

Las Positas College
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Course Outline for THEA 4
MODERN AMERICAN THEATER
Effective: Spring 2020

I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

THEA 4 — MODERN AMERICAN THEATER — 3.00 units

The history, representation and contributions of various works of Modern American Theater and the study of Modern American theater as an instrument for expressing and understanding cultural identity. The focus will be on at least three of the following cultural groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Latin Americans and Native Americans.

3.00 Units Lecture

Strongly Recommended

ENG 1A - Critical Reading and Composition
with a minimum grade of C

Grading Methods:

Letter Grade

Discipline:

- Drama/Theater Arts

| | MIN |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Lecture Hours: | 54.00 |
| Total Hours: | 54.00 |

II. NUMBER OF TIMES COURSE MAY BE TAKEN FOR CREDIT: 1

III. PREREQUISITE AND/OR ADVISORY SKILLS:

Before entering this course, it is strongly recommended that the student should be able to:

A. ENG1A

1. Critically read texts and materials from a variety of academic and cultural contexts, demonstrating in writing and discussion the ability to:
 - a. Summarize a thesis and main points;
 - b. Analyze main ideas;
 - c. Evaluate the validity and logic of the text's reasoning and support;
 - d. Relate ideas and information in the text to his/her own experience as well as other texts;
 - e. Create a coherent position or argument based on reading;
2. Write multiple-paragraph papers that:
 - a. Accurately and appropriately respond to a given assignment;
 - b. Develop a relevant, focused thesis;
 - c. Are well-developed with sufficient and relevant evidence;
 - d. Synthesize facts and ideas originating outside his/her direct experience to develop and support a thesis;
 - e. Demonstrate stylistic choices in tone, syntax, and diction;
 - f. Use standard American English correctly;
 - g. Document sources in an academically responsible way.

IV. MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

- A. For each group studied:
 1. Trace the history of the group in American Theater as represented by the majority culture and the group itself.
 2. Describe the history, techniques and purpose of theater in the group's country of origin
 3. List significant plays, writers, performers and theatrical styles of the group
 4. Describe and discuss in detail at least one play or musical from the group
 5. Discuss theater related issues particular to each group
 6. Compare and contrast theatrical and artistic expressions in various American ethnic groups;
- B. Demonstrate an appreciation for theatrical experiences from ethnic cultures other than their own;
- C. Discuss ethnic theater related issues such as:
 1. Assimilation versus cultural uniqueness
 2. Differences in perceptions and values between various ethnic groups
 3. Open ("color blind") casting

- D. Critique and evaluate theatrical experiences, making particular reference to the elements of dramatic art.
- E. Define and describe the elements of dramatic art;

V. CONTENT:

- A. Elements of dramatic art
 - 1. Plot/Dramatic Action
 - 2. Character (including acting)
 - 3. Theme/Idea
 - 4. Spectacle (including scenery, costumes, lighting and elements of design)
 - 5. Diction (language)
 - 6. Music
 - 7. Applications of these Aristotelian elements to theater
- B. Purposes of Theater
 - 1. Reflection of society and human behavior
 - 2. Venue for celebration, community and catharsis
 - 3. Instrument for social criticism and change
- C. Study of three ethnic groups in theater and film. Each of the three groups will be covered with the following topics
 - 1. History and background
 - a. Style and purpose of theater in the country of origin
 - b. Representations by the dominant ethnic group
 - 1. e.g. African American – Uncle Tom's Cabin, Minstrel Shows, Porgy and Bess, Six Degrees of Separation
 - c. Representations by the group itself:
 - 1. e.g. African American – A Raisin in the Sun, Dutchman, Fences, The Wiz, The Colored Museum, Tyler Perry
 - 2. Elements of Theatrical Expression
 - a. Periods and styles
 - b. Writers
 - c. Plays and musicals
 - d. Performers
 - 3. Themes and Issues expressed in plays and musicals
 - a. Ethnic identity and pride
 - b. Social and economic issues
 - c. Relations between ethnic groups
 - d. Theater as celebration and life affirmation
- D. Issues related to ethnic theater
 - 1. Assimilation versus cultural uniqueness
 - 2. Open ("colorblind") casting
 - 3. Differences and similarities in perceptions and values between various ethnic groups

VI. METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

- A. **Projects** -
- B. **Lecture** -
- C. Whole class and small group discussions
- D. In class performance readings of scenes from plays and musicals
- E. **Field Trips** - Attendance at live theatrical productions, at least one from each group studied
- F. **Guest Lecturers** - or artists
- G. **Student Presentations** -
- H. Assigned readings from plays and articles
- I. **Audio-visual Activity** - Viewing of films and videos of stage productions and documentaries
- J. Group Projects

VII. TYPICAL ASSIGNMENTS:

- A. Theatrical Performance:
 - 1. Attend a performance of a play or musical by authors and artists of a studied ethnic group (eg. M. Butterfly at the Asian American Theatre Company in San Francisco)
 - 2. Write a descriptive and critical response to
 - a. The play or musical as written
 - b. The play or musical as produced and performed
- B. Reading/Writing
 - 1. Read the play, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, and be prepared by the next class session to:
 - a. Take a quiz on the content of the play
 - b. Discuss the themes and ideas expressed in the play
- C. Group Project
 - 1. Rehearse and perform for the class a scene from the Latino play, Los Vendidos, by Luis Valdez
- D. Research Report
 - 1. Research a Bay Area theater group or playwright from one of the cultures studied
 - 2. Write a five-page report describing and evaluation the group or playwright

VIII. EVALUATION:

Methods/Frequency

- A. Exams/Tests
 - 2x per semester
- B. Quizzes
 - weekly
- C. Research Projects
 - 1 per semester
- D. Papers
 - 2x per semester
- E. Field Trips
 - 1 per semester
- F. Group Projects
 - 1 per semester

IX. TYPICAL TEXTS:

- 1. Lane, S. (2017). *Jews on Broadway: An Historical Survey....* (2 ed.). Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland & Co Inc Pub.
- 2. Savran, David, Ed (1988). *In Their Own Words (B. Interviews by playwrights such as David Henry Hwang, Luis Valdez, August Wilson, Wallace Shawn)*. : Theater Communications Group.

3. Carr, J. (2015). *Encountering Texts: The Multicultural Theatre Project and "Minority" Literature* (2 ed.). New York, NY: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers.
4. Ellis, R. (1998). *Multicultural Theatre 2: Contemporary Hispanic, Asian and African-American Plays* (1st ed.). Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Pub.
5. Nadel, A., & Wetmore, K. (2019). *The Theatre of August Wilson (Critical Companions)* (1st ed.). London, UK: Methuen Drama.
6. Greer, S. (2019). *Queer exceptions: Solo performance in neoliberal times (Theatre Theory Practice Performance MUP)* (1st ed.). Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
7. Articles from magazines such as American Theater and Theatre Bay Area
8. Scripts of plays
 1. Native American:
 - a. Indians by Arthur Kopit
 - b. Joy Ride by Greg Sarris
 9. European American:
 - a. Day of Absence by Douglas Turner Ward
 - b. Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
 10. African American:
 - a. Uncle Tom's Cabin by George L. Aiken
 - b. A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
 11. Latino American:
 - a. West Side Story by Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein
 - b. Zoot Suit by Luis Valdez
 12. Asian American:
 - a. Teahouse of the August Moon by John Patrick
 - b. M. Butterfly by David Henry Hwang

X. OTHER MATERIALS REQUIRED OF STUDENTS:

- A. Tickets will need to be purchased to live theatrical productions