

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**GESM 111g: Theatre Scene**  
**Spring 2024/12-1:50pm Monday/Wednesday**  
**Units: 4**  
**Location: LVL 13**

**Instructor: Lena Ford**  
**Student Hours: M/W 10-11am or by appointment**  
**Contact info: lenaford@usc.edu**

## **Course Description**

This course serves as an in-depth exploration of the process of presenting a play, from the first reading through to the physical embodiment of a production in a theatre and is worthwhile for anyone with even a passing interest in theatre. The theatre mirrors our humanity and asks us to question the status quo.

For theatre artists and professionals, the play – as written – is the starting point for a journey of research, exploration, and imagination. Before the first day of rehearsal, the director spends several months – if not longer – working with their dramaturg and designers in researching various aspects of the play as well as reading it multiple times. The research would include: the historical period in which the play was written – its politics, customs, and mores; the performance history or tradition of the play; the life of and other works by the playwright; and critical essays on the play or playwright. This research and re-reading eventually leads the director to their concept of the play – an aesthetic, philosophical, and visual realization of the play that is unique to that director working in concert with their artistic team of designers.

The director brings this concept to the first rehearsal and begins the process of sharing the research to their primary collaborators – the actors. Before and during rehearsal, the designers and actors themselves do their own research, which is not dissimilar to the director's but is more individually based on their priorities of characterization (actors) or visual rendering (designers.) Pre-production research is different for a new play or for a play which does not result from a traditional script, i.e. a devised work, which might evolve from movement-based language or political framework. There, the director works with the playwright or choreographer, and the cast(s) to explore the writer's intentions in the play, questioning scenes and characters as well as reading and rereading the text and any material that inspires or is pertinent to the play.

## Learning Objectives

1. **Analysis:** Increase the student's ability to analyze creative endeavors, including describing them with appropriate vocabulary, examining their formal elements, and engaging in research to understand their contexts.
2. **Making:** Expand the student's knowledge about the creative process, as exemplified by specific works studied, and, in many cases, by the student's making creative work.
3. **Connectivity:** Deepen the student's appreciation of the connections between creative endeavors and the concurrent political, religious, and social conditions; show how these endeavors fulfill cultural functions or fill cultural needs.
4. **Engagement:** Increase the student's understanding of becoming a lifelong supporter or participant in the arts by exposure to creative production in the contemporary environment.

**Course Notes:** This class will require viewing of plays or production experiences outside of class time for discussion in class and fulfillment of written assignments. All classes will be conducted in person on-ground. Absence from the class due to illness should be communicated to the professor prior to class so that a zoom link can be made available to the absent student.

## USC technology rental program

If you need resources to successfully participate in your classes, such as a laptop or internet hotspot, you may be eligible for the university's equipment rental program. To apply, please submit an application. The Student Basic Needs team will contact all applicants and distribute equipment to eligible applicants prior to the start of the spring semester.

## Required Materials

**Acquire from the USC Bookstore, Amazon, or ideally, a small local bookstore near you unless indicated below under other required materials:**

*The Art of Theatre, 4-Edition*, by William Missouri Downs, Lou Anne Wright and Erik Ramsey

*Introduction to Play Analysis* by Cal Pritner and Scott Walters  
ISBN: 9781478634676

*Much To Do About Nothing* by William Shakespeare

*12 Angry Jurors* by Reginald Rose, adapted for stage by Sherman L. Sergel

*Rent* by Jonathan David Larson

*They Never Called It Chavez Ravine* by Culture Clash

## **Other Required Materials**

*Notes on Directing: 130 Lessons in Leadership from the Director's Chair* by Frank Hauser and Russell Reich via [ARES](#), the course reserves for the USC Libraries

*The Creative Habit* by Twyla Tharp (Assigned excerpts will be available in ARES)

**Required Viewing: 1 Comp will be made available to you for specified performance dates. If you choose to attend another date, you will need to buy your ticket.**

Much To Do About Nothing	02/18/24 @ 2:30 PM
12 Angry Jurors	03/20/24 @ 7:30 PM
Rent	04/08/24 @ 7:30 PM
They Never Called it Chavez Ravine	04/17/24 @ 7:30 PM

Please refer to the School of Dramatic Arts website for ticketing information.  
<https://dramaticarts.usc.edu/on-stage/>

\*You can sign up for tickets on the link below by February 9th:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1\\_1fkUPMu6ZWUZBde7vzSGpNFOxC3yVTScpGBWNfbYs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_1fkUPMu6ZWUZBde7vzSGpNFOxC3yVTScpGBWNfbYs/edit?usp=sharing)

## **Protocols for attending a live event**

1. Tickets must be arranged for all productions no later than February 9th. If you miss this deadline, you will be responsible for purchasing these tickets through the ticket office. Comp tickets are only available for the specific days listed above.
2. No food or beverages may be consumed in the theatre.
3. Please show up no later than 20 minutes prior to curtain in order to be seated.
4. Comps will be released at 10 minutes prior to curtain.

## **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

There will be discussions based on the reading of the plays, the main texts, and articles on ARES and Blackboard. It will be important to come prepared with having read the material **prior to the class in which it will be discussed.**

## Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The evaluation of your performance in the course includes attendance, active engagement, participation in class activities, discussions and critiques, along with the quality, growth, and ingenuity of performance projects, and written work.

The course has four major components: Critique and Analysis of Plays and Essays/Readings that correlate with work studied; Performance explorations and dramatization of text/narrative; Written assignments/Papers; and Group Projects.

Note:

- (1) The written assignments should be typed and double-spaced. The margins of your papers should be kept at 1 inch; the size of the font should not exceed 12-point. Written assignments should be submitted to Turnitin on Blackboard, unless otherwise indicated before 11:59 PDT on the due date. Please allow a 30-minute buffer for uploading.
- (2) According to the School of Theatre policy, no late paper will be accepted, unless permission is granted prior to the due date.
- (3) No Laptops, Phones, or IPAD usage during instructional class session unless otherwise indicated.
- (4) You are expected to attend all classes. In the event you must miss a class, please email me prior to the absence and let me know. Participation contributes to your grade. You are allowed one “free” absence. Subsequent unexcused absences will result in the loss of points for each time you are absent.
- (5) Please do not be late.
- (6) \*Please note: **no late final papers are accepted.** If you fail to submit your final paper on time, you will receive a 0 grade for your final paper.

### NO AI GENERATED WORK ACCEPTED

All work should be original and created specifically for the given assignment. You are responsible for the accuracy and originality of any material submitted.

You should be the author of all text submitted. In assignment that are collaborative, the group of students will be the co-authors and have all associated responsibilities.

Academic integrity policies regarding the use of generative AI tools will apply to every assignment.

\*Using an AI generator will count as plagiarism; students are responsible for whatever is turned in, including AI’s false citations.

## **PARTICIPATION**

- Class participation includes attending/commenting in class on a regular basis and writing reflection papers. Students are required to attend lectures and to participate in class discussions and debates providing both qualitative and quantitative data to support your hypothesis.

Participation contributes to your grade. Please be on time.

- Simple snacks and/or drinks are acceptable as long as they do not distract you or your peers during class.

## **REFLECTION PAPERS: 20% /200pts**

Students are required to write (4) reflection papers as indicated on the weekly course schedule. Each student must create a **650-700 word reflection paper** to respond to the plays.

A reflection paper must include 1) a concise statement addressing the conflicts/themes discussed by the playwright. 2) evidence from the text or lecture that supports your analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the text/; 3) a statement about how the play/text connects to larger concepts introduced in the course. **PLEASE DO NOT WRITE A PLAY SUMMARY**; focus your critical lens on the concept(s) the playwright/writer is expressing.

**\*Include one question for discussion in class.**

**A printed copy is due at the start of class.**

## **PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 20%/200pts**

Objective: The response papers are designed for you to practice analytical writing and performance analysis after viewing four productions.

Students view four (4) productions this semester. After watching each of the four ( 4) productions, students will **write a 700-800 word** analytical paper based on the **Theatricality** of the play. These four analysis papers are close examinations of the production and articulation of how the design elements contributed to the unity of the Director's vision. **No** additional sources outside the text of the play and your visual analysis are to be used.

Each paper should focus on one of the five following elements, a **different** element for each production and one only for each paper:

**Scenic/Projection Design Lighting Design Director/Dramaturg choices  
Costuming/makeup Sound/music.**

**PERFORMANCE ESSAY****20%/200pts**

Write a 900 -1000 word essay based on one of the play productions and analyze the difference between how the you imagined the play while reading the text and the elements that differed in the live production. Please include two secondary critical sources.

**FINAL - Comparative Analysis Essay:****25%/250pts**

You will write a **1500-1800 word** comparative analysis essay about **two plays** read/ viewed from the class with a lens on the characters, conflicts and theatricality from the text to the production. You will identify the critical lens you are using to analyze text including: formalistic, psychological, biographical, historical, gendered, allegorical and subjective. MLA source guidelines. (1500-1800 words)

**GRADING BREAKDOWN**

Reflection Papers (50pts each)	20% - 200pts
Performance Analysis (50pts each)	20% - 200pts
Performance Essay	20% - 200pts
Comparative Analysis - FINAL	25% - 250pts
Participation	15% - 150pts

TOTAL 100% - 1000

All assignment will be graded on a percentage of 100 points. The grades will then be calculated into a final point total that will then be converted into a final letter grade as follows:

A: 100-95; A-: 94-90; B+: 89-85; B: 84-80; B-: 79-75; C+: 74-70; C: 69-65; C-: 64-60; D: 59-55; D-: 54-50; F: Below 50.

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.

## **Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

### **Week 1 – INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW**

- 1/8 Course/syllabus overview  
**REVIEW:** Dramaturgy and *Visit to a Small Planet* by Elinor Fuchs  
**READ:** *Visit to a Small Planet* by Elinor Fuchs
- 1/10 **READ:** *Much To Do About Nothing* by William Shakespeare  
**REVIEW:** Dramaturgy/Lens of a Play

### **Week 2 – THEATRE, ART AND ENTERTAINMENT**

- 1/15 NO CLASS
- 1/17 **READ:** *The Art of Theatre* by Downs, Wright and Ramsey, p. 1-21

### **Week 3**

- 1/22 **PLAY ANALYSIS**  
**READ:** *Introduction of Play Analysis*, p.25-34  
**REVIEW:** Conflict
- 1/24 **Play Analysis**  
**READ:** *Introduction of Play Analysis*, p.37-51

### **Week 4**

- 1/29 **THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS AND DIRECTORIAL VISIONS**  
**READ:** *The Art of Theatre*, “*The Art of Directing*”, p. 149-168
- 1/31 **READ: ARES – NOTES ON DIRECTING**  
**Reflection Paper #1 due on *Much To Do About Nothing* by William Shakespeare**

### **Week 5**

- 2/5 **PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGEMENT**  
**READ:** *The Art of Theatre: A Day in the Life of A Theatre*, p. 88-108  
**\*Please compose questions for our guest speaker Scott Faris for 2/7**
- 2/7 **GUEST TALK: Scott Faris, USC Professor of Stage Management,  
Director of BA Musical Theatre**

### **Week 6**

- 2/12 **THE CREATIVE TEAM AND CREATIVITY**  
**READ:** *The Art of the Theatre: The Art of Design*, p. 169-193  
**READ/REVIEW: ARES - *The Creative Habit* by Tyla Tharp, *Rituals of Preparation and Rituals of Preparation***
- 2/14 **READ:** *The Art of the Theatre: A Creative Life*, p. 194-208  
**\*PLEASE NOTE: The class will meet from noon-1:50 at USC Fisher Museum located at 823 W. Exposition Blvd to view Stage Designer Sibyl Wickersheimer’s Scene Shift Exhibition and participate in an open discussion.** <https://fisher.usc.edu/exhibitions/scene-shift-the-exhibit/>

\*2/18 **COMP TICKET FOR *MUCH TO DO ABOUT NOTHING* PRODUCTION AT  
\*\*CLASS MEETS AT THE BING THEATRE: 3500 Watt Way at 2:15pm for  
2:30 production**

**Week 7**

2/19 NO CLASS

2/21 **EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE THEATRE**

**READ:** New York Times Article about the Public 22-23 Season

**CHOOSE ONE ARTICLE TO DISCUSS IN CLASS:**

<https://www.americantheatre.org/category/feature/edi/>

**EXAMINE:** SDA 2024 Season of Plays in the context of inclusivity

**\*PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS PAPER DUE: *MUCH TO DO ABOUT NOTHING***

**Week 8**

2/26 **THE POLITICS OF THEATRE**

**READ/REVIEW:** *The Art of Theatre: Theatre of the People*, p. 42-62

**READ:** *12 Angry Jurors*

2/28 **REVIEW/DISCUSS:** *The Art of Theatre: The Art of Playwriting*, p. 110-126

**Week 9**

3/4 **PLAYWRIGHT AS CHARACTER AND SOCIAL COMMENTATOR**

**REVIEW:** *12 Angry Jurors*

3/6 **CREATE A 3-5 page play**

**Week 10**

3/11 SPRING BREAK

3/13 SPRING BREAK

**Week 11**

3/18 **IMMERSIVE THEATRE**

**DISCUSS THE ELEMENTS OF IMMERSIVE THEATRE**

**IN-CLASS REVIEW/COMMENTARY: IMMERSIVE THEATRE**

The immersive exhibition/performance of *Sacrifice Zone: Los Angeles* at Natural

History Museum of Los Angeles County, Produced by playwright

Paula <https://www.sacrifice-zone.com>

**Reflection Paper #2 due on *12 Angry Jurors***

3/20 **COMP TICKET FOR *12 ANGRY JURORS* PRODUCTION**

**\*\*CLASS MEETS AT McClintock Theatre, 1010 W. Jefferson Blvd at 7:15pm  
for 7:30pm production**



**Week 12**

- 3/25 **THE ECONOMY OF THEATRE AND CENSORSHIP**  
REVIEW: IMPACT OF FUNDING IN THE U.S.
- 3/27 **REVIEW: BOOK/THEATRE CENSORSHIP IN THE U.S.**  
RESEARCH/DISCUSS: Who decides what we read/see  
**\*\*PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS DUE ON 12 ANGRY JURORS**

**Week 13**

- 4/1 **MUSICAL THEATRE**  
**READ: *The Art of Theatre: The Musical* p. 209-228**  
In-class review: *The Musical*  
**READ: *Rent***
- 4/3 **REVIEW SOCIAL ISSUES: MULTICULTURALISM, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND HOMOPHOBIA ON STAGE**  
**READ: *The Art of Theatre: Theatre of the People*, p.42-62**  
**Reflection Paper #3 on *Rent* due**

**Week 14**

- 4/8 **READ: *Chavez Ravine: An L.A. Ghost Story***  
**COMP TICKET FOR *RENT* PRODUCTION**  
**\*\*\*CLASS MEETS AT BING THEATRE at 7:15 for 7:30pm production\*\*\***
- 4/10 **REVIEW: *Chavez Ravine: An L.A. Ghost Story***  
**Reflection Paper #4 due on *Chavez Ravine: An L.A. Ghost Story***

**Week 15**

- 4/15 **THEATRE AROUND THE WORLD**  
**READ: *The Art of Theatre*, p. 229-255**  
**\*\*\*PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS DUE ON *RENT***
- 4/17 **COMP TICKET FOR PRODUCTION OF *CHAVEZ RAVINE: AN L.A. GHOST STORY***  
**\*\*CLASS MEETS at Sanctuary Theatre at 7:15pm for 7:30 production**
- 4/22 **FINAL PAPER REVIEW**  
**\*\*\*\*PERFORMANCE ESSAY DUE ON ONE PLAY**
- 4/24 **SUMMARIZING/SHARING OUR THEATRE EXPLORATION**  
**\*\*\*\*PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS DUE ON *CHAVEZ RAVINE: AN L.A. GHOST STORY***
- 5/6 **FINAL PAPER DUE – Comparative Analysis due to Turnitin on Blackboard by 11:59 PDT**

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you are advised to **complete the contact tracing form in MySHR** (<https://usc.edu/myshr>). The contact tracing form contains information for positive students to obtain isolation accommodations through the university, and fields to enter email addresses for known close contacts during their infectious period.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC recommends that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors, including in classrooms, as well as in crowded outdoor settings. Face coverings that cover your nose and mouth to be worn throughout the class session is suggested. Cloth/homemade masks or bandanas are not recommended. USC will provide masks (including N95s) upon request. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

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

### Academic Conduct

*Plagiarism*—presenting someone else’s ideas as your own—is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. This includes repurposing any portion of your academic work without appropriate permission. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “*Behavior Violating University Standards*” here <https://policy.usc.edu/files/2020/07/SCampus-Part-B-1.pdf> and on academic integrity here <https://sjacs.usc.edu/students/academic-integrity/>.

### 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 for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### 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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

### Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.  
[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 or (213) 740-9355 (WELL) – 24/7 on call

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services provides immediate therapy services for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (e.g., sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking). **All services are confidential.**

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu).

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit: [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu).

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias or hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu).

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa).

Diversity at USC. For information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu).