

USC School of Dramatic Arts

GESM 111-G: Section: 35307R
“I Too Am American: Theatre and Cultural Literacy”
Spring 2024: Tues/Thurs-2:00-3:50pm
Location: MCC 102

Instructor: Lena Ford
Student Hours: Tuesday 1:00-2:00pm or by appointment
Contact Info: lenaford@usc.edu

Course Description and Overview:

Students will have the opportunity to utilize theatre and dramatic literature to critically analyze, interpret, and experience the world from multi-cultural perspectives. Students will reflect upon what it means to be human in an increasingly global society and understand what it means to “live another life” through the transformative power of our imagination.

Course Objectives:

Over the course of the semester, students will develop tools for independent creative and critical thinking in the following capacity: critical analysis of multi-cultural literature and plays; in depth textual and character analysis; acting and scene study of texts/plays; research through dramaturgy and ethnography. Through engaging with plays and literature, students will learn how to contextualize literature as a means of understanding cultures. In addition to the cultural contexts of literature, students will investigate the historical, political, and sociological contexts that shape and inform the narrative or story.

GE-A: The Arts - Core 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.

Students will engage in close reading and critical analysis of literature and plays written by multi-cultural playwrights. They will investigate the textual and sub-textual meanings of language and analyze how language reveals different aspects of the character (understanding, empathy, and logic). In support of this objective, students will write analytical papers examining and researching the formalistic structure of narrative; the different dramaturgical devices; linguistic style/rhythm; imagery and figurative language; thematic motifs; and artistic aesthetic of the multi-cultural authors.

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.

Students will personalize and experience story, character, and circumstances through dramatization and performance of literature/texts. Students will explore and embody not only the actions of the character (verbal, physical, and emotional), but also discover how the character thinks (psychology) based on the given circumstances of the text. Students will also create and write a memoir/reflective paper from the character's perspective that will add breadth and depth to the dramatization.

3. **CONTEXT:** Enrich the student's discernment of creative production by increasing the knowledge of its theoretical, historical, and aesthetic bases across history and cultures.

Students will conduct extensive research regarding the historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts that frame the narratives that, in turn, become reflections of our collective humanity. This process will culminate in ethnographic research papers that archive data collected in the field through interviews, oral/written testimonies, and cultural/historical artifacts preserved in library and museums.

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.

GE-H: Traditions and Historical Foundations - Core Learning Objectives

1. Cover materials from a substantially long period.

In this critical and experiential process, students will gain knowledge about the historical context/foundation of America and its expressive cultures.

2. Require students to study primary sources.

As students increase their knowledge about history through the use of dramatic literature and supplementary texts, they will become more literate about the importance and complexities of American culture.

3. Address one or more traditions of thought, culture, and practice affecting multiple societies.

This form of humanistic inquiry via literature and arts will enable students to learn how to evaluate ideas and values from multiple perspectives and formulate informed opinions on complex issues that affect the world globally.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. *The America Play* by Suzan-Lori Parks (History and Identity of America)
2. *A Raisin In The Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (History and Manifestations of the American Dream)
3. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson (History of the The Great Migration)
4. *Tea* by Velina Hasu Houston (Explores history of Japanese American War Brides)
5. *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez (Explores history of Chicano Riots in Los Angeles)
6. *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse (Explores Native American Identity)
7. **I Never Saw Another Butterfly* edited by Hana Volavkovia (History of Holocaust-Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp)
8. **The Dance and the Railroad* by David Henry Hwang (Chinese Railroad Workers)

Foundational/Theoretical Texts

8. *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James W. Loewen (Required Reading)

*Supplementary reading and other materials will be available on Blackboard. All required texts are available for purchase through the bookstore or through online booksellers, such as Amazon.

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 papers will be accepted, unless permission is granted prior to the due date.**

(3)*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 - 100pts

- Participation contributes to your grade.
- Class participation includes attending/commenting in class on a regular basis and writing dramaturgical 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.

Please do not have other applications or web pages open during class unless I ask you to do so for a specific exercise.

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

ASSIGNMENTS

DRAMATURGY – 150pts

You will compile a small **dramaturgical glossary** and an analysis for each play per the syllabus. These will be prepared as a hard copy and will be handed in at the beginning of class. Please print an additional copy for class discussions.

While you are reading, **identify five words/concepts** from the text that you do not know. Define each term and in 2-3 sentences explain how the term illuminates a deeper aspect of the characters, their relationships, or the world of the play or essay. **Include one dramaturgical question** to be presented to the class for discussion. (30pts each)

MIDTERM – 200pts

CHARACTER STUDY/SOLO PERFORMANCE – MIDTERM 100pts

After conducting interviews and field work/research, you will create your own solo performance/public address based on one of the social, political, cultural, historical, or current event topics discussed in class. Students should incorporate ethnographic and dramaturgical research skills used in creating performance piece about **five to ten minutes in length**. You will receive an individual grade for this assignment.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH PAPER—MIDTERM 100pts

This critical and analytical **2-3 page research paper** supports the Character Study Performance Project. It will include the following theoretical, conceptual, qualitative and quantitative research, and ethnographic field notes: Research Design and Lay Summary of fieldwork; Interviewing and Field Techniques; Diverse Models of Formulating Research Questions and Questions for your Subject during interview.

LIVING HISTORY - SPEECH/ORAL PRESENTATION: 100pts

Research and analyze a major speech delivered by an individual that reflects a pivotal moment in the history of America. Investigate how words—the power of words as actions—weapons of change for good or evil—the politics of language and the politics of performance/representation through our speech and oral tradition. Recite the speech (**3-5 minutes**) and your critique of the speech with the peers in the class.

LITERARY ANALYSIS GROUP PROJECT: 200pts

You are required to participate in a Multi-Media Literary Analysis Group Project and select one of the multi-cultural plays assigned by the instructor. Each **15-minute presentation** will choose a specific critical literary lens through which to analyze the plays; incorporate textual and visual media in presentation; music or video/film of scenes

or thematic material from plays; as well as a dramatization of text, characters, or scene work presented live as part of the presentation. Students will be assessed on not only the specificity of content but also how the group creatively composed and organized the presentation. This further examines how any kind of presentation is a type of performance. Your partners will be assigned accordingly and will range between two to three people. Your whole ensemble will receive a group grade for these projects.

FINAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ESSAY: 250pts

After analyzing and discussing diverse political, cultural, and social movements explored in class, students will choose one movement from the past and compare it to a current movement from the present time based on two plays we reviewed in class. The essay should be **1500 words** in length, cite two primary and two secondary sources, and include an annotated bibliography. Essay should address the following: historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural context of the people/citizens calling for action, change, justice, equality, and freedom; strategic planning, working within or outside of the constructs of law, policy, and government; assessing the cost and sacrifice of the citizens during the movement; and identifying tangible outcomes and impact of the movements from the past and present and how it currently affects our society.

*Please note: **no late final papers accepted.**

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Assignment	% of Grade
1. Dramaturgy Papers/Annotated Bibliography	15%/150
2. Midterm: Solo Performance/Research Paper	20%/200
3. Literary Analysis Group Project	20%/200
4. Oral Presentation/Speech	10%/100
5. Final – Comparative Analysis	25%/250
6. Participation	10%/100
TOTAL:	100%/1000

Grading Scale

All assignments 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.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1: American Identity & History – Racial Formations in the United States of America

1/9 **INTRODUCTION**

Overview of syllabus

READ: *The America Play* by Suzan Lori-Parks

1/11 **READ:** *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen,
“Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-Making, . 11-30

Dramaturgy Paper #1 due: *The America Play* by Suzan Lori-Parks

Week 2: American Identity and Citizenship

1/16 **READ/View Performance:** *Citizen*, by Claudia Rankine, I-IV

READ: **The Fabrication of Race* by Matthew Frye Jacobson, p. 2-12

In class: Poetry exploration based on current events

1/18 **READ:** *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, “Why Is History Taught Like This?”,
p. 301-339

Week 3: American Identity and The American Dream: Class, Property, Ownership (Class, Wealth, Power)

1/23 **READ:** *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

Dramaturgy Paper #2 due: *A Raisin in the Sun*

1/25 **READ:** *Facing Up to The American Dream by Jennifer Hochschild, “What is the American Dream”, p15-38

Week 4: In Search of the Character of America

1/30 **READ:** (Excerpts from) **Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* by Anna Deavere Smith
View/Discuss – Anna Deavere Smith Interview/Characters

2/1 **READ:** **Documenting the Myth: Anna Deveare Smith*

Week 5: Intersections/Collision of Space/Territory and Power in America

2/6 **READ:** *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse

READ: *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by Loewen, “Red Eyes”, p. 93-134

Dramaturgy Paper #3 due: *The Thanksgiving Play*

2/8 **READ:** *Michael Foucault’s *Space, Power and Knowledge*

Assignment Due: Annotated Bibliography based on subject/subject matter of Solo Performance Project

Week 6: Ritual, Play and Performance

2/13 **READ/VIEW:** **The Dance and the Railroad* by David Henry Hwang

READ: **Performance Studies* by Richard Schechner, “What is Performance?”, p.28-48 and “Ritual” p. 52-57 (Ritual as Performance)

2/15 **READ:** **Critical Ethnography-Method, Ethics and Performance* by D. Soyini Madison, “Methods: Do I really Need a Method, p. 17-30

Acting Exploration: Storytelling through Movement

Week 7: Transformation of Cultural Identity/Ethnicity: Acculturation, Assimilation, Annihilation--Disembodied

2/20 **READ:** **I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, edited by Hana Volvackova (History of the Holocaust through Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp)

READ/view excerpts: **The Diary of Anne Frank*

2/22 **READ:** **Whiteness of a Different Color* by Jacobson.

Writing Exploration: Create and Write your own Memoir/Diary

Week 8: Exploration of Personal Experiences

2/27 Explore/Visit: USC Shoah Collection of Holocaust Memorabilia & Museum of Tolerance

2/29 **MIDTERM:** In Class-Character Study/Solo Performance/ Ethnographic Essay Submission

Week 9: Embodiment and Performance of Gender & Femininity

3/5 **READ:** *Tea* by Velina Hasu Houston (History of the Japanese American War Brides)

Dramaturgy paper #4 due: *Tea* by Velina Hasu Houston

3/7 **View Film:** *M Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang

Week 10:

3/12 **NO CLASS**

3/14 **NO CLASS**

Week 11: Cultural Inscription of the Body

3/19 **READ:** **Ornamentalism: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman* by Anne Anlin Cheng

3/21 **READ:** *The Cultural Studies Reader* edited by Simon During, Judith Butler's "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire": p. 340-353

Tea playwright Professor Velina Hasu Houston in-class talk back

Week 12: Process of Reclaiming Body and Mind

3/26 **READ:** *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson (The Great Migration)
Reflection Paper #5 due: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

3/28 **READ:** *The Ground on Which I Stand* by August Wilson

Week 13:

4/2 **Living History-Oral Speech Presentations Due**

4/4 **Oral Speech Presentations**

Week 14: Documenting Los Angeles History

4/9 **READ:** *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez (History of Chicano Riots in Los Angeles)

4/11 **VIEW:** Chicano/Zoot Suit Riots

4/17 **READ:** *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by Loewen, “What is the Result of Teaching History Like This?”, p. 340-362

4/19 Final Paper review

Week 15

4/23 **Literary Group Presentations**

4/24 **Literary Group Presentations**

****FINAL PAPER**

DUE: Monday, May 6th on Turnitin on Blackboard by 11:59pm PDT

Health

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, 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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. 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>.

Sharing of Course Materials Outside of the Learning Environment

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy)

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) 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 Basic Needs

Resources for students regarding food, housing, finances, COVID-19 support, and technology support. <https://studentbasicneeds.usc.edu/>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call.

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call.

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call. studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298.

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298. usc-advocate.symphlicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776. <https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710. campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101. diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call. dps.usc.edu and emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call.
dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.