

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 510 Writing the Short Drama 63172D**  
**Fall 2014—Mondays—12:00-2:50 pm**  
**Location:** Shrine (SHR 105)

**Instructor:** Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD  
**Office:** Massman Drama Center, 1029 Childs Way  
**Office Hours:** M 10-12 via appointment utilizing email  
**Contact Info:** [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu)

## Course Description and Overview

The art and craft of dramatic writing. In particular exploring its dimensions with regard to character and story development in the short play.

## Learning Objectives

This course is designed for 1<sup>st</sup>- and 2<sup>nd</sup>-year students in the USC School of Dramatic Arts' Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program, but may include graduate students from other writing-related programs at USC at the discretion of the instructor. Students will focus on the art and craft of dramatic writing, in particular exploring its dimensions with regard to character and story development in microscopic ways as they examine the challenges of dramatic writing in short form. Concentrating on the Theatre for Young Audiences plays that are 30 to 60 minutes in length, students will write and develop two plays. Note that initially, for Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program students, THTR 510 was in tandem with THTR 529A Textual Studies in Performance, which is taken with first-year acting students in the Master of Fine Arts in Acting program. You are encouraged to integrate your work collaboratively into your THTR 529A course work if possible.

## Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The book is available at the noted link.

*Eight Plays for Children: The New Generation Play Project*, Edited by Coleman A. Jennings, University of Texas Press, <https://utpress.utexas.edu/index.php/books/jeneig>.

Blackboard <https://blackboard.usc.edu/> (Means of communication and continuation of curriculum in the event of an emergency) (If you do not know how to use Blackboard, visit the site and follow links to USC Blackboard Help.)

### Supplementary:

*Poetics* by Aristotle

*One Act Plays for Acting Students: An Anthology*, Ed. Norman Bert

*The Art of the Story: An International Anthology*, Ed. Daniel Halpern

*The Sound of Water: Haiku by Basho, Buson, Issa, and Other Poets*, Ed. Sam Hamill,

*Plays in One Act*, Ed. Dan Halpern

*The Penguin Book of International Women's Stories*, Ed. Kate Figes

*Short Stories by Latin American Women: The Magic and the Real*, Ed. Celia Correias Zapata

*The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories*, Ed. Carlos Fuentes

*Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction*, Ed. Terry McMillan

*The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry*, Eds. Vinay Dharwadker and AK Ramanujan

*Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, Mick Short and Michael H. Short

*The Ways of White Folks: Stories*, Langston Hughes

*The Oxford Book of Short Poems*, Eds. P. J. Kavanagh and James Michie

*Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, Ed. Peter Ludlow

*A Walk in My World: International Short Stories About Youth*, Ed. Anne Mazer

*Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets...*, Ed. Yoel Hoffman

*Burnt Sugar Cana Quemada: Contemporary Cuban Poetry...*, Eds. Carlson/Hijuelos

## Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Academic integrity is important to the University. The student is urged to remember that professors do not "give" grades; students *earn* grades. Thus, a final grade is entirely up to the student with regards to the effort he or she chooses to expend to meet course requirements. Please note that late work is given a ten percent (20%) penalty and is accepted only

within one week of its due date (see "Grading Breakdown"). The only exception is illness or personal crisis. Here are USC's definitions of grades: "A" for work of excellent quality, "B" for work of good quality, "C" for work of fair quality for undergraduate credit and minimum passing for graduate credit, "C-" as a failing grade for graduate credit, "D-" for work of minimum passing quality for undergraduate credit, "F" for failure, "IN" for incomplete work, *student-initiated after 12th week and only awarded under exceptional circumstances*. There will be three categories of grading:

**30% - Weekly Grade.** This evaluates your engagement in reading and writing assignments, writing exercises, and evaluative discussions in class.

**20% - Professional Development and Constructive Criticism.** This evaluates professional behavior as a writer in class including behavior toward peers as well as the quality of your giving/receiving of constructive criticism. The student will maintain a weekly Professional Development journal responding to two questions: (1) How have I behaved toward my peers this week that will help to make me a better writer? (2) How well have I listened to criticism and how well have I given criticism to my peers? Was the criticism constructive in both cases?

**50% - Completed Project/Final Exam.** Your final project will be two short TYA plays typed in standard manuscript format (consult the current *Dramatists' Guild Resource Directory* or *Samuel French*: <http://www.samuel french.com/content/files/upload/General%20SFI%20Formatting%20Guidelines%20Complete.pdf>); suggested length 20-30 pages. The manuscripts will be professionally presented with card stock covers and genuine brass brads or silver rings. Note that lack of adherence to these guidelines will lower your grade, as they are professional standards to learn. Please do not plagiarize. [Many of you have trouble locating professional brass brads. Here is a link: <http://www.amazon.com/Solid-Brass-Fasteners-Capacity-A7071505/dp/B000061BK1>; you will need 1¼ inch or 1½ inch depending on the thickness of your manuscript.]

Grading is determined on the following scale:

96-100%=A	88-90%=B+	81-84%=B-	75-77%= C	67-70%=D+
95-91%=A-	85-87%=B	78-80%=C+	71-74%= C-	66-64%=D 61-63%=D-
[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]				

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 in class has been good, but will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

The final project grade is evaluated on a percentage scale with the grade breaking down as follows: 20% Quality of structure/through-line/plotting, 20% Quality of character development, 20% Quality of dialogue development, 20% Quality of overall creative achievement, and 20% professionalism of project (i.e. editing, presentation, length, etc.).

### Grading Breakdown

30% Weekly Grade

20% Professional Development and Constructive Criticism

50% Final Project

In keeping with SDA guidelines on grading:

- 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.

### Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are to be submitted in class for weekly assignments and in hard copy, professional format as noted above, for the final projects.

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

8/25 – Introduction and overview. Discussion of syllabus, plays, required reading. In-class reading/writing workshop. Jennings book needed in class.

9/1 – Holiday. No class.  
9/8 – Reading/Writing workshop: Jennings, student work, exploring character and place.  
9/15 – Reading/Writing workshop: Jennings, student work, exploring character and story.  
9/22 – Reading/Writing workshop.  
9/29 – Reading/Writing workshop.  
10/6 – Reading/Writing workshop.  
10/13 – Critical Analysis Presentations and discussions.  
10/20 – Reading/Writing workshop.  
10/27 – Reading/Writing workshop.  
11/3 – Reading/Writing workshop.  
11/10 – Marketing work in the Theatre for Young Audiences world.  
11/17 – Readings of final works.  
11/24 – Readings of final works.

*[11/27-30 Thanksgiving Holiday]*

12/1 – Last day of class. Readings of final works.  
12/12 – 11 am-1 pm, FINAL EXAMINATION DATE\*

*[12/18-1/11 Winter Break]*

**\*Final Examination Date:**

Please note that the Final Exam is mandatory on a day and time set by the University. Site TBD.

**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](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.