

Las Positas College  
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**Course Outline for THEA 4**  
**AMERICAN CULTURES IN THEATER**  
**Effective: Fall 2018**

**I. CATALOG DESCRIPTION:**

THEA 4 — AMERICAN CULTURES IN THEATER — 3.00 units

The history, representation and contributions of various ethnic groups in American theater and the study of 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

**Grading Methods:**

Letter Grade

**Discipline:**

- Drama/Theater Arts

	<b>MIN</b>
<b>Lecture Hours:</b>	54.00
<b>Total Hours:</b>	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. Relate ideas and information in the text to his/her own experience as well as other texts;
2. Write multiple-paragraph papers that:
  - a. Accurately and appropriately respond to a given assignment;
  - b. Are well-organized and coherently move from coordinating to subordinating points;
  - 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. Use standard American English correctly;
  - f. 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 Musicals
  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:

##### A. **Methods**

1. Exams/Tests
2. Quizzes
3. Research Projects
4. Papers
5. Field Trips
6. Group Projects
7. Other:
  - a. Quizzes (on the content of plays read; given the day the reading assignment is due)
    1. Sample question:
      - a. In A Raisin in the Sun, what do three of the characters each want to do with the inheritance money?
  - b. Test (Final exam)
    1. Sample question:
      - a. Compare and contrast the view and concept of the family in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, August Wilson's Fences and Milcha Sanchez-Scott's Roosters.

##### B. **Frequency**

1. Quizzes will be given every two to three weeks
2. Final exam will be two hours during finals week
3. Attendance at assigned plays and completion of Reaction Paper - at least one per semester
4. Group Projects - at least one per semester
5. Research Reports - at least one per semester

#### IX. TYPICAL TEXTS:

1. 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.

2. Lane, S. (2017). *Jews on Broadway: An Historical Survey....* (2 ed.). Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland & Co Inc Pub.
3. Ellis, R. (1998). *Multicultural Theatre 2: Contemporary Hispanic, Asian and African-American Plays* (1st ed.). Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether Pub.
4. Carr, J. (2015). *Encountering Texts: The Multicultural Theatre Project and "Minority" Literature* (2 ed.). New York, NY: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers.
5. Articles from magazines such as American Theater and Theatre Bay Area
6. Scripts of plays
  1. Native American:
    - a. Indians by Arthur Kopit
    - b. Joy Ride by Greg Sarris
  7. European American:
    - a. Day of Absence by Douglas Turner Ward
    - b. Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
  8. African American:
    - a. Uncle Tom's Cabin by George L. Aiken
    - b. A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
  9. Latino American:
    - a. West Side Story by Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein
    - b. Zoot Suit by Luis Valdez
  10. 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