

Theatre & Social Change

THEA 4390.001 Spring 2024

Instructor: **Lisa Devine, MFA**

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Office Hours:

In-person: Tuesday/Thursday: 11:00a.m.-1:00 p.m. Friday: After our class. Or by appointment.

Virtual: Monday/Wednesday: Appointments via Zoom.

Communication Preference: Message via Canvas, email, or Zoom session

Class Time: F 12:00-2:50p.m.

Office: RTFP 215

Course Description

This course has been developed to provide opportunities for students to explore the potential relationship between Theatre and Contemporary Issues from Social, Political, and Personal Perspectives. The premise draws from the notion that theatre/film/performance arts are effective tools of communication – and beyond the aesthetic or entertainment value – may reflect and influence changes within society.

Objectives:

- Through readings, performances, film/videos, personal experiences, historical and cultural concerns, students will form and discuss personal point of view regarding contemporary issues and theatrical performances.
- Students will develop the ability to effectively communicate about theatre and contemporary issues in written and verbal forms.
- As active participants in the learning process, students will assume a responsibility for identifying and investigating opportunities to broaden and deepen a personal understanding and commitment to issues of social change inherent in popular culture.

Required Course Textbooks

Books:

Arnold, Daniel, et.al. Inheritance: A Pick-the-Path Experience. Talonbooks, 2022. (ISBN: 9781772013627)

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. Between the World and Me. Spiegel & Grau, New York City, 2015. (ISBN: 09780812993437)

Plays: (available on Canvas)

Alfaro, Luis. Mojada. Methuen Drama. London. 2021. (ISBN: 9781350155404)

Brenton, Howard. #aiww: The Arrest of Ai Weiwei. Nick Hern Books. London. 2013. (ISBN:9781848423312)

Clifford, Jo & Chris Goode. Eve. Oberon Modern Plays. London, 2017. (ISBN: 9781786822697)

Davenport, Ken & People Just Like You. My First Time. Samuel French. 2009. (ISBN: 9780573663826)

Drury, Jackie Sibblies. Fairview. Theatre Communication Group. NYC, 2019. (ISBN: 9781559369527)

Ensler, Eve. The Vagina Monologues. Dramatists Play Service, NYC, 2000. (ISBN: 0822217724)

Hwang, David Henry. Yellow Face. Theatre Communications Group. NYC, 2009. (ISBN: 9781559363402)

Jackson, Michael R. A Strange Loop. Theatre Communications Group. NYC, 2020. (ISBN:9781559369930)

Jones, Kenneth. Alabama Story. Dramatists Play Service, NYC, 2022. (ISBN: 9780822242284)

Karam, Stephen and PJ Paprelli. Columbinus, Dramatic Publishing, Woodstock, IL. 2008. (ISBN: 9781583423929)

Lewis, Sinclair. Adapted by Tony Taccone & Bennett S. Cohen. It Can't Happen Here. Dramatists Play Service, NYC, 2017. (ISBN: 9780822237068)

Yorkey, Brian & Tom Kitt. Next to Normal. Theatre Communication Group, NYC, 2010. (ISBN: 9781559363709)

Subject Matter Disclaimer

In the study of theatre, film, art, and literature as well as the moral, social, cultural, and political issues, we will cover a wide spectrum of human behavior, practices, language, and subject matter that may be considered immoral, anti-social or obscene to some. Some performances, readings and discussions may contain adult themes, language or images which are not within your personal standards or value system. The instructor nor the university plays the role of "censor." Please consider this matter carefully. ***If you are easily offended or are not willing to experience standards and values different from your own, this may not be the class for you.***

Assignments and Grading

Projects & Major Grades

Current Events Exam		A= excellent (100-90)
Race in America Exam		B= good (89-80)
Social/Personal Issues Exam		C=average (79-70)
Hot Social Topic Presentation		D= (69-60)
Self-Reflection Essay #2	50%	F = (59 or below)

Assignments & Writings

Hot Social Topic Outline	
Hot Social Topic Visual Aid	
Social Critique of <u>The Donner Party</u>	
Self-Reflection Essay #1	
Sculpting Our Future	30%

Discussion & Reading

Weekly Reading Quizzes	
Attendance	
Class Participation	
Learning Activities	20%
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	100%

*** This course meets the Historical/Critical Perspective requirements for Theatre Majors. ***

Quizzes and Exams – On Canvas only

A quiz will be given once a week over the play reading and/or play background. All quizzes will be taken on Canvas. A quiz will be uploaded directly after Friday's class (3:00pm.) and be open for students to take until Sunday at midnight (11:59 p.m.). Once Canvas has closed the quiz, I will not re-open it. Plan your quiz taking schedule with this in mind.

Three exams will also be administered through Canvas. The date and hours of exam availability will be written on review sheets. The exams will be composed of limited choice questions, short essay, and the occasional essay. Exams must be taken during the scheduled opportunity. Once the date and time has passed, **no make-up exams will be given.**

Considerations and Self-Reflections

Throughout the semester, questions about the play or its structure will be posed to you to investigate and form an opinion. There are no "right" answers to these questions. They are designed like essay questions in which there are a range of possible responses. Your grade does not rest on what your opinions are. You will be graded on the amount of effort and thought that you put into your writings, as well as how you well you support your opinions given the limitation of two pages. All written assignments will be uploaded into Canvas for grading.

Research Projects and Response Papers

For every assignment you will be asked to complete, you will receive **an assignment sheet and a rubric** as to my expectations. I am always happy to answer questions about an assignment but if I am not available, please refer to these sheets. With some of the projects you may be assigned a performance portion that will help with understanding of your interpretation. *Use assignment guidelines when creating your assignment as a checklist to be sure you have completed the assignment. The most egress mistake I see student's make is not completing all portions of an assignment.*

Late Assignments

No late assignments will be accepted. This is to guarantee equitable treatment of all students. Please acquaint yourself with the calendar attached. ***In theatre, the curtain rises on opening night regardless.*** Consider the "due date" the last moment I will take the assignment. Any written assignment may be turned in early. I will open the portal to turn in an assignment when I introduce it. This allows you to structure your study schedule to allow you time for other

course assignments. *Time Management is a life skill. Recognize that if you are battling the clock on Canvas, you have procrastinated.* **Bottom line: Any assignment can be early. Nothing can be late. Show initiative.**

UNT DTA Season Productions

You will receive vouchers for free tickets to the productions. The Spring 2024 season of plays includes:

The Donner Party by The Kraken Company
Dates: February 29 – March 3

The Pretty Trap by Tennessee Williams
Dates: March 28 - 30

Fiddler on the Roof Book by Joseph Stein, Music by Jerry Bock, Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick
Dates: April 18 - 21

Attendance

Active Participation is an extremely important part of maintaining a good grade in this class. You must attend all scheduled class sessions. Each has been designed for the needs and goals of this group. If you are absent, you have missed experiences that cannot be made up or even explained. Information is imparted during lecture, discussion, activities, and exercises that discussing with me or other students will not fill the gap of your absence.

You should attend class on time, complete readings prior to class and participate in class activities. **Attendance will be taken every class meeting.** Although I am here to help you in any way and sympathize with problems you will encounter this semester, only documented illnesses, death in the family, and extreme circumstances are considered excused absences.

Acceptable Student Behavior

- Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT.
- Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr.

Bottom Line:

- Attendance is mandatory. You may receive two (2) excused absences for family emergencies, serious illness, or official UNT business. Students must show written proof. Doctors' appointments are not excused.
- The professor's roll book is the official record of absences and tardiness. This should be followed by students on Canvas. Leaving class early, sleeping, not joining an assigned breakout room and non-participation will all be counted as an absence.
- Suggested Dance and Theatre attendance policy expects the number of allowable absences should not exceed 10% of the total class meetings for the semester. For example, *if a class meets once a week for 15 weeks*, then the **number of allowable absences** before the student's grade is affected **one and half class sessions (1.5)**.

Class Discussions

The structure of this course is focused on experiences, investigation, and interaction. You are required to read all the plays, come to class with the text, ready to participate in all class activities. Read the scripts not only as literature, but also from the perspective of directors, designers, actors, and teachers/students of literature. **Discussions of the assigned readings will constitute a major portion of the class.** It is imperative that students accept the responsibility for attending each class and assigned events as evidence of a commitment to the study of social issues as well as to their peers and themselves. This is essential for passing this course. Please feel free to ask questions during lectures or discussions. Even in Zoom sessions, students are expected to become involved in the class discussion.

Class Participation

The grade for class participation is evaluated in the following areas: *Attitude, Willingness to Learn, Citizenship, adding to the conversation, work ethic, improvement over the semester, acceptance of grades earned and how absences are handled.*

Grades

There is a grading rubric that has been designed for each assignment. This tool is used to stay as objective and fair as possible when grading each student's work. **You are responsible for knowledge of your grade at all times.** Consult Canvas frequently (if not daily) to know where your grade is at throughout the semester. For large classes, I will grade the papers in the order they are received. This means those students who turn their assignments in at or close to

11:59 p.m. the day they are due will receive their graded work back last. If you have any questions about your grades, please contact me and I will be happy to help you. *Grades will not be discussed over the phone but rather in private Zoom sessions or in person during office hours.*

Incompletes

Only under extraordinary circumstances will an Incomplete be given.

Withdrawal

Should you choose to drop this course, you must initiate the drop and acquire all the proper signatures and paperwork. If that process is not completed, you will be subject to a WF or F at the close of the semester.

Cheating/Plagiarism

The Student Code of Conduct prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty including the use of Artificial Intelligence or AI. This includes plagiarism, cheating on exams, using papers that have been written by someone other than yourself, or providing work to other students. *"Use of AI to produce or help content without proper attribution or authorization, when an assignment does not explicitly call or allow for it, is plagiarism."*

To plagiarize means to take and submit as one's own ideas and/or the expression of ideas of another person. Plagiarism is using words or ideas which are not your own, but which you have culled from another source (including the internet) and have not given credit. Plagiarism is intellectual thievery and will not be tolerated.

If a student is caught cheating or plagiarizing the student will receive an F for that assignment. If the student is caught a second time, the student will receive an F for the course. With plagiarism, it will also be incumbent upon the student to demonstrate that the student has not plagiarized (rough drafts of papers, notes, outlines, annotated source materials, etc.) so please retain all evidence of your having done writing projects yourself.

Americans with Disabilities Act Notice

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940-565-4323.

Accommodation

Please let me know if you need accommodation for religious holidays or other issues.

SPOT

The Student Perception of Teaching Effectiveness (SPOT) is a requirement for all organized class at UNT. This short survey will be conducted in class on your laptop or cellphone at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. I am very interested in your feedback I get from students, as I work to continually improve my teaching. I consider your "Personal Growth Assessment Assignment" and the SPOT to be an important part of your participation in this class.

Last day to drop course is April 5, 2024

****Because you (and only you) know what you'd like to gain from this class, I encourage you to set a few goals to accomplish over the course of the semester. Please let me know what I can do to assist you as you achieve these goals.****

I am looking forward to getting to know each of you!

THEA 4390: Theatre & Social Change
University of North Texas Spring 2024
Tentative Calendar

Unit I: Current Events & the Stage

Week 1:

January 19

Welcome to Theatre & Social Change.

Receive Syllabus and Calendar.

Receive Self-Reflection #1 assignment. Due Tuesday January 23.

Lecture & Activities: Power of Listening

Week 2

January 26

Read It Can't Happen Here by Lewis Sinclair.

Adapted by Tony Taccone & Bennett S. Cohen (2017)

Lecture & Discussion: Democratic Fragility

Receive Hot Social Topics Assignment

Week 3

February 2

Read Alabama Story by Kenneth Jones (2022)

Lecture & Discussion: Banning or Censoring of Books; Outlining Research

Week 4:

February 9

Read Next to Normal. Music by Tom Kitt; Books & Lyrics by Brian Yorkey (2010)

Lecture & Discussion: Mental Health Awareness

Begin Reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (p.3-20)

Week 5:

February 16

Read #aiww: The Arrest of Ai Weiwei by Howard Brenton. (2013)

Lecture & Discussion: Artist as Activist

Reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (p.20-39)

Receive Review Sheet for Exam.

Receive The Donner Party Response Assignment

Unit II: Race in America & the Stage

UNT Production: The Donner Party

by The Kraken Company

Dates: February 29 – March 3

Week 6:

February 23

Read Fairview by Jackie Sibblies Drury (2019)

Reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (p.39-71)

Lecture & Discussion: Black/White Relationship

Unit 1: Current Events & the Stage Exam
Canvas portal opens at 4:00 pm on Friday, February 24.
Canvas portal closes at midnight. on Sunday, February 26.

Week 7

March 1

Read Mojada by Luis Alfaro (2021)

Reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (pages 73-99)

Lecture & Discussion: Immigration & Border Control

Week 8

March 8

Read Inheritance by Daniel Arnold, Darrell Dennis, and Media Hahn (2022)

Reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (pages 99-132)

Lecture & Discussion: Native American Rights & Protection

The Donner Party Response Assignment Due.

March 11-15

Spring Break. Enjoy!

Week 9

March 22

Read Yellow Face by David Henry Hwang. (2009)

Reading Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (pages 133-152)

Lecture & Discussion: Representation in Entertainment

Receive Review Sheet for Exam.

UNT Production:

The Pretty Trap by Tennessee Williams

Dates: March 28-30

Unit III: Social/Personal Issues & the Stage

Week 10

March 29

Read My First Time by Ken Davenport & People Just Like You (2008)

Lecture & Discussion: Sex, Taboos, and Education

Unit 2: Race & the Stage Exam

Canvas portal opens at 4:00 pm on Friday, March 31.

Canvas portal closes at midnight. on Sunday, April 2.

Week 11:

April 5

Read Columbinus by Stephen Karam and PJ Paprelli (2008)

Lecture & Discussion: Mass Shootings & Gun Control Laws

(Last Day to Withdraw)

Week 12

April 12

Read The Vagina Monologues by Eve Ensler. (2000)

Lecture & Discussion: Reproductive Justice

UNT Production: Fiddler on the Roof

Book by Joseph Stein, Music by Jerry Bock, & Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick

Dates: April 18-21

Week 13

April 19

Read Eve by Jo Clifford and Chris Goode. (2017)
Lecture & Discussion: Transgender Rights

Week 14

April 26

Read A Strange Loop by Michael R. Jackson (2020)
Lecture & Discussion: Future & Career Fear
Receive Review Sheet for Personal Issues & the Stage Exam
Receive Self Reflection #2 and Sculpting Our Future

Unit 3: Personal Issues & the Stage Exam
Canvas portal opens at 10:00 am on Monday, April 29.
Canvas portal closes at 11:59 pm on Thursday, May 2.

Week 15

May 3

Reading Day – No class

Week 16

Wednesday May 8

Final Exam (10:30a.m.- 12:30 p.m.)
Sculpting our Future Due.
Self-Reflection #2 Due.