

USC School of Dramatic Arts

GESM 111-G: Section: 35310R
“I Too Am American: Theatre and Cultural Literacy”
Spring 2025, Tues/Thurs. 2:00-3:50pm
Location: MCC 102

Instructor: Professor 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 multi-cultural writers.

2. **CREATIVITY:** 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 write a dramaturgical glossary from the readings that will add breadth and depth to understanding 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 libraries.

4. **ENGAGEMENT:** This seminar/engagement-focus course will increase the student's exposure to the creative process and production of the arts for life-long understanding and supporters of the contemporary arts 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.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. *The America Play* by Suzan-Lori Parks (History and Identity of America)
2. *Citizen* by Claudia Rankin (Identity)
3. **A Raisin In The Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (History and Manifestations of the American Dream)
4. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson (History of the The Great Migration)
5. *Tea* play by Velina Hasu Houston (Explores history of Japanese American War Brides)
6. *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez (Explores history of Chicano Riots in Los Angeles)
7. *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse (Explores Thanksgiving Myths)
8. **I Never Saw Another Butterfly* edited by Hana Volavkova (History of Holocaust-Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp)
9. **The Dance and the Railroad* by David Henry Hwang (Chinese Railroad Workers)
- 10.**Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* by Anna Deavere Smith
- 11.* *The Diary of Anne Frank*

Foundational/Theoretical Texts

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

* Required and Supplemental reading available on Brightspace. All other 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/EXPECTATIONS

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 Brightspace, unless otherwise indicated by 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) 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. Three late arrivals will count as one absence.

(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.

DRAMATURGY - 150pts

You will compile a **small dramaturgical glossary and analysis** for each play we read. These will be prepared and will be due to Brightspace at the first class meeting where we begin to discuss the play. Please have access to the assignment through an electronic device 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.

***Include one dramaturgical question to be presented to the class for discussion.**

You will be assessed on the following:

1. Length of Entries: The entries are the required length.
2. Appropriateness and Vitality of Entries/Question: The entries define the terms and make serious efforts to explain their relevance to the play. **Due before the start of class on Brightspace.** (30 pts 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 their performance piece running **five to seven minutes in length.** You will receive an individual grade for this assignment.

DUE: 3/4

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. **DUE 3/4 due in Turnitin on Brightspace..**

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 are used through our speech and oral tradition. Recite the speech and your critique of the speech with the peers in the class. **(3-5 minutes total)**

DUE: 4/8-4/10

LITERARY ANALYSIS GROUP PROJECT: 200pts

You are required to participate in a **Multi-Media Literary Analysis Group Project** based on one of the required multi-cultural plays. Each **15-minute presentation** will choose a specific **critical literary lens** through which to analyze the play; incorporate textual and visual media in presentation; music or video/film of scenes or thematic material from the play; 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 three-four people. Your whole ensemble will receive a group grade for these projects. **DUE: 4/29-5/1**

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. **MLA format.**

DUE: 5/13 at 5:00pm in Turnitin on Brightspace

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Assignment	% of Grade
1. Dramaturgy	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.

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

Additional Policies

- You are expected to attend all classes. In the event you must miss a class, please email me prior to the absence and let us 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.
- Please do not be late. Three late arrivals will count as one absence.
- Please do not have other applications or web pages open in class unless I ask you to do so for a specific exercise.
- Please do not use phones in class.
- A pattern of off-task behavior will constitute a lack of participation, and the student will receive a “0” for participation on that given week.
- The final exam is required. Please make a note of the final exam on your calendars. If you miss the final submission period on Turnitin in Brightspace, you will receive a grade of “0” for the final exam.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

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

- 1/14 **INTRODUCTION:** Review syllabus/*Visit to a Small Planet* by Elinor Fuchs
1/16 **READ/REVIEW:** *The America Play* by Suzan Lori-Parks
READ: *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen,
“Handicapped by History: The Process of Hero-Making, p.11-30

Week 2: American Identity and Citizenship

- 1/21 **READ:** **Citizen*, by Claudia Rankine, I-II
REVIEW: **The Fabrication of Race* by Matthew Frye Jacobson, p. 2-12
1/23 **READ:** *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, by James Loewen “Why Is History Taught Like This?”, p. 301-339
Dramaturgy Paper #1 due: *The America Play* by Suzan Lori-Parks

Week 3: American Identity and The American Dream: Class, Property, Ownership

- 1/28 **READ:** *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
1/30 **REVIEW:** **Facing Up to The American Dream* by Jennifer Hochschild, “What is the American Dream”, p.15-38

Week 4: In Search of the Character of America

- 2/4 **READ:** (Excerpts from) **Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* by Anna Deavere Smith
View/Discuss – Anna Deavere Smith Interview/Characters
2/6 **REVIEW:** **Documenting the Myth: Anna Devere Smith*

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

- 2/11 **READ:** *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse
READ: *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen, “Red Eyes”, p. 93-134
Dramaturgy Paper #2 due: *The Thanksgiving Play* by Larissa FastHorse
2/13 **REVIEW:** *Michael Foucault’s *Space, Power and Knowledge*
REVIEW: Annotated Bibliography assignment

Week 6: Ritual, Play and Performance

- 2/18 **READ:** **The Dance and the Railroad* by David Henry Hwang
2/20 **REVIEW:** **Critical Ethnography-Method, Ethics and Performance* by D. Soyini Madison, “Methods: Do I really Need a Method, p. 17-30
Assignment Due: Annotated Bibliography based on subject/subject matter of Solo Performance Project

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

- 2/25 **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/excerpts: **The Diary of Anne Frank*
2/27 **REVIEW:** * Whiteness of a Different Color by Matthew Frye Jacobson

Week 8: Exploration of Personal Experiences

- 3/4 **MIDTERM:** In-Class Character Study/Solo Performance
Ethnographic Essay Submission due
3/6 **MIDTERM:** In-Class Character Study/Solo Performance

Week 9: Embodiment and Performance of Gender & Femininity

- 3/11 **READ:** *Tea* by Velina Hasu Houston (History of the Japanese American War Brides)
Dramaturgy Paper #3 due: *Tea*
3/13 **REVIEW:** **Ornamentation: A Feminist Theory for the Yellow Woman* by Anne Anlin Cheng

Week 10:

- 3/18 SPRING BREAK
3/20 SPRING BREAK

Week 11: Cultural Inscription of the Body

- 3/25 **View:** *M Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang
3/27 **REVIEW:** *The Cultural Studies Reader* edited by Simon During, Judith Butler's "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire": p. 340-353

Week 12: Process of Reclaiming Body and Mind

- 4/1 **READ:** *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* by August Wilson (The Great Migration)
Dramaturgy Paper #4 due: *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*
4/3 **REVIEW:** **The Ground on Which I Stand* by August Wilson

Week 13: Becoming Whole through Art and Activism

- 4/8 **Oral Speech Presentations**
4/10 **Oral Speech Presentations**

Week 14: Revolution-Revolving-Evolving

- 4/15 **READ:** *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez (History of the Chicano Riots in Los Angeles)
Dramaturgy Paper #5 due: *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez
4/17 **VIEW:** *Zoot Suit* Documentary of the Chicano Riots/*Zoot Suit Riots*
Review Literary Analysis Group Presentations

Week 15:

- 4/29 Literary Group Presentations
5/1 Literary Group Presentations

5/12 FINAL PAPER DUE in Turnitin on Brightspace by 5:00pm PDT

SDA Productions, ISPs, and Extracurricular Activities

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

**Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.*

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre 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, along with the 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 ever 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.

Health and Participation in Class

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. Face coverings that cover your nose and mouth to be worn throughout the class session is optional. 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/>).

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term.

You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage. Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, **using AI-generated text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.**

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity’s website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct. Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

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 on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

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 Brightspace, 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.symplicity.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.