

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 486 63126R Creating Characters**  
**Fall 2016 Wednesday 3 – 5:50 pm**  
**Location: MCC 102**

**Instructor: Paula Cizmar**

**Office:** JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

**Office Hours:** (Available: Tues 3 - 6 pm ; Wed 10 am – 1 pm;  
Wed 6 – 8 pm; Thurs 3 - 5 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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**IT Help:** USC Information Technology Services

<http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts IT – Mr. Prakash  
Shirke, Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288. MCC

## Course Description and Overview

**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.*

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*

## Learning Objectives

THTR 486 is a writing workshop devoted to the development of living, breathing characters; the goal is to infuse authenticity and complexity into the characters of original written work. Primarily intended for creative writers of all genres (playwrights, screenwriters, prose writers, poets, and interactive media writers), the course is also useful to actors and other theatre makers who develop characters for performance. Students learn creative strategies including: writing exercises, brainstorming tools, character voice exploration, character banks, analysis of characters from exceptional plays, films, and novels. This course augments other writing courses, which, due to time constraints, may be more focused on plot, theme, and structure, and provides an opportunity to explore a character-driven approach. A useful side benefit of character work is an improvement in dialogue, the world of the piece, mood, and tone. Both the interior life of the character as well as external motivators are explored in the process of originating characters from various sources including: mythological archetypes, psychological profiles, and a real life/documentary perspective. Students also gain experience in working with elements of human nature—habits, desires, lies, inner demons, attitudes, quirks, secrets, and fatal flaws. By introducing and investigating different models of the hero/heroine's journey, the course provides insight into how characters may be employed as story generators and as the source of movement in a written work.

Emphasis is placed on *empathy* and *metaphor* as each person strives to:

- establish for each character a unique tone, rhythm, voice;

- experiment with diverse modes of character creation;
- discover how to use multidimensional characters as a point of origin for stories;
- explore the dark side of characters, their obstacles, and the resources available to them to overcome them.

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.

### **Objectives and Beyond...**

We're also adopting key elements of USC's 21<sup>st</sup>-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 teleconferencing tools available (Skype, etc.). 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Prerequisite(s):** None

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

BFE. Julia Cho.

GUM. Karen Hartman

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL. Hudes.

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE. August Wilson.

PLAYWRITING BRIEF AND BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen.

One unpublished play (to be supplied as a PDF)

BLOOD AND GIFTS. JT Rogers. (optional – will be discussed)

Published texts available via the USC Bookstore or online at Amazon.

Note: The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for playwriting students 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 various components.) 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**

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94; A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: the D range (1.3-0) = 60s; F (0) = 59 and below

- "Excellent" indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight; "Good" means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material; "Average" indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; "Poor" indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student's understanding of the class material; "Failure" is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.
- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

### **Information About the Graded Components**

Your grade will be based on multiple components: 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, critical analysis, ongoing writing, 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, provided arrangements are made for an extension. 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):

Character Inspiration Presentation	10 percent
Character Bank/character recipes/monologues	15 percent
Reading assignments (discussion and critical analysis)	10 percent
Participation	15 percent
Ongoing writing and revision	25 percent
Final Projects (Character & Deep Map/Special Projects)	25 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

The Character Inspiration Presentation is a creative project in which each person presents the various sources that provide the background for the characters of a 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 the classroom) and may include visual art, musical inspirations, charts, graphics, articles/news stories/essays, photographs, podcasts—any kind of source material. If desired, the presentations may be done in a specific format, such as Powerpoint, Keynote, Glogster, Pinterest, Prezi, etc. Be prepared to discuss your resources and inspirations for your characters/story both in a creative/metaphoric language, as well as pragmatically. Note that this presentation is a “vision board” and is useful whenever beginning a creative work—and it is also an opportunity for us to brainstorm together; this presentation may include items that inspire you in general, or items that relate particularly to the characters you have in 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. This a tool with which you can tap into your imagination; you can use it as an active, multimedia form of self-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 this vision board presentation is virtual—we’ll project your inspirations onto the screen from a laptop.

Critical Analysis is vital to every writer because it provides a process for assessing artistic work; in the analysis of already published plays, you gain experience in taking a deeper look at character, language, and structure—which can then be applied to evaluating your own work, to assist you in revision. Two short posts in which you address components of the assigned reading are required for this course.

What does participation entail?

Participation includes: Writing exercises, character exercises; discussion of assignments; and feedback provided to other writers’ work.

Your Final Project consists of two parts: (1) The Character Final Project and (2) The Deep Map Project. The Character Final Project is a creative work illustrating your understanding of multidimensional characters plus your ability to develop and use such characters. The Character 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. Please bear in mind: Revision of the Final Project is a component of the grade. The Deep Map Project is a short play that will fit into the guidelines of the History Matters/Back To The Future initiative—and will be a piece that is eligible for consideration for the Judith Barlow Prize. (Details will be available on BlackBoard.)

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. Course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. For your syllabus, handouts, etc., 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. For collaborations, you may work on Google documents that may be team-edited via Google Drive.

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 8/24/16 to 9/7/16 Gathering & Preparing**

Topics:

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?

**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 the Final Project. Students from different disciplines and/or different levels of writing experience 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/story that you had planned to write in advance of this class, be prepared to expand your vision and try new approaches to the writing of the piece.**

### **Weeks Four - Six 9/14/16 to 9/28/16 Exploration & Experimentation**

Topics:

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.

### **Weeks Seven - Nine 10/5/16 to 10/19/16 Mission & Transformation**

Topics:

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.

## **Weeks Ten - Twelve 10/26/16 to 11/9/16 Insight & Evaluation**

Topics:

Character Epiphanies and Revelations.

Charting/Tracking with Concrete Creative Tools.

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

## **Week Thirteen 11/16/16 Presentation**

Begin presentation/Playreadings/Demonstrations of Final Projects (both Character Piece and Deep Map Project).

Keep working on your Final Project components. Revise as needed.

**No class 11/23/2016 - Thanksgiving**

## **Week Fourteen 11/30/16 Presentation, Post-Mortem, and Beyond**

Finish Presentation/Playreadings/Demonstrations of Final Projects (both Character Piece and Deep Map Project).

*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:**

**Monday December 12 2 – 4 pm**

FINAL EXAM: Feedback & Critique of Scripts plus Presentation of Deep Map Projects.

### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

#### **Academic Conduct**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

### **Support Systems**

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with **scholarly writing**. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs [http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html) provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

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 GFS 120 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](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](mailto: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](http://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.