

AFR 372E/T D 357T/AMS 321/E 376M

## **Writing for Black Performance**

Professor Thompson

Office: Warfield Center (Jester A232BD)

Flags: Diversity, Writing

### **Course Description**

This course will require students to write theatrical pieces as well as critical essays about the performance of black identity in America. Participants will also give oral presentations and perform readings of their work using various African-American performance styles. Students will read texts that examine African-American performance, contemporary black identity, and expressive culture. During the semester we will explore what Lajos Egri describes as “the art of dramatic writing” or, depending on your style and interests, the art of comedic writing. We will consider the magic of theater and learn ways to use words to shape action on the stage. The main objectives of this course are finding or refining your voice, learning how to write a play or performance text and presenting it to an audience. The term will be spent reading theatre, writing plays and talking about plays—and if we are lucky, maybe even seeing a show or two. This class will introduce students to different theatrical formats including solo shows, the choreopoem, and a full-length traditional play. We will discuss topics such as character development, dialogue, monologue, conflict and setting. In acknowledgement of some of the difficulties writers face, we will also consider topics such as inspiration, technique and discipline as well as do a variety of writing exercises. We will also devote time performing what we read and write during class. The course will culminate with staged readings of excerpts from your final projects.

### **Required Texts**

Colman Domingo, *A Boy and His Soul*

William Missouri Downs et. al, *Naked Playwriting*

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*

Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow was Enuf*

Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

August Wilson, *Fences*

All books can be purchased at the university bookstore. All other texts can be found on the course Blackboard site.

## Course Policies & Requirements

### Participation

Students are expected to complete all reading before class and participate fully in discussions and activities such as in-class exercises, readings and group projects. Remember to bring paper or a notebook or another writing apparatus to each class because we will often do in class writing exercises. Also always bring assigned books and articles to every class because we will regularly read excerpts aloud and analyze select passages. Please be advised that prompt and regular attendance is expected.

On a final note, presentations, performances and readings are not just an academic exercise for the presenters. As classmates, fellow writers and audience members you have a responsibility to act as attentive and engaged listeners. In fact, your written feedback on each presentation and performance will be incorporated into your final grade so your active participation is not just encouraged, but required.

### Artistic Statement

Provide a (2-3 page) thoughtful and detailed statement about what matters to you as a writer. You will begin with a critical analysis of Parks and Wilson then explain your own vision as a writer. Consider this an exercise that calls on you to explain your influences, priorities and objectives. This can be written as a letter to a producer, director or be a journal entry; the format is not as important as the spirit of the document. This statement should serve as a guide for your writing throughout the semester.

### Monologue

You will write a dramatic or comedic monologue (2+pages) that also includes a description of the setting and a character sketch (a brief description of your character's gender, age, race, and other distinguishing characteristics. A successful monologue will reveal something about the character speaking as well as present the play's major tensions and conflicts. Each student will perform her/his monologue or an excerpt before the class (5 minutes).

### Presentation: My black art object is . . .

You will take a "Personal Inspiration Field Trip" to the Bullock Museum, the Contemporary Arts Center, UT's Visual Arts Center, Blanton Museum, the Warfield Center's ISESE gallery or another art space to find inspiration. Pay particular attention to why this piece of art moved you as an artist. After you find a piece of art that inspires you create a presentation that explains your inspiration to the class

### Play

Each student will write and revise a play for submission at the end of the term. The final text should be some around 15-25 pages with proper formatting. The style is open; it could be a one-act, full-length, 10-minute, a series of 1 minute plays or even a musical. I encourage you to consult with me as well as your classmates at any stage in your writing process. You are free to

pick the subject matter and form of the play (one person show, comedy, tragedy, one act, full-length drama). This assignment includes writing a synopsis as well as drafts of scenes for in-class workshops and discussion.

### Staged Reading

You will direct and perform in a short (5 minute) scene or excerpt from your play to present to the class at the end of the term. This is your final opportunity to let your creative spirit soar! Besides writing the script, you are in charge of casting, rehearsal, and the overall presentation of your work to the audience. You may do a staged reading or put the play “on its feet.” You may cast anyone you wish in roles, but I encourage everyone to help their classmates present their work. Please feel free to invite friends, family and colleagues to join the audience and view your work. Location of these final two days of class TBA.

### Notice:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Artistic Statement (2-3 pages):	15%
Monologue (2-3 pages):	15%
Presentation (2-3 minutes):	15%
Play (any format) (15-25 pages):	30%
Staged Reading/Performance (5-10 minutes):	15%
Participation (attendance, workshops, readings, etc.):	10%

## Course Schedule

Thursday, August 28

Introduction

When I Write . . .

Note: 1<sup>st</sup> Austin One -Minute Play Festival, Salvage Vanguard Theater

August 28-30 @ 8pm

For info see: <http://salvagevanguard.org>

Livestreaming of the Austin One-Minute Play Festival #1MPF—8 pm on Sat, Aug 30

<http://goo.gl/fb/kEqGML>

## **An Equation for Black Performance:**

Innovative Narratives in Black Theatre

Tuesday, September 2

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*

Thursday, September 4

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*

William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch 1, "What on Earth Gave You that Idea?" p. 1-21, and Ch 2, "Schools of Thought," p. 22-52.

Tuesday, September 9

Suzan-Lori Parks, *The America Play and Other Works*

## **Artistic Inspiration:**

Mining Black Memory

Thursday, September 11

Colman Domingo, *A Boy and His Soul*

Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory."

Tuesday, September 16

Colman Domingo, *A Boy and His Soul*

Thursday, September 18

Due: Monologue draft

Writing Workshop: Peer Editing

Tuesday, September 23

Due: Monologue

Monologue Readings

Colman Domingo, *A Boy and His Soul*

Thursday, September 25

Black Art: Personal Inspiration Field Trip

Tuesday, September 30

Presentation (Z-M): My black art object is \_\_\_\_\_ and it inspires me to write . . .

Bring in a piece of black art (or more likely a photograph of the piece) that inspires your writing. In your presentation explain what moves you about the artwork.

Thursday, October 2

Presentation (L-A): My black art object is \_\_\_\_\_ and it inspires me to write . . .

### **Structuring the African American Narrative:**

Story, Plot, Dialogue & Setting

Tuesday, October 7

August Wilson, *The Ground on Which I Stand*

August Wilson, *Fences*

Thursday, October 9

Writing Partner Workshop

Assignment: Meet with your partner to share

Due: Artistic Statement Draft

Tuesday, October 14

August Wilson, *Fences*

William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch. 3, "Structure, Part One: Story & Plot," 55-87 and Ch. 4, "Structure, Part Two: Creativity, Scenario & Writing," 88-110.

Thursday, October 16

August Wilson, *Fences*

William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch. 6, "Dialogue in Action," p. 140-169

Due: Artistic Statement final draft

### **Politics of Black Performance Writing:**

Creating Character

Tuesday, October 21

Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide*

Thursday, October 23

Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide*

William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch. 5, "Getting into Character," p. 111-139

Tuesday, October 28

Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

Thursday, October 30

Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

Tuesday, November 4

Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

### **Writing for Black Performance:**

The Next Generation

Thursday, November 6

Due: Exchange draft of final project with your writing partner (play or performance piece)

Writing Workshop

William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch. 7, "Looking Good," p. 170-196

Tuesday, November 11

Student Conferences

Last name starts with A-M: meet with Professor Thompson

Last name starts with N-Z: meet with writing partner

Thursday, November 13

Student Conferences

Last name starts with N-Z: meet with Professor Thompson

Last name starts with A-M: meet with writing partner

Tuesday, November 18

Writing Workshop: Revisions

Suggested: William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch. 8, "Copyrights, Rewriting and Development," 199-217

Thursday, November 20  
Rehearsal

Tuesday, November 25  
Rehearsal

Thursday, November 27  
Thanksgiving

**New Black Theatre:**  
Staged Readings

Tuesday, December 2  
Due: Final projects  
Staged Reading/Performances  
Location TBA

Thursday, December 4  
Staged Reading/Performances  
Location TBA

Suggested: William Missouri Downs, *Naked Playwriting*, Ch. 10, "Marketing a Play," & Ch. 11, "Getting Real: Production and Contracts," 255-302  
Conclusion