll connect with each other to form a support network so that everyone feels secure taking artistic risks; plus we'll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what's going on in class; you may even want to try connecting via the free teleconferencing tools available (Google Hangout, Skype). We'll also stay attuned to what's going on in American theatre, and we'll look at what's going on in the world—and explore how we can use art for growth and healing.

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives, and in the lives of others; we'll look at creating theatre from a place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern for humanity; we'll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): None

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

FAR AWAY. Caryl Churchill.

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL. Quiara Alegria Hudes

YELLOWFACE. David Henry Hwang.

POLAROID STORIES. Naomi Iizuka. (Compare w/ METAMORPHOSES, Mary Zimmerman.)

TWO-HEADED. Julie Jensen.

PLAYWRITING – BRIEF & BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen.

BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO. Rajid Joseph.

TREEFALL. Henry Murray.

Plus: THE NETHER and another current unpublished play.

All published texts available via the USC Bookstore or online at Amazon. I will provide the unpublished plays in PDF form.

The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in Playwriting 1 to read at least seven plays as part of the course. The plays listed under "Required Texts" fulfill this requirement. You are also encouraged to read additional plays from the "Recommended Reading" handout (see Blackboard). The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: *The quality of work for the inspiration board, the reading and discussion segment, and the ongoing writing segment is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed. (More information below under the description of the inspiration board.) The rubric for determining the quality of work for the Final Project is described below in the detailed description of the project.*

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

Grading Breakdown

Your grade will be based on multiple components: a source/inspiration board (this is a presentation), ongoing writing of your portfolio of short plays and revision of at least one of the plays, contribution to a group collaborative project, completion of the reading assignments and presentations re: the reading, participation in class exercises and discussion, contributions to feedback on other students' works-in-progress, and completion of your Final Project.

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline. Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows (see below for details):

Inspiration Board	10 percent
Reading & Discussions	15 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Analysis	45 percent
Final Project (portfolio & collaborative project) + Final Exam	30 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

The Inspiration Board is your starting point; it's a presentation of the things that move you; it can be a combination of poetry, photos, doodles, news reports, artwork, music, video—any kind of source material. It may be done as a simple projection of various items from your computer, or it may be done in a distinct format, such as Keynote, Glogster, Pinterest, Prezi, Power Point; it may include items that inspire you in general, or items that relate particularly to what's on your mind right now (even if you don't know what to do with them), or items that are even more specific and directly relate to a play you want to write. The Inspiration Board is a tool with which you can tap into your imagination; you can use it as an active and more multimedia form of brainstorming, as a way to start to explore ideas, as a way to begin to frame your thoughts, and as a way to promote discussion with other artists to enhance your vision. The "board" part of the Inspiration Board is virtual—we'll project your inspirations onto the screen from a laptop.

Your Final Project consists of two parts: (1) A portfolio of short plays, including a revised draft of at least one of them, which we'll call the "developed play," and (2) your contribution to the Deep Map Theatre project component; the Deep Map component includes a two-minute play for ClimatePalooza and a short, collaborative group-created play (or other approved project) that incorporates some form of mixed media with live presentation. **Re: the "developed play" component of your portfolio:** The developed play will be graded on both artistic merit AND progress, i.e., growth from early exploratory work to final draft. Elements to be assessed are: character development - 25 percent; language (distinct character voice; rhythm, pace, metaphor) – 25 percent; story/structure/theatricality – 25 percent; overall achievement (includes how well script works as a whole, plus professional appearance of script) – 25 percent. **Re: the Deep Map Projects:** See the Projects handout for more detailed information (available on Blackboard). Elements to be assessed for Projects are: amount of individual's participation – 25 percent; collaborative skills – 15 percent; originality – 10 percent; structure and theme – 25 percent; overall achievement – 25 percent. Note: The purpose of the Projects is to gain experience in connection, collaboration, and transformation. Connection and collaboration are key components of theatre; the ability to connect with an audience and the ability to collaborate with other artists--both are

vital to the playwright, especially in new play development. Transformation is a desired outcome of the empathic, heart-driven theatre artist; we want to create art that matters. The multimedia component of the Projects is a fun add-on—and a way to prepare for the next wave that is beginning to emerge in theatre production and even in theatre writing.

HINT: Keep a Creative Journal! This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, and exercises and raw material from class. **NOTE:** It's no longer necessary to keep an actual journal, on paper. Due to the proliferation of smart phone and tablet apps for storing notes, etc., the Creative Journal may now be electronic. But do keep one. It will make your writing so much easier!

Note: *The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:*

- *There shall be no unexcused absences.*
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*

Additional Policies

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, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Indeed, in this class, one of our projects depends upon collaboration. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and turn it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

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. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade. Only one (1) unexcused absence is allowed.
4. 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. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. **IF YOU MISS CLASS:** It is your responsibility—and **SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**—to make up work you have missed and to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates or Blackboard, not from me. 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 keep in contact with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Again: Do not request notes or information from me. Most course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. If you lose your syllabus or handouts, go to Blackboard.

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 and/or text message.
8. We're going green in this classroom, so you will be providing all workshop members with copies of your work by **projecting your documents onto the screen in the classroom from your computer**, thus eliminating the need for paper. Instructions on how to do this will be provided and we will create a schedule of volunteer scribes to assist in this area so that it will not be necessary for everyone to carry a laptop to all class meetings.
9. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Weeks One - Three 8/28/14 to 9/11/14 Gathering & Preparing

Topics:

Introduction: What Makes a Play a Play?

Introduction to Fall 2014 Theme: *Wounded World – What's the Artist's Responsibility?*

Why Empathy? Why Metaphor?

Sources of Inspiration: Myth, Ephemera, True Life, Brainstorms, and More

Complex Characters – Voice, Mission, Inner Life

Introduction of Final Project Portfolio, Developed Play, and The Deep Map Projects

Introduction to Collaboration.

Formation of Collaboration Teams.

Assignments:

Write a 2-3 page "found character" monologue. Due week two.

Read selected scenes from *Far Away*, *Treefall*, *Bengal Tiger*, and *Water by the Spoonful*.

Prepare to discuss. (Due week two.)

Read *Playwriting – Brief & Brilliant*, 1st half. (Due week two.)

Create a character bank. (Due weeks 3 – 4.)

For character bank: Begin creating a bank containing six or more characters; your character bank should include at least one character derived from **myth**, one character from **current events (research)**; one character from **historical events (research)**, and one character totally from your **imagination** who can humanize a theme; write monologues for each of these designated characters.

Create an Inspiration Board to present (images, other people's writing, pictures, sound, research, video, etc.). (Due weeks 3 – 4.)

Write an exploratory scene. (Due week 3.)

Weeks Four - Six 9/18/14 to 10/2/14 Assembling/Grafting/Evolving/Expanding

Topics:

Rituals of Antiquity – Honoring the Origins of Theatre in Present Day Plays.

Variations on the Theme "Wounded World": Applying Metaphor and Empathy.

Page to Stage: Moving from Idea to Scene
Roles in Collaboration - How to Contribute.

Assignments:

Read remainder of *Far Away*, *Treefall*, *Bengal Tiger*, and *Water by the Spoonful*. Begin *Yellowface*, *Polaroid Stories*, and *Twoheaded*. (Due week 5.)

Read the rest of *Playwriting – Brief and Brilliant*. Discussion. (Due week 4.)

Begin a search/research for your portfolio plays. (Due weeks 4 – 5.)

Meet with your collaboration team (*recommended: meet via video conferencing!*) and begin plans for your collaborative play on the topic *The Wounded World – What's Your Responsibility?* (Due weeks 4 -5.)

Begin exercises for your two- to three-minute Deep Map Project play.

Write an exploratory scene for a short play: 2 - 4 pages. (Due week 5.)

Project Check-In: Create a presentation with your team that shows the research, images, beginnings, plans, etc. of your collaborative piece. (Due weeks 5 -6.) Present drafts of two- to three-minute Project plays. (Due weeks 5 – 6.)

Prepare a character-voice-exploration monologue for a main character. (Due week 6.)

Write another experimental scene (2 – 4 pages) for a one-act play. Note: This may be the first scene of your developed play—or a later scene. It's not necessary that you write in order, at this point. (Hint: Look at writing exercises you've done for possible raw material.) (Due week 7.)

Prepare for all-workshop story conference. (Due week 7.)

Continue work on your collaborative piece. (Due week 7.)

Weeks Seven - Nine 10/9/14 to 10/23/14

Seeking and Exploring: Voice, World of the Piece, Collaborating

Topics:

Story Conference: How to Focus Your Research, Resources, Characters, and Theatrical Elements on Your Own Project and in a Group.

The Worst-Case Scenario: Pushing Your Character to the Edge.

Language, The Playwright's Paint, and The Sensory World of the Play.

Collaboration Troubleshooting: Getting Past Problems.

Brainstorming New Delivery Systems for Live Theatre: Is It Still Theatre?

Assignments:

Read the remainder of all assigned plays. Prepare to discuss.

Continue research and writing scenes. (Ongoing.)

TURN – IN: Raw draft of pages written so far for your developed play. (Due week 8—midterm.)

PROGRESS REPORT: Create a presentation that shows the status of your collaborative project. (Due week 9.)

Keep writing. (Due week 9 and ongoing.)

Weeks Ten - Twelve 10/30/14 to 11/13/14 Getting Ready for the Stage

Topics:

Believe What They Say? Or What They Do? An Exploration of Dialogue, Subtext, Behavior, and Action.

But Is It Theatrical? Exploration of Imaginative Ways To Make Things Happen
Exploration of Rewrite Tools—Right-brain/Left-brain, Traditional and Non-.

Assignments:

Continue working on your developed play and your collaborative piece.

Create a plan for revision of the developed play. Revise as needed.

(Note: In-class presentations of one-acts will be scheduled for the last weeks of class; be ready to sign up for a particular week.)

Weeks Thirteen – 11/20/14

Workshopping

Activities:

In-class presentations and critiques of developed one-acts. (Schedule TBA.)

NO CLASS 11/27 – THANKSGIVING

Week Fourteen 12/4/14

End Game

Activities:

Finish up in-class presentations and critiques of developed one-acts. (Schedule TBA.)

Final check-in on collaborative pieces.

Topic:

Last Look Q&As. Where To Go Next—How To Submit a Script.

TURN IN: Your Final Project, i.e., your portfolio including the developed play.

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

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*

Final Examination Date:

FINAL EXAM: Feedback & Critique of Scripts plus Presentation of Collaborative Pieces and Deep Map Projects. **TUES December 16 2 – 4 pm**

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.